

Officer Ordination/Installation in Biblical Perspective
“Leadership That Makes a Difference”
I Thessalonians 1:2-10
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January 8, 2012 – Evening Sermon

This is a significant moment in the life of any congregation and one that we value greatly here at Briarwood. It is the ordination and installation of those qualified and called men selected by a congregation and gifted by the Holy Spirit to occupy those God ordained and designed offices of elder and deacon in the congregation of the church. I'd like to give a couple of words before I talk about leadership from God's Word. I'd like to give some in house conversation here. I'm a Presbyterian by conviction. I weren't born one. I was probably one of those deep water Presbyterians. I came out of a baptistic background but I came in this direction for a number of reasons and not the least of which was my deep appreciation for the form of church government that was established. The word Presbyter means elder – government by elders, the plurality of elders. I began to examine the Scriptures and I every time I would see the word 'elder' and I would see the word 'church', elder would be plural and church would be singular.

Scriptures says “If anyone sick let him call for the elders (plural) of the church (singular).” Paul called for the elders plural of the church and I fully realize that church government is a secondary doctrine where you can get it wrong and still get to heaven. I know not all of you are Presbyterians but I have good news for you and that is you don't have to be a Presbyterian to get to heaven. I wouldn't take a chance if I were you but you don't have to be. While it's a secondary doctrine it doesn't mean it a non-important doctrine. One of the reasons I greatly appreciate that a church is run by, directed by and shepherded by a plurality of leaders is because if your run or directed by one leader you not only get that leader's strengths but you get their weaknesses. With a plurality you get the strengths of others to cover the weaknesses of others.

Secondly, you get accountability. Probably one of the biggest reasons I'm a Presbyterian is it's the only system of government I know where every member, every pastor, every leader and every church is accountable to somebody and so we can fulfill the Biblical admonition to be submissive to one another. Those are probably some of the key reasons why. Then of course to see the fascinating way in which God designed the government of His church with a three office person here where He has these teaching elders who occupy the office of minister of the Word whereby they teach the Word of God and minister the Word of God. They are even supported to do that.

It's an amazing thing to me that God allows something so sacred as the tithe to support people like me and then because of my inadequacies we have other teaching elders to help out on our pastoral staff. The Bible says “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.” It's not because of the importance of us being ministers of the Word but because of the importance of preaching and teaching. God says to set them aside, support them so they can give their time to the preaching, teaching and leadership of the Word that needs to be there for the equipping of the saints so they can do the ministry. Then they work in concert with the ruling elders – the shepherds of the church who oversee the policies, the people and the processes of the church.

The diaconate rises up in Acts 6 because the people were giving so much and the needs were so extraordinary that the mercy ministry wasn't being done right. So they said "if we do a better job on the mercy ministry then we'll have to neglect prayer and the Word which is what we're called to do so let's raise up those deacons." You can almost see how the Old Testament is being reflected in the New Testament. What were the three offices in the Old Testament? It was prophet, priest and king. The prophet would speak forth the Word of God. The priest would intercede on behalf of the people and then there is an example of a great shepherd king, King David, who would oversee and care for the people. Jesus of course fulfills that as The Prophet, The Priest and The King. In the New Testament you have the reflection of those offices. The minister of the Word kind of reflects the office of prophet by administering the Word. The deacons reflect the office of priest with intercession. The elders represent the kingly ministry where they oversee the shepherding, the church to give direction. So you see how God has carefully designed His church so that it can function appropriately.

One of the things that is very challenging and fascinating to me as I read the Scriptures which I wrote a book on called The Leadership Dynamic and see how God uses leadership. Whenever God does something He raises up leaders. If He wants to lead the people out of Egypt then He'll do by using someone like Moses. When He wanted to put them in Israel He raised up Joseph. When He wanted to take care of His people while in exile He raised up a Daniel, who worked 80 years in the lives of God's people, through five dynasties and two different empires (Babylon and Medo-Persia) to care for them while they are in exile. It's amazing to me how God raises up leaders to lead in these kinds of situations.

So there is a premise that I fully believe and that is leadership works. You may be thinking of churches that have had bad leadership and the churches are in trouble so perhaps how can I say leadership works. You just proved it. I didn't say leadership always work good. I just said leadership works. Good leadership will produce good results usually. Bad leadership works too. It actually accomplishes things. Jesus said, "When the blind lead the blind (it works) they both fall into the pit. When all is said and done the pupil becomes like the teacher, the servant like the master." Leadership can almost classify as a means of grace. In other words, God raises up leaders to use as a means to do His redemptive work of grace in the lives of people.

I want to give a few more introductory words before I bring out five observations for you to meditate on about leadership from Scripture. When you think of leadership my burden right now is what is happening in the church is that we are letting the world define leadership and develop leaders. Then we are bringing them into the church and we think a couple of officer training classes will make them Christian leaders and that just doesn't work. It's a good thing to do but it will not work. God has given me a heart on this and that's why I love our Fellows program, Campus Outreach, YBL, the Christian Medical Ministry etc but one of the things these programs are doing is defining leadership in the church, developing leaders through discipleship in the church and then sending them to the world. Instead of the world's leaders getting baptized into the church, we are sending the leaders from the church into the world.

So the church doesn't only develop leaders for the church but they develop leaders that go into the world, whether it's a statesman in the area of politics. Some use the word politician in a negative way and yet it's actually a good word. The word politic

means benevolent policies and comes from the root word in Latin that means giving benevolent policies to people. That's what it ought to mean but of course it has become a bad term now where it's almost a curse word. We need Christian politicians bringing benevolent policies of God's common grace to the world. We need good statesmen. We need people to move into the area of fine arts, popular arts, performing arts. We need people to move into the academic institutions. I think one of the big implosions you're about to see is the implosions that will take place in the academic institutions of our society. If you think the housing bubble was something wait till you see what's about to happen in the education institutions.

I believe that is in the church (here) that we ought to be providing these leaders but the leaders we produce to go out there the standard is set by the leaders that develop them here. That is why this study is important. Leadership works. We need Gospel drenched, saturated leaders for Christ's church so that men can rise up and lead their wives and men and women can rise up and lead their children. We need Christian families in a neighborhood that can lead others to the glories of Christ and Christian men and women can go into their businesses and make an impact as leaders for Christ. One of the most crucial things is right here.

The text that I'd like you to consider is I Thessalonians 2. The church in Thessalonica was one of the first churches that had state sponsored persecution so a number of believers had died but Jesus hadn't come back yet so they wrote Paul a letter saying "Paul you said if we come to Jesus we're saved. We came. You said Jesus is coming back and He hasn't but some of our people have died so can you tell us what happened to them?" So Paul answers them in I Thessalonians 4 and 5 but before he does he spends some time writing a marvelous letter to them. I just want to read some from this letter.

I Thessalonians 1:2-10 says [2] *We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, [3] remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.* (you'll always see this in Paul's letters – the triad of Christian virtues, faith, hope and love) [4] *For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,* (Paul, how in the world did you know that God chose these people? You weren't there when God chose. So here is how he knows that God's electing love is upon these people. He sees the evidences of electing grace.) [5] *because our gospel came to you not only in **word**, but also in **power** and in the Holy Spirit and with **full conviction**.* (Paul knows how absolutely astounding it is that they are standing like this in the midst of this affliction. So what is one thing God uses in these people to show the power of His grace?) *You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. [6] And you became imitators of us and of the Lord* (They used the Lord's leaders as imitators, as sign posts that pointed them to the Lord), *for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit* (In the midst of dying for Christ and receiving the Word there is joy in these people), [7] *so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. [8] For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. [9] For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,*

[10] and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Here is this glorious statement about these people who are under persecution, who are dying for the faith and he says they received the Word with power, full conviction and you're standing firm with joy even in the midst of that affliction. One of things that God used was us in your life because we set a standard for you by God's grace and not because our strength and it made an impact in your life so that when the affliction came upon you, you knew how to respond because you had been watching us before. So I want to draw out five observations about leadership that makes a difference.

Here is the first observation. Over the course of time the fellowship of a church will reflect the leadership in the church. It may not happen over time but what the leadership does, says and how it functions even if persecution comes upon the church, the followership of the church will reflect the leadership of the church, over a course of time. God will use leaders as a means of grace to prepare His people for what's to come.

The second observation from the text is leaders are both directional and relational. In other words, leaders are pointing us where to go. Leaders are responsible for management but management is not leadership. Leadership is not merely managing policies, processes and situations which is good stewardship but leadership goes beyond that. Leadership points people where we are going but it doesn't point them and tell them to go there. It points them and says "Follow me as I go there with you." It is both directional and relational. Shepherds don't say to sheep "Go over there to the grass." They lead them. The sheep know their voice and they follow them directionally and relationally. These people had been directed by Paul and the team when they planted the church and ministered. Paul and that team had loved them. He said "You know what kind of men we were among you."

The third observation is leaders both model and mentor. I put this in order for a reason. Paul said they had set an example and you received the Word from us. In my fledgling, frail, every growing walk with the Lord about five years ago you would have hoped I had learned this a long time ago. I used to believe that you teach people and then you go model what you teach. One day I'm reading Acts 1 and Luke is writing to Theophilus, his second volume which tells you what the second volume is but it also tells you what the first volume (The book of Luke) is. Acts (Luke's second volume) 1:1 says *[1] In the first book (the book of Luke), O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to **do and teach**.* After reading this I realized that I have had this thing backward my whole life. I thought it was teach and do but Jesus according to this verse would do and teach. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray He said "This is the way you pray." When they asked about evangelizing He taught them how to evangelize. He would do and teach.

Luke's first volume is thirty three years of Jesus, the incarnate body, of what He would do and teach. The second volume is what Jesus is continuing to do and teach through body number two, His church. The book of Acts is covers about the same length of time the book of Luke does, thirty three years. It covers thirty three years of how the body of Christ expanded itself. What did they do? God raised up leaders. Jesus had prepared leaders who would take the church, the body of Christ that would go from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the utter most parts of the world. What is it that a leader does to accomplish ministry? They do and teach.

My brothers I'm going to give you a very brief charge here. This church will not value worship if our leaders don't value worship. God has his wonderful people that will go ahead of the leaders but by in large the church as a followership will not value worship (Trinitarian worship in Spirit and in truth) if our leaders don't. You have to model it and mentor it. With evangelism we're talking about our iShare series. Our congregation won't share because of a program. They will share because of Christ at work in them and the encouragement of leaders who are sharing Christ with others. Our people will learn stewardship by watching you. Our people will learn how to love one another by watching you. You are a means of grace sent from God to set a standard for God's people. What you do will then open the door to teach what they need to know.

A fourth observation is leaders prepare others for both joy and affliction in a broken world. I want to assure you of something. Many times Jesus intervenes in this world and dispels the clouds of affliction. Many times He comes into our life physically and He'll miraculously heal but by in large you live in a broken world. In a broken world there will be all kinds of issues where there will be disappointments and discouragements for God's people. Leaders, you and I are preparing them for that day when the acid test of the sufficiency of God's grace will be manifested in the lives of His people. When the day of affliction comes they will respond not with a fake stoicism, just grin and bear it but with a real joy even when they grieve over the loss of loved ones or even when they grieve over mockery and ridicule when they stand for Christ. No matter what the affliction or persecution is that might come to them, while in Thessalonica it was the loss of life, the leaders had prepared them for that moment that they would respond with the joy of the Lord and not the happiness of happenstance, but the joy of the Lord that overcomes all.

The fifth and final observation of leaders that make a difference is leaders profile for others what the Lord will do in them and through them in the midst of adversity. You will not only prepare them but you will profile for them. I want to say this carefully. When you as a leader encounter the disappointments and discouragements of life, our people aren't sitting there waiting to say "So what's he going to do now Mr. Leader?" They are going to pray for you and love you as they look at you because you are upfront. As you're out front and they are looking at you, then by God's grace you will profile for them what they need to hear. That is an extraordinary privilege of what God has put in place for us.

Leaders make a difference. Elders and deacons in just a few moments you are joining, not a perfect company of leaders at Briarwood over 50 plus years, a noble band that God by His grace has put together throughout all the years. Whenever we have wanted to stray He has kept us faithful. When He keeps us faithful it has been all of Him, from Him, and to Him. I can't wait to see what God's grace through you is going to add to the luster of that company for His glory. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I thank You for the way that You use leadership and how You put it in place in Your church. I ask O God, even in these moments, that You will give us a sense of the significance of what You've done to put leaders before the church of Jesus Christ and to provide them so that the church of Jesus Christ will not only be well led and well fed spiritually but will also

be able to produce that glorious testimony that this world needs to see and even leaders that this world desperately needs. Lord, when You do something You always do it from the ground up out of the lives of everyday people but the longevity of what You do is blessed by the leaders You have given to us. You did a glorious thing at Thessalonica from the bottom up and when the day of affliction came, what the leaders had done enabled it to go to the next generation with faithfulness and joy. Continue to bless us with such leaders, even these whom You have selected through Your people by Your Spirit, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.