

Leadership Challenges in the African Church

Ephesians 4:1-24

Sermon

Hobart, July 24th, 2016

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Ephesians 4:1-24

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.⁴ For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.⁵ There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism,⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.

⁷ However, he has given each one of us a special gift* through the generosity of Christ.
⁸ That is why the Scriptures say,

“When he ascended to the heights,
he led a crowd of captives
and gave gifts to his people.”*

⁹ Notice that it says “he ascended.” This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world.*¹⁰ And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.

¹¹ Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Living as Children of Light

¹⁷ With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused.¹⁸ Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him.¹⁹ They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.

²⁰ But that isn't what you learned about Christ.²¹ Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him,²² throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.²³ Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.²⁴ Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.¹

* **4:7** Greek *a grace*.

* **4:8** Ps 68:18.

* **4:9** Some manuscripts read *to the lower parts of the earth*.

¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Eph 4:1–24). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

I. AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

A. AFRICA IS PROBABLY THE FASTEST AREA OF CHURCH GROWTH

1. Many thousands becoming Christians each year

a) According to Christianity Today

In 1900 there were fewer than 9 million Christians in Africa. Now there are more than 541 million. In the last 15 years alone, the Church in Africa has seen a 51 per cent increase, which works out on average at around 33,000 people either becoming Christians or being born into Christian families each day in Africa alone.²

2. According to Dan Meyer,

At the end of the 19th century, the southern portion of Africa was only 3 percent Christian. Today, 63 percent of the population is Christian.³

3. Worldwide there are around 2.4 billion people who call themselves Christians.⁴

B. CHALLENGES

1. Fast growth comes with its challenges, particularly in the area of leadership

a) And as a result there are not anywhere near enough Christian leaders in Africa

2. And many of them are not appropriately trained or equipped

a) And most are overburdened with large numbers to take care of

3. As one expert put it;

² Krish Kandiah, The Church is growing, and here are the figures that prove it, Christianity Today, March 5, 2015, <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/a.growing.church.why.we.should.focus.on.the.bigger.picture/49362.htm>

³ Dan Meyer, quoted in, <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2012/june/1061112.html>

⁴ Krish Kandiah

Overextended leaders try to meet all the pastoral and sacramental functions of multiple congregations and seek to uphold the artificially high western standards of ministry but deny the priesthood of all believers.⁵

4. There is a tendency, as everywhere, for leaders to reflect the values of the local culture as well as to be caught up in self-interest, and see leadership as an opportunity to have prestige and power in the community

5. An African writer tells us about the tendency among post-colonial politics to be focused on personal power.

People are made to believe their rights come from the generosity of that leader. In Africa every ruler becomes an ungazetted king, sitting in an unimpeachable position, ruling supreme and for life.⁶

6. Others add,

In their quest to monopolise the control of state power following independence, most of Africa's rulers—soldiers and civilians alike—adopted practices of authoritarianism, with the consequence that national public politics withered and a world of largely private power and influence emerged. Politics became a kind of “palace politics” engaged in by privileged members of a ruling oligarchy...

In seeking to understand the character of African political systems, we must therefore set aside the preconceptions and categories of institutionalised public politics and consider the older and historically pervasive practices of palace politics that were common in societies prior to the modern democratic revolution.⁷

7. African tribes are traditionally hierarchical, led by a chief in whom all authority and power is held

a) So ancient African traditional leadership styles, and modern dictatorial political leadership tends to carry over into the church

b) There tends to be a separation between pastor and the rest of the congregation

⁵ Elliston, quoted in Kohls, A Look at Church Leadership in Africa, Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology, 17.2.1998, p.113

⁶ Okullu, p.115

⁷ Jackson and Rosberg, 1982, quoted in Kohls, African Journal of Evangelical Theology, p.115

8. In areas of Ghana pastors are called “Christian chiefs”.

a) In many areas instead of humble, servant leaders and shepherds, leaders tend towards autocratic, religious chief type roles

b) As Warren writes,

Can we...be surprised if in Africa the ministry tends to be preoccupied with questions of status? For status is an ever present preoccupation with a chief and his people insist on it being so for it has to do with the sacred significance that lies behind the whole traditional understanding of the chieftainship.⁸

C. THERE IS ALSO THE CHALLENGE OF URBANISATION

1. The industrial revolution has led many to move into city areas

a) Tribal loyalties persist, but urban lives cause many challenges and issues for individuals and for communities that can often end up with inter-tribal conflicts

D. UNFORTUNATELY, WITH ALL OF THESE CHALLENGES, MANY CHURCHES HAVE TAKEN ON A HEALTH-WEALTH GOSPEL APPROACH

1. Focusing on Christianity as a means of bringing guaranteed physical blessings

2. And as a result, attracting poor and oppressed people who have suffered greatly at the hands of corrupt political leaders and others, based on a false premise

E. IT IS EXCITING TO SEE THE GROWTH IN THE CHURCH IN AFRICA, BUT THERE ARE MANY CHALLENGES, NEEDS AND CONCERNS TO PRAY ABOUT

1. France writes;

African Christianity is going to need, indeed it already needs, more than numbers. If it is to survive...it must be truly African, speaking to actual African concerns with an authentic African voice. But, if it is to have any *raison d'être*, it must also be truly Christian, and that means that what it applies to the question of Africa must be the biblical revelation.⁹

⁸ Warren quoted in Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology, 17.2.1998, p.114

⁹ France, quoted in Kohls, African Journal of Evangelical Theology, 17.2.1998, p. 122

S.P.S:

A. WITH THIS IN MIND

1. Let's take a look at the Biblical view of the church and its leaders that Paul gave to the church in Ephesus
2. And the calling and priorities we all share as God's people, whether we are Ephesians, Africans or Australians, leaders or congregants

B. PRAYER

BODY:

II. EPHESIANS 4:1-24

A. IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

1. Paul has been giving thanks for and explaining the many blessings of the Gospel,
 - a) As well as the privilege he feels in being God's servant in spreading his good news.

Ephesians 3:1

When I think of all this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles* ...² assuming, by the way, that you know God gave me the special responsibility of extending his grace to you Gentiles. ³ As I briefly wrote earlier, God himself revealed his mysterious plan to me. ⁴ As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ. ⁵ God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets.

* 3:1 Paul resumes this thought in verse 14: "When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father."

B. CLEARLY PAUL IS GOD'S SERVANT, TO THE POINT OF SUFFERING AS A PRISONER

1. All he does is in service to God, for the benefit of God's people
2. This is not about power, position, personal benefit or recognition for Paul
3. It is about service;
 - a) Serving God
 - b) And he serves God by serving God's people by spreading the Good News
4. And the Good news is that all people of all tribes and nations are equally God's children
 - a) We are all part of the same body of Christ, and share the same blessings

^{v 6} And this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus

C. BLESSINGS AND RICHES

1. What are the blessings and riches promised?
2. Not health, wealth, position, privilege or personal power and status
3. In Ephesians 4:1 Paul says he is a prisoner as a result of serving the Lord

⁷ By God's grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.

- a) Paul as a leader, does as Jesus said the greatest among his people would do, he is a servant
- b) And participating in Jesus' work and ministry of serving God's people

Ephesians 4:1-24

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.

4. The starting place for all of us, is the one who has called us

- a) Paul is so dedicated to serving the Lord, that he has become a prisoner
- b) The priority is on God and the mission he has called us to join Jesus Christ on, not our well-being, our comfort, prestige or power

5. Our lives are to match with our calling to be like Jesus Christ in our attitude, motives, and actions

² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.

6. Why are we to be humble, gentle, patient and tolerant of other's faults and weaknesses?

- a) Because of our love
- b) Because God is love, and through the Holy Spirit we are filled with the loving mind and heart of God

³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. ⁴ For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. ⁵ There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.

7. Our purpose as Christians, now we have received God's blessings, and been included in his life and kingdom is peace

- a) "Keeping ourselves united and binding ourselves together in peace"
- b) He shows how God is one, and how everything about him and the Christian life and hope and faith is unified in God
- c) The God who is Father of all, One Lord and one Spirit

8. Peace is about restoring things to be in proper order

a) And that proper order comes from being focused on God, not on ourselves

b) It comes from always being humble, patient and forgiving

9. The reason there is one body, one Spirit, one future hope, one Lord, one Faith, one baptism is because there is one God and Father of all who is over all and living through all

a) God as Father, Son and Spirit is one because each member of the Godhead is in unity, and is motivated by love and the desire to serve and restore and build up

b) It is because of this harmonious, self-sacrificing love and graciousness of God that he sent his Son and then his Spirit to bring us into relationship with him

c) To forgive us, and to lead us in his way of life, the way of love, unity and peace

D. WE CAN'T HAVE HARMONY, PEACE AND GROWTH IN THE CHURCH IF ANYTHING ELSE IS MOTIVATING US

1. If our motives are our own position, or how we can get ahead in life, or be healthier or wealthier, or gain more popularity, power or control over others, then we are going the opposite way to unity, peace and love.

a) Paul has already discussed how we have come out of our former lives and the wrong ways of our society and world, the wrong attitudes towards life we have been brought up with

Ephesians 2:1-6

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. ² You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world.* He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. ³ All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

* **2:2** Greek *obeying the commander of the power of the air*.

⁴ But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)

Ephesians 5:7-

⁷ However, he has given each one of us a special gift* through the generosity of Christ. ⁸ That is why the Scriptures say,

“When he ascended to the heights,

he led a crowd of captives

and gave gifts to his people.”*

⁹ Notice that it says “he ascended.” This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world.* ¹⁰ And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.

2. This is our calling

- a) To use the gifts Jesus Christ has given humbly and selflessly

3. The son of God humbled himself and descended to lead his people free and give us his gifts

- a) As Paul tells us in Philippians, Jesus didn't cling on to his position of power and authority, but humbled himself in order to lovingly help and bless his people

E. THE GIFTS CHRIST GIVES THE CHURCH

¹¹ Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

1. Leaders are gifts of Christ to the church

- a) Leadership is not something given to the individual for their own benefit

2. Leaders are responsible for serving and building the church

* **4:7** Greek *a grace*.

* **4:8** Ps 68:18.

* **4:9** Some manuscripts read *to the lower parts of the earth*.

a) For helping equip God's people to do his work

3. Who is to do God's work and build up the body?

a) The body of Christ, all members

b) This is called the "priesthood of all believers"

(1) Before the Reformation in Europe, leaders were seen as the ones who did God's work, and the members just listened, and watched as the leaders took on all the authority and responsibility of the work of the church

4. Leaders are responsible (v12) to serve God and the church (not independently and irresponsibly serve themselves)

a) Like Jesus and Paul, Christian leaders support, help, guide and teach and build up others

b) They sacrifice, and patiently, humbly serve God by serving his people

¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

5. This is the goal – being complete, mature, fulfilled in Christ

a) Unity in our trusting and knowing Jesus

b) He is the living example and source of how we are to conduct our lives as Christians

c) In *him* we find true meaning, fulfilment, hope, encouragement and a sense of belonging and being whole

d) We can't find that true satisfaction in feathering our own nest and trying to get others to do what *we* want

F. MATURE UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRUTH

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.

1. There are so many ideas and passionately expressed ideas that purport to be the latest and greatest truths that everyone supposedly needs to know and act upon
2. We naturally want to feel better, to be better off physically, to be able to solve all our problems
3. Too often leaders with a charismatic personalities push their get well or get rich quickly or be more righteous schemes dressed up to sound Christian
 - a) And people who are immature are quickly attracted to and tossed and blown around by such new teachings, which as Paul warns, are “lies so clever they sound like the truth”.

G. WHY DO PEOPLE FIND SUCH TEACHINGS ATTRACTIVE?

1. Why do people like the idea of simple, quick fixes to their problems and hurts in life?
2. Why do so many believe that by praying the right words engaging in particular religious practices, keeping certain rituals they will get what they want from God?
3. Why does the health-wealth gospel gather so many followers, while churches that teach the true gospel seem unappealing and tend not to grow so dramatically?
4. Why are such exclusive and legalistic teachings so attractive and enthusiastically embraced by so many?
5. Perhaps it is because our human needs and appetites find them appealing, just like Eve and then Adam were conned in the beginning
 - a) The appeal to the eye, and to our desire to feel good, and to be seen as good are very powerful motivators
 - b) But as the Lord told Cain

Genesis 4:7

⁷ You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.

6. It is all too easy to fall prey to the lie, to the false-gospel that there is another and better way to life, wealth, and health than through Jesus Christ and his way of humility and sacrifice of self, and self-interest as our number one priority

a) This actually the heart of sin, it is idolatry, it is having another truth before the gospel, another god before the true God

7. Paul makes clear what the real truth of the gospel we are to be teaching and believing is focused on, and the better blessings and more satisfying fruits it produces

Ephesians 5:15

¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.

8. This is what we are to teach and believe and practice

a) And the result is that we are blessed and grow in the only way that really benefits us, and the church

b) We grow to be more like Jesus Christ, the son of God

¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

9. This is who we are to be as leaders and members working together as the whole, cooperative and unified body of Christ

a) This is what really blesses our lives and gives us true peace, happiness and fulfilment

b) Happiness, contentment and hope that get us through physical trials and suffering

Living as Children of Light

¹⁷ With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. ¹⁸ Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. ¹⁹ They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.

H. THE ROLE OF CHURCH LEADERS IS TO SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE

1. To teach the true Gospel, and to encourage people to understand and grow in it
 - a) And to warn against unhealthy teachings that deceive and harm the flock and divide and confuse
2. Christians are called out of the old carnal and self-serving ways that we have been brought up with and are bombarded with from our societies and culture

²⁰ But that isn't what you learned about Christ. ²¹ Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, ²² throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.

I. WE ALL NEED TO KEEP GOING BACK TO CHRIST

1. And what the Scriptures teach us about him
2. About how he was prepared to suffer ridicule, hardship, shame, persecution, wrongful treatment, false-accusations, rejection by his own people, and ultimately to be crucified as a criminal for our sakes
 - a) The truth then sets us free, and helps us throw off the temptations of our old sinful nature and our old way of life which is dominated and perverted by selfish motives and the lies we too willingly want to believe as true
 - b) That there is a quicker and easier way to health, wealth and happiness than the self-sacrificing way of Jesus

²³ Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. ²⁴ Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

J. INSTEAD WE NEED TO BE LED BY GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. Who can transform and set right our thoughts and motives
 2. When we look to him, rather than get righteous or rich quick heresies, we end up being transformed to have a new nature like God, to be genuinely righteous and holy
 3. To be like Jesus, who didn't think twice, but counted it all joy, and a privilege to become one of us here on earth, to love us, and embrace us, and to die for us, and with us, that we might live with him, and for him, and for all people
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CONCLUSION:

I. OUR CALLING

A. WHETHER WE ARE LEADERS OR NOT, IS TO BE GOD FOCUSED RATHER THAN SELF-FOCUSED

1. J.R. Clinton defines a Christian leadership,

A leader, as defined from a study of Biblical leadership...is a person (1) with God-given capacity and (2) with God-given responsibility to influence (3) a specific group of God's people (4) towards God's purposes for the group.

... The central task of leadership is influencing God's people towards God's purposes.¹⁰

2. Ted Ward adds,

... A leader is one who ministers, a leader serves through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, not in terms of prowess, not in terms of accomplishments or acquired knowledge, but in terms of what God is doing through his or her life. Leadership in the church in the servanthood.¹¹

3. Kohls summarises what he sees needs to happen with leaders for the church in Africa to succeed in the future

Unquestionably, leadership models for the church in Africa and around the world must be drawn from the Scriptures and evaluated in terms of accountability to the Scriptures, and especially to the life of Christ.¹²

1. While the need in Africa for trained pastors is great, the moral-spiritual standard demanded in the Scriptures...cannot be relaxed for pragmatic reasons. True men of God, full of the Holy Spirit, are desperately needed; men, conscious of God's call, and acknowledged to have the requisite gifts for ministry by the people of God.

2. Pastors must recognise that their primary task is as a teacher and preacher of the Word of God and they must be educated to have a servant spirit. Where possible and as much as possible they need to

¹⁰ J.R. Clinton, quoted in Kohls, African Journal of Evangelical Theology, 17.2.1998, p. 118

¹¹ Ted Ward, quoted in Kohls, African Journal of Evangelical Theology, 17.2.1998, p. 118

¹² Kohls, p.118

relinquish administrative tasks to others. The pastor must see his ministry in terms of equipping the people of God for their ministries.

3. In terms of training for the ministry, the emphasis must be on Biblical exegesis as applied to the African milieu. The need is for pastors to be able to both accurately and convictingly preach the Word, for there is need for both instruction and exhortation. ...then, by God's grace, the spiritual face of Africa, qualitatively and quantitatively, will be that much more transformed. It is for reasons like these the church leaders... remain hopeful about the future of the church.

B. PRAYER