

Our Key Difference

by John Edmiston

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What are some of the key spiritual differences in leadership between a godly Christian leader and a successful but worldly executive such as Donald Trump?

Some that immediately come to mind (in fairly random order) include: Prayer, a pure heart, clean lips, worship, graciousness, kindness, treating people as precious individuals for whom Christ died and not just as means to an end, washing the feet of the saints, going the extra mile, turning the other cheek, taking up one's cross daily, separation from the world and its lusts, loving God, reverence for the Scriptures and for holy things, marital faithfulness, contentment, simplicity, humility, lowliness, obedience, peace, joy, treating others as we wish to be treated ourselves, and being loving, gentle, patient, easy to be entreated and meek.

The things listed above are the differences that make the Church the Church! They shall know we are Christians by our love:

John 13:34-35 ESV *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. (35) By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

One passage recently stood out to me as highlighting some key leadership differences:

Matthew 11:28-30 ESV *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

Look what Jesus is promising! Rest for our souls flowing from His gentle, lowly and meek leadership style. He promises not to overload us - for His yoke is easy and His burden is light! Jesus is a leader who allows His followers rest and recreation and who does not stress them out or overwork them but instead treats them with great gentleness and respect! The apostle John even tells thus that following Jesus' commandments is not hard:

1 John 5:2-3 MKJV *By this we know that we love the children of God, whenever we love God and keep His commandments. (3) For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.*

Good Christian leaders do not put their followers on a treadmill. Instead they take heavily burdened people and give them rest! One of the keys to this is teaching people to walk in the Holy Spirit so that they can have God's strength for each and every day so that they can fulfill all the commandments of God (Romans 8:4, Galatians 5:16).

Sometimes we can over-schedule our staff or our volunteers. We see a great goal to be accomplished and we drive everyone hard until it is fulfilled, forgetting that they have family and obligations and a life to live. This is nearly always wrong. The people must come before the project. If the project is too big for the people it clearly should be scaled back a bit.

God gave the Jews three large holiday feasts each year of about ten days each, plus a day off each week and an entire year off every seven years. These were to be times without work. Times to just rest and be refreshed. God does not want you to be working a 70 hour week. And God does not want you to drive your staff so hard that they have to work 70 hour weeks! Fruitfulness is far more important than production and you simply cannot be spiritual, gracious, kind, patient and loving if you are stressed-out, over-tired, and irritable from lack of sleep!

Are your people better or bitter? Are they blessed or burdened? Fruitful or frustrated? Cults burden people, but Christ gives them rest.

The primary concern of a godly Christian leader is not the size of the organization but the quality of the fruit. The key question we need to ask ourselves is: Are our people developing into the image of God's beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Savior?

Christ-like spiritual quality was Paul's primary prayer concern:

Ephesians 3:14-19 MKJV *For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (15) of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named, (16) that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; (17) that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, (18) may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, (19) and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.*

As well as his vision for the role of the entire five-fold ministry:

Ephesians 4:11-13 ISV *And it is he who gifted some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, and still others to be pastors and teachers, (12) to perfect the saints, to do the work of ministry, and to build up the body of Christ (13) until all of us are united in the faith and in the full knowledge of God's Son, and until we attain mature adulthood and the full standard of development in Christ.*

Christian leadership is not about the execution of organizational goals but is instead about the growth of the people within the organization and the blessedness of those whom they minister to. At the end of our ministry we should be able to look at our people and see that they are becoming more and more like Jesus each day!

Funding has become very closely tied to numerical measures and to leaders who are able to present 'business plans' to large foundations and donors. This in turn drives a culture of frantic achievement and a marginalization of (seemingly) time-consuming spiritual practices and values. The task tends to come before things such as worship and relationships and even prayer tends to focus on what needs to be done rather than on the people who are doing it.

In extreme cases some "Christian" organizations are just worldly corporations pursuing religious goals with a Bible in one hand and a calculator in the other. They are just like any big business and they are even proud to say so. In such cases they have lost the Spirit of Christ and are run by the spirit of this present evil age.

The problem with slowing down and paying attention to people, relationships, prayer, worship, the poor and broken and so on is that "the numbers look bad". What man sees on the outside is not as impressive. But God looks on the heart! He beholds our quality not our quantity:

1 Samuel 16:7 ESV *But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."*

Indeed when Jesus comments on each of the seven churches in Revelation chapters two and three He ONLY mentions "quality issues" - primarily of love, endurance, faith and sanctification.

Corporate leadership may be glamorous but it is not spiritual. It does not produce people made in the image of God's beloved Son. Unless God can see and know Himself in our fruit He will say "I never knew you! Depart from Me you workers of iniquity!". If our ministries just produce worldly people who know a few bible verses and can say a few prayers but who are devoid of higher spiritual values such as agape love then we have failed completely. We have become "workers of iniquity" for we have kept them in their sins.

Our leadership goals and leadership styles are to be vastly different from those of the world. We are to be as the least among them, we are to serve, we are to be gentle and lowly and meek and we are to give people rest for their souls.

The leadership style of Christian organizations should be saturated with holiness and with agape love. Our organizations should be filled with solid deep prayerful friendships among brothers and sisters in the Lord. No one should feel marginalized, left out or at the bottom of a church or mission "pecking order". Everyone should feel that they are loved, accepted and being built up in the Lord

and in their faith. No one should feel that they are just there to do a job. Everyone should feel that they are part of a living fellowship of divine grace.

Why not spend ten minutes, right now, thinking about how you lead and how you minister?

What do you need to change if the people you lead are to be built up in Christ?

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