

## The Leader/Follower Relationship

### I. Christ our Leader

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (Colossians 1:18)

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant... (Hebrews 13:20)

- No servant is greater than His master. This Scriptures make it clear, Christ is our Leader. He is our Head, our Shepherd, our Master, our Example. To be in Christ, is not just to be a beneficiary of His work on Calvary, but dynamically connected to His leadership as a body is connected to a head. It is to be completely dependent on Him, following after His voice, as sheep follow their shepherd.

### II. The Way of the Cross

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (Matthew 16:24)

- Christ defines the path of following Him as a path that will ultimately include a cross. You cannot follow Jesus without picking up your cross. Jesus voluntarily went to the Cross. It was the Father’s ordained plan for His Son to bleed and die, so that His death could be accounted as a sacrifice. Our cross is not the same as our Messiah’s cross. Our cross will not accomplish atonement for sins. Our cross is for our sanctification and conformity to our Master. Our cross represents a death. A death to all that we boast in that is of ourselves. A death to our self-righteousness. A death to our selfish ambitions and fleshly desires. A death to the anxiety over the worries and cares of this life. The cross is death to self, and life in the Spirit.

Therefore I urge you, 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. (Romans 12:1)

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. (Galatians 2:20)

### III. The Way of Love

- Christ’s sacrifice was the ultimate act of love. It is the most convincing proof that the Father loves us. And therefore, as followers we learn what it means to love. A love for God and a love for our neighbor demands self-sacrifice.

<sup>1</sup>Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children <sup>2</sup>and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:1, 2)

<sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

#### IV. The Way of the Spirit

- It requires the work of the Spirit to deny ourselves daily and pick up our cross. In death to self, we find life in the Spirit.

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:13)

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16)

#### V. The Way of Eternal Life

- We follow our Master not only to Calvary but ultimately into His Glory. Those who follow Christ on the way of the Cross in this age will follow Him into resurrected glory in the ages to come.

<sup>28</sup>Peter said, "Behold, we have left our own *homes* and followed You." <sup>29</sup>And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, <sup>30</sup>who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life." (Luke 18:28-30)

For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness of His resurrection*... (Romans 6:5)

#### VI. The Apostles' our Entrusted Leaders

- The Apostles were entrusted with the message of the Gospel, and they were entrusted to live out the Gospel. Their teachings and their life provide a pure example for us as we follow Christ.

<sup>3</sup>For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit; <sup>4</sup>but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. (1 Thess. 2:3, 4)

So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. (1 Thess. 2:8)

<sup>10</sup>You are witnesses, and *so is* God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; <sup>11</sup>just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children, <sup>12</sup>so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. (1 Thess. 2:10-12)

- We can therefore follow the Apostles as they follow Christ.

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. (NIV1 Cor. 11:1)

<sup>6</sup>You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup>so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. (1 Thessalonians 1:6, 7)

### VII. The Way of Suffering

- When we read the New Testament and examine the life, teachings, and examples of the Apostles, we are struck with their frequent sufferings. The apostles suffered many tribulations (Acts 14:22, 2 Cor. 1:8, Rev. 1:9, etc.). Jesus indicated to Peter the kind of death by which he would glorify God. Paul was told upon conversion that he would suffer for God's name. They did not suffer the result of the evil they committed. Instead, their suffering was the result of following Jesus. In proclaiming the Gospel there is resistance from powers and principalities and resistance from evil men. This is witnessed in the crucifixion of Christ. The message of the Cross and the way of the Cross will result in persecution. The Apostles witnessed in places where the Gospel was violently opposed. They labored day and night to feed and protect the flock. In countless other ways they laid down their lives. Paul claimed that he faced death daily. (1 Cor. 15:31). But the apostles did not suffer in an ascetic way. They suffered because of their love and service of the Great Shepherd and his blood purchased flock.

So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is for your glory. (Ephesians 3:13)

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith. I am glad and rejoice with you all. (Philippians 2:17)

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake... (Colossians 1:24)

- To be a follower of Christ is no easy task. You cannot take up your life and at the same time inherit eternal life. We cannot serve two masters. We cannot set our eye on this age and at the same time set our eye on the ages to come. Jesus makes that clear and direct, and the way of the Apostles affirm that they heard their Master loud and clear.

<sup>24</sup>Then Jesus told his disciples, "if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16:24-25)

### VIII. Elders and Deacons – Our Local Leaders

- There is no set of qualifications for choosing or handing down a succession for the apostolate. After Judas is disqualified, they elect a 12<sup>th</sup> apostle, because of the assumption that there will be 12 thrones governing the 12 tribes of Israel. Thus, there is no plan for leaving behind a succession beyond the 12.

Instead, the apostles left behind their witness and testimony in Scripture. They also gave clear instruction for a continuing leadership of the Assembly through elders and deacons.

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Tim. 2:2)

<sup>5</sup> For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you. (Titus 1:5)

When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

- In the pastoral epistles written towards the end of Paul's ministry, Paul outlines to his disciples Timothy and Titus a clear set of qualifications for those who aspire as elders and deacons. (1 Tim. 3, Titus 1)
- Because of these clear set of qualifications, the term elder, not only connotes old age and wisdom, but also maturity and faithfulness in the Gospel.
- The Greek "presbyteros" is the NT word for elder. The Greek "episcopo" for overseer is also used interchangeably with elder. (cf. Titus 1:5-7). An elder functions as an overseer. The Elder/Overseer is also associated closely with the role of a shepherd (Gk. Poimano). Throughout church history it's not difficult to see the role of pastor, the role of an elder, and the role of an overseer/bishop being distinct tiers of leadership. However, biblically speaking these are three different ways of speaking about one position of leadership.
- Along with elders are deacons, or "diakonos" in Greek. It translates as one who executes the commands of another, a servant, attendant, minister; a waiter who serves food and drink.
- So in the leadership of elders we see mature and faithful men, who have aspired to shepherd the flock as elders and serve the flock as deacons.
- To aspire for these roles is not to have a power trip in order to lord over your subjects. Rather, it is to have seen Christ as the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, who laid down His life for the sheep. It is to have seen Christ as one who comes as the Servant of all, who stoops down to wash His disciples' feet.
- To serve as a leader is to lay down selfish ambition for the ambition of Christ. It is to set aside the interests of pleasing men, to the interest of pleasing Christ (Gal. 1:10, 2 Cor. 5:9). A leader can only do this by setting their heart on eternity, to look for the unfading crown of glory (1 Pe. 5:4). They can sacrifice their life, because Christ sacrificed for them. They can care for the souls of others because Christ cares for them. They can deny their rights, privileges and honor in this life, because they are looking for an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading. They can lay down their lives, because Christ has granted them eternal life. They aspire to the noble task of shepherding because Christ Himself is a shepherd.

### IX. The Way of Self-Sacrifice for Shepherds

I am the good shepherd (Gk. poimen). The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:11)

- Poi-ma'n (G4166) - a herdsman, esp., a shepherd. He to whose care and control others have committed themselves, and whose precepts they follow.
- As we see in the Prophets, false shepherds are after sordid gain, or they feed themselves and not the flock, they scatter the flock.
- Good shepherds know the flock, lead the flock, feed the flock, and protect the flock. Ultimately, this cannot happen without the heart to lay down your life for the flock.

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (Gk. Episkopos), to shepherd (Gk. poimano) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (NKJV Acts 20:28)

For you were straying like sheep, but now have returned to the Shepherd (Gk. poimen) and Overseer (Gk. Episkopos) of your souls. (1 Peter 2:25)

<sup>17</sup>The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. (NIV John 21:17)

Therefore, I exhort the elders (Gk. Presbyteros) among you, as your fellow elder (sympresbyteros) and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd (Gk. Poimano') the flock (Gk. Poiminion) of God among you, exercising oversight (episkopeo) not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples of the flock (Gk. Poiminion). And when the Chief Shepherd (Gk. Archipoimen) appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:1-7)

### X. The Way of Self-Sacrifice for Sheep

Now I urge you, brothers – you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achai, and that they have devoted themselves to the service (Gk. Diakonia) of the saints – be subject (Gk. Hypostasso) to such as these, and to ever fellow worker and laborer. (1 Cor. 16:15-16)

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord to admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. (1 Thess. 5:12,13)

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)

Obey you leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch (Gk. agrypneo) 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. (Hebrews 13:17)

- Agypneo (G2347) – to be sleepless, keep awake, watch. To be circumspect, attentive, ready. (Used in Mat 13:33 and Luke 21:36 in relation to the end of the age.)

You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders (Gk. presbyteros); and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:5-7)