

A Biblical View of Leadership in the Workplace

Dan Hult, 3 June 2017 updated 27 March 2023

Abstract

Leadership in the workplace is a topic of great importance that is often explored from a secular perspective, and when it is explored from a Christian perspective it is usually focused on leadership in the church and the home. But what of the Christian who is found in or aspires to leadership in the workplace? How can the Christian lead in a way that is not only consistent with the Christian faith but built on the foundation of Scripture? The aim of this paper is to establish just such a foundation, both examining secular leadership principles through the lens of Scripture and exploring both the general themes and specific passages of Scripture dealing with leadership in the workplace. It is certainly not exhaustive, but seeks to provide the current or aspiring Christian leader with a Scriptural lens, filter, and foundation for leadership in the workplace.

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Note: All Scripture references from the ESV: English Standard Version of the Holy Bible, Crossway, 2016 except as noted. NIV Scripture references from The Holy Bible, New International Version, Biblica, Inc., 2011

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Introduction

What is leadership? What traits make a good leader—or a bad leader for that matter? These questions are addressed in enumerable books, seminars, and courses throughout the academic and corporate worlds. Yet within this mountain of resources, there are very few created from a Christian worldview—and the few that are deal mostly with leadership in the context of the church or home. So how is the believer who is either found in a position of leadership in the workplace or on track to such a position to approach the topic of leadership? While the Christian’s study of leadership should involve a wise sampling of the various available resources, how do we leverage the wisdom found in these resources along with the truth of Scripture? If the Bible is truly inspired by God and contains all that is necessary for life and godliness so that the believer is equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:3)—including leadership—then the Bible should be both the starting point for the Christian’s study of leadership the lens through which to view and evaluate all secular advice on leadership. Essentially, we must examine how a Christian is both exhorted by the commands of Scripture and guided by examples in Scripture to lead in the workplace. We will look at the evolution of the world’s view of corporate leadership then apply the truth of the Scripture to form a vision for Christian leadership useful for anyone from first line supervisor to CEO. Before we begin, it is important to note that in this context “workplace” refers to any work environment outside of the Church and home, whether private sector, government, or non-profit. While many of these concepts certainly can be applied to leadership in the Church and at home, the emphasis here is on the “secular” workplace—though as we will see, no workplace is truly secular.

Presuppositions

First, it is important to address the presuppositions that undergird this study. This paper is written from the Reformed Protestant perspective, based on the five *solas*, primarily *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone is the highest authority above all writings and edicts of man) and *soli Deo gloria* (all is to be done to the glory of God alone). The other *solas* are similarly assumed: *sola fide* (salvation comes by faith alone and not by works or merit), *sola gratia* (salvation is the gracious gift of God alone and cannot be earned by sinful humans), and *solus Christus* (salvation is through Jesus Christ alone). Thus, the Bible is the primary source herein—that is to say the bulk of the material found herein is taken from the pages of Scripture interpreted in the context of the whole of Scripture then applied to leadership in the workplace. All other sources referenced or summarized are viewed through the lens of Scripture (that is, through a worldview founded on Scripture) and passed through the filter of Scripture as the ultimate standard of what is true, helpful, and necessary. This stems from the following operating assumptions:

1. The Bible is the sole inspired and inerrant Word of God written by various men as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Being inerrant, it is the source and standard of truth. It contains all that is required to live a godly life (2 Peter 1:3), fully equipping the Christian for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17)—including vocation and leadership.
2. The Bible is a single storyline that reveals God’s character, man’s condition, and God’s plan of redemption. Every command, every narrative, every poem, every prophecy, and every letter contained within the Bible supports that storyline, following the themes of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. All of the words of Scripture proceed from the Holy Spirit and point to Jesus Christ.

3. Mankind is sinful. That is, all men and women who have ever lived (except one) commit enumerable offenses against God by thought, word, and action both by what they do and leave undone. This not only includes individual sinning but also the corrupt sin nature inherited by all people (except one) by descending from Adam and Eve. Therefore, our only hope is for God to save us from sin—i.e., redemption.
4. The narratives and letters in the Bible address the lives of numerous people. Many of these provide both positive and negative leadership lessons to be heeded. These people were all flawed (except one) and all observations about their lives and leadership must consider the historical and cultural context in which they lived.
5. The lone perfect character in the Bible is the Triune God, meaning that there is only one God but three distinct persons: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit, all of whom are equally God. In perfect community, God created everything and works His plan of redemption for mankind. As the climax of God's plan of redemption, Jesus Christ, being fully God, became a man: he was born, lived a perfect life, died to atone for sin, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven.
6. God has created an orderly world that can be explored and understood. People then, regardless of whether they acknowledge God or not, have the ability to make true observations about the world and human nature. They may arrive at their conclusions without acknowledgement of the Bible, but what they observe that is true will align with Scripture—otherwise it would not be true. Since sin nature clouds and corrupts mankind's ability to think and reason properly, all of these observations are tainted by sin and must pass through the filter of Scripture as the standard of truth.¹

All of this underscores the importance of Scripture as the foundation upon which Christian leaders must build their leadership philosophy—as with every other aspect of life. Undoubtedly, Christian leaders should seek out tools from a variety of sources to fill their leadership toolboxes, but these tools should be viewed through the lens of Scripture and passed through the filter of Scripture. So while Christian leaders should certainly be avid readers of all manner of helpful books, they must place the highest priority on regularly reading, studying, understanding, and obeying the Bible. All that follows herein is written with that in mind.

The Evolution of Worldly Management

With that foundation, we begin by looking at the world's perspective on leadership. Though leadership has always existed, its modern manifestation began in the Industrial Revolution. As companies became larger and more complex, more effort was required to effectively manage them. From this, the first corporate management theory emerged. Mirroring the engine of progress of that age, the company was seen as a machine: a collection of parts created for a common purpose. The workers, equipment, facilities, and other resources were all parts of the company's machine, working together toward the machine's purpose of making money. In *Creating the Corporate Future*, Dr. Russell Ackoff explains the origin of this view.

In the Machine Age the universe was believed to be a machine that was created by God to do his work. Man, as part of that machine, was expected to serve God's purposes, to

¹ All of these assumptions briefly summarize systematic theology concepts. For more, see sources such as Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* or *Bible Doctrine*, Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, or John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue's *Biblical Theology*.

do His will. This belief was combined with another even more ancient in origin, man had been created in the image of God....In a sense, men were taken to be “demigods”. From these two beliefs...it obviously followed that man ought to be creating machines to do his work. The Industrial Revolution was a product of this inference.²

Managing the company machine was thus seen as similar to God’s management of the universe: with supremacy. The job of management was to ensure the various parts were working at peak performance in order to accomplish the company’s purpose. Before the Industrial Revolution, most businesses were small and localized, making them relatively easy to manage. As they grew, management became more complex and the consequences of its lack became more pronounced. The need for a management model became abundantly clear following the collision of two Western Railroad trains in 1841. The resulting investigation listed a lack of management as a contributing factor. To fix this problem, the investigators needed to find a model for managing large, complex companies, but these were scarce. There were really only two large and enduring organization types to choose from: the church and the military. The investigators chose the military, modeling their recommended management method after the Prussian Army, creating a hierarchical and directive model and with it the familiar organizational chart. *Figure 1* shows this model per Dr. Myron Tribus, visually portraying its underlying assumption that the workers “have no heads”. Nevertheless, this model revolutionized industry, allowing large companies to be effectively managed. It remained in use well into the Twentieth Century.³

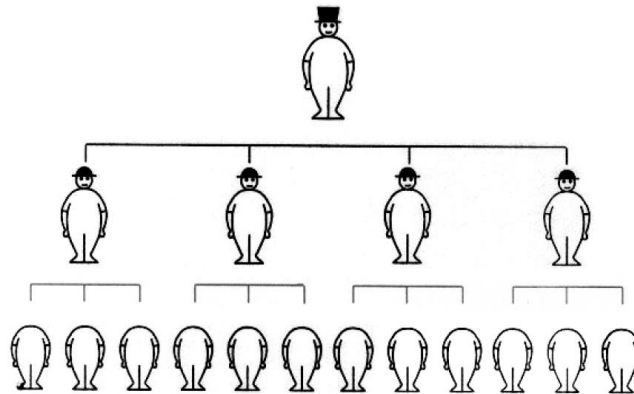


Figure 1: “Train-Wreck” Management Organizational Chart⁴

From this management model also came a matching leadership philosophy for the workplace, stemming from a view of workers much like the soldiers of the army after which it was modeled: little more than easily-replaceable part in the machine. Ackoff described the working environment this created:

The industrial organizations...were thought of as machines whose function was to serve their creators by providing them with an adequate return on their investment of time and money....In corporations so conceived, employees were treated as replaceable machines

² Russell L. Ackoff, *Creating the Corporate Future*, New York: John Wiley & Sons: 1981: 6.

³ Peter R. Scholtes, *The Leader’s Handbook: Making Things Happen, Getting Things Done*, New York: McGraw-Hill: 1998: 2-3.

⁴ Myron Tribus, “The Germ Theory of Management”, *Swiss Deming Institute*, 31 March 2002: 8.

or machine parts even though they were known to be human beings. Their personal objectives, however, were considered irrelevant by employers. Employment involved an implicit acceptance by employees of the employer's right to treat them as though they were machines.⁵

This environment gave rise to some common assumptions about leadership—many of which are still pervasive today. Dr. Douglas McGregor listed these in *The Human Side of Enterprise*, calling them “Theory X”. This theory assumed that people have an inherent dislike of work and try to avoid it whenever possible, requiring them to be coerced, controlled, directed, and threatened to accomplish acceptable work. They wait to be directed rather than seeking responsibility, with very little ambition and a desire only for security. This made leadership little more than “carrot-and-stick” motivation in which the manager had to extrinsically motivate them by promising reward (the carrot) or threatening punishment (the stick). Thus, the manager became much like a military officer of the period, maintaining discipline through fear.⁶ This leadership philosophy worked relatively well in the Industrial Age, when the manager enjoyed nearly unlimited authority and the threat of unemployment loomed large for the easily-replaceable workers, who were relatively uneducated with limited life aspirations.⁷ It persisted until the middle of the Twentieth Century, when it slowly became untenable.

Following World War II, management began to transform as work became more complex, giving rise to the view of the company as an organization. “An organization is (1) a purposeful system that is (2) part of one or more purposeful systems, and (3) parts of which, people have purposes of their own”.⁸ Unlike a machine, a system is a collection of various elements that interact with each other and with elements outside the system. Components inside and outside the system are not independent but interdependent. No matter how far you break a system down, no part can be truly isolated, so its independent contribution to the system cannot be ascertained. As this view formed, a few scholars noted that the inherent complexity of systems meant that the old military-style management method was no longer adequate. One of the first to trumpet this change was Dr. W. Edwards Deming. Having been instrumental in improving the quality of American manufacturing through quality control, he was summoned to Japan to improve their industrial quality following World War II. The systems-based management principles he taught to Japanese business leaders are summed up in his 14 Points:

1. Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and service, with the aim to become competitive and to stay in business, and to provide jobs.
2. Adopt the new management philosophy of leadership for change.
3. Cease dependence on inspection. Build quality into the product in the first place.
4. Don't award business on the basis of price tag. Instead, minimize total cost.
5. Improve constantly and forever the system of production and service.
6. Institute training on the job.
7. Institute leadership. The aim of supervision should be to help people and machines do a better job.
8. Drive out fear, so that everyone may work effectively.

⁵ Russell L. Ackoff, *Creating the Corporate Future*, New York: John Wiley & Sons: 1981: 25-26.

⁶ Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, New York: McGraw-Hill: 2006: 45-49.

⁷ Russell L. Ackoff, *Creating the Corporate Future*, New York: John Wiley & Sons: 1981: 29.

⁸ Ibid: 29.

9. Break down barriers between departments.
10. Eliminate slogans, exhortations, and targets for the work force asking for zero defects and new levels of productivity, as the bulk of the causes of low quality and low productivity belong to the system and thus lie beyond the power of the work force.
11. Remove barriers that rob the hourly worker of his right to pride of workmanship. The responsibility of supervisors must be changed from sheer numbers to quality.
12. Remove barriers that rob people in management of their right to pride of workmanship. This means abolishment of the annual or merit rating and of management by objective.
13. Institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement.
14. Put everybody in the company to work to accomplish the transformation.⁹

The Japanese adopted this new management philosophy, transforming their industry from post-war devastation to the gold standard of quality and efficiency within a generation. As part of this transformation, they invented modern process improvement, with the establishment of Lean by Toyota and Six Sigma by Motorola.¹⁰

While the Japanese were applying Deming's new management principles to transform their industry, their economy, and the world, the shift to the systems understanding of companies led to other developments. Just as people in the Industrial Revolution viewed world around them in terms of machines, people in the Systems Age—what we now call the Information Age—began to view the world in terms of computer systems.¹¹ The advent of computers brought with it the understanding that the success of the system depended on more than just its physical components. Information itself, in the form of software, was as important as any physical part. Software is by nature both complex and interdependent. Even the simplest code relies on complex interactions with other codes. My first computer code—a four-line FORTRAN program that wrote “hello world” to the screen—depended on complex interactions within the computer and even with other computers. This understanding of the complexity of the seemingly simple has since been applied to everything from our understanding of the universe to our assumptions about organizations.

The assumption that even the simple was complex led to a critical look of the simplified assumptions that had driven Industrial Age management. When McGregor recognized Theory X, he introduced Theory Y, which challenged the former's assumptions about work. He postulated that under the right circumstances, people could be motivated not only to work hard and give their best effort at work, but to seek increased responsibility and endeavor to improve the organization. The circumstance that produces this motivation is when organizational goals and workers' personal goals align. When this occurs, improvement of the company is intertwined with improving themselves, motivating them to put forth their best effort.¹² During this same period, Frederick Herzberg studied causes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the workplace, developing his Two Factors Theory. He noted that the opposite of dissatisfaction is

⁹ W. Edwards Deming, *Out of the Crisis*, Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology: 1986: 23-24.

¹⁰ W. Edwards Deming, *Out of the Crisis*, Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology: 1986: 486-492; Peter R. Scholtes, *The Leader's Handbook: Making Things Happen, Getting Things Done*, New York: McGraw-Hill: 1998: 5-9; Jeffrey K. Liker, *The Toyota Way*, New York, NY: McGraw-Hill: 2004: 15-26.

¹¹ Russell L. Ackoff, *Creating the Corporate Future*, New York: John Wiley & Sons: 1981; W. Edwards Deming, *The New Economics: For Industry, Government, Education*, Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology: 1994.

¹² Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, New York: McGraw-Hill: 2006: 63-77.

not satisfaction but a lack of dissatisfaction. The factors in the study were divided into two categories: hygiene factors (contributing to dissatisfaction) and motivational factors (contributing to satisfaction).¹³ The results of his study are shown in *Figure 2*.

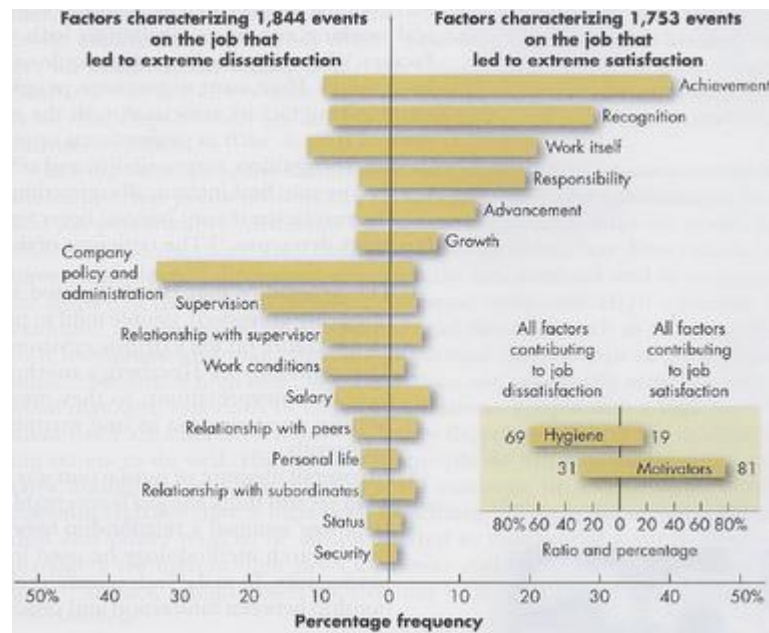


Figure 2: Herzberg's Factors of Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction¹⁴

Remarkably, the normal methods of motivation (job security, pay, work-life balance, and working conditions) all fall squarely into the hygiene category. Thus, once an acceptable level of these factors is reached, they do not provide further motivation. The motivational factors are actually not external but internal: personal growth, advancement (independent of salary), responsibility, the work itself, recognition (formal and informal) and achievement (individual and corporate). Another interesting finding of this study is the level of dissatisfaction caused by various factors. The most significant are company policy/administration, supervision, and relationship with supervisor. Though companies pour immense time and resources into salary, benefits, working conditions, and other programs to motivate their employees, failure in these top three categories negates these efforts.¹⁵ While these discoveries are several decades old, the problems they reveal still persist. This transition is still ongoing, so as some aspects of this new understanding of both the nature of the company and the motivation of employees are commonplace, several aspects and assumptions of the old machine-age remain.¹⁶

Culturally, another transformation was occurring during the same period: the rise of humanism. As the culture shifted from a Judeo-Christian worldview to a Secular Humanism and then to Postmodernism, the shift in thinking impacted all of society, including those who

¹³ Frederick Herzberg, "One More Time: How to Motivate Employees", *Harvard Business Review*: January 2003: 87-90.

¹⁴ Ibid: 90.

¹⁵ Ibid: 87-90.

¹⁶ Myron Tribus, "The Germ Theory of Management", *Swiss Deming Institute*, 31 March 2002: 2-4.

developed the aforementioned theories.¹⁷ McGregor based his Theory Y on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, postulating that the "carrot-and-stick" method is only motivational when employees' lower needs of sustenance and security are either not met or in jeopardy, which was certainly the case in the Industrial Revolution. Once the lower needs were met, employees moved on to seeking higher needs of self-esteem and self-actualization. Theory Y thus motivates them by aligning this search to their work.¹⁸ Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is also clear in Herzberg's Two Factors Theory. The Hygiene Factors represent the lower needs of sustenance and security, while the Motivational Factors align with the higher needs.¹⁹ Thus, the emerging theories validated the departure from a God-centered view of work and management, which was held in disdain. Ackoff claimed that God had disappeared.²⁰ McGregor went further, attributing Theory X to the Judeo-Christian worldview: "The average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if he can. This assumption has deep roots. The punishment of Adam and Eve for eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was to be banished from Eden into a world where they had to work for a living".²¹ Like many today, these scholars viewed God as the distant and cruel myth that inspired the tyrannical, heartless management methods of the former age. Thus, leaving this archaic management philosophy necessitated leaving the Judeo-Christian worldview behind. This view has not only lingered but has grown today as a plethora of leadership philosophies and resources have flooded an eager market, all devoid of God.

A Christian View of Work

So how should the Christian view work in general and leadership in particular? Were McGregor, Ackoff, and Herzberg correct in their assumptions about the Christian view of work and leadership? To answer this, we must follow McGregor back to the Garden. He supposed that the dislike of work came from the Christian view that work was part of the curse of the Fall. However, early in Genesis, one finds the flaw in this common view. In Genesis 1, God gives the Cultural Mandate, telling Adam and Eve to "fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28) then states that God put Adam in the Garden of Eden "to work it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). Thus, work was not a curse of the Fall but in fact predated the Fall. A central part of man's perfect life before the Fall was work. After the Fall, God cursed man's work: "cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life" (Genesis 3:17), but prior to the Fall, work had been both good and desirable. After the Fall, it was made more difficult but was still an integral part of God's Will for the lives of men.

Just as work was cursed by the Fall of the First Adam, it was redeemed by the work of the Second Adam. Jesus earned our righteousness through work. He worked for most of His life as a carpenter. During His ministry, He obeyed God the Father by doing the work God had called Him to do. When Jesus healed the paralytic at the Bethesda Pool, He responded to the Pharisees' criticism of that work (on the Sabbath) by saying, "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (John 5:17). In the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus summed up his life and ministry by praying, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work you gave me to do"

¹⁷ Timothy J. Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*, New York: Riverhead Books: 2012: 137-141.

¹⁸ Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, New York: McGraw-Hill: 2006: 33-39, 48-49.

¹⁹ Frederick Herzberg, "One More Time: How to Motivate Employees", *Harvard Business Review*: January 2003: 87-90.

²⁰ Russell L. Ackoff, *Creating the Corporate Future*, New York: John Wiley & Sons: 1981: 26.

²¹ Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, New York: McGraw-Hill: 2006: 45.

(John 17:4). The realization that work was not a curse was central to the Protestant Reformation, giving rise to the concept of Vocation (from the Latin for “calling”), viewing all lawful work as a calling from God. Thus, the Christian’s highest need is not Maslow’s self-actualization but the need “to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever”.²² This higher calling produced the Protestant Work Ethic, which then transformed the nations that adopted it: first the Netherlands, then Great Britain, and finally the United States.²³ This topic is addressed more thoroughly in Gene Veith’s *God at Work* and Tim Keller’s *Every Good Endeavor*.

What happened to change society’s view of work from the Protestant Reformation to the Industrial Revolution? The answer lies in another cultural change: The Enlightenment. In the years preceding the Industrial Revolution, scholars sought to expel all manifestations of the Christian worldview from society. Thus, the absence of God meant an absence of ethical boundaries on the quest of company owners toward self-glorification. The management philosophy it produced was thus cold and cruel, using and abusing workers in order to glorify the company owners. In the absence of God, company owners acted like gods, exercising nearly supreme authority over his workers to advance his glory. It was yet another echo of Satan’s lie in the Garden; that Man can become like God (Genesis 3:5). This led to the view of management that Ackoff described. What seemed to him as a natural pathway from a Christian heritage was actually a gross distortion of that heritage perpetuated by none other than Satan and Self, bearing little resemblance to true God-centered and Christ-honoring work in any endeavor, particularly leadership.

Still, in the grace of God, many observations of McGregor, Ackoff, Herzberg, and others prove to be correct despite being based on humanistic philosophy. This like all such empirical truth is the result of two factors: common grace and Satan’s deceit. First, God has chosen to reveal some truth to everyone through common grace.²⁴ This is the basis of observational science: an orderly God created an orderly universe that can be observed and understood.²⁵ So one should not be surprised when scientific discoveries in any field align with what we understand of the world from Scripture.

Second, God in His sovereignty even uses Satan’s deceitful schemes to draw people away from God to convey truth. This seems counterintuitive, requiring a bit of a philosophical claim. Satan is referred to as a liar several times throughout Scripture. Most notably, Jesus says of Satan, “when he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). If Satan is the father of lies, he can be considered the expert on the subject. To be effective, a lie must contain peripheral truth while being centrally false. The more peripheral truth a lie contains, the more effective it will be. If all of the lie was untrue, it would not stand up to any level of scrutiny. To withstand scrutiny, a lie must have enough truth to be convincing yet must remain untrue at its core in such a way that it will be difficult to spot what is untrue. As a result, every worldview is based somewhat on truth, since people observe the same world (Romans 1:19-20). Throughout the world, people have strikingly similar interactions with other people, shaping their ideas about human nature. Satan then uses these observations to lead

²² Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1

²³ Gene E. Veith, *God at Work*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 2012: 17-21; J.C. Ryle, *Holiness*, Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust: 2014: 403.

²⁴ Romans 1:19-20, Psalm 19:1-4, Romans 2:14-15, Timothy J. Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work*, New York: Riverhead Books: 2012: 185-201.

²⁵ Hebrews 1:3, Colossians 1:17, Jeremiah 33:25, Psalm 74:16-17, Psalm 104:19-20, Job 38-41

people to the wrong conclusions. He tempts them to reject central truths while accepting peripheral truths, playing into their inherent pride, as Paul made quite clear in Romans 1:18-23:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

This describes the current state of all unbelievers and the former state of all believers: dead in trespasses and sins with foolish hearts darkened. But now, all who call upon the Name of Christ have been made alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-10). All were once futile in thinking and with darkened foolish hearts, but the Holy Spirit breathed new life into their hearts, opening their eyes to see the glorious truth of the Gospel, which cannot be discovered in any other way. Part of this regeneration means seeing the world through the lens of the Gospel—what can be known about God through what God has revealed about Himself in Scripture. This allows us to see the truth that God has imprinted on the world, no matter what lens through which it was observed in the first place. A Christian can thus read the valid scientific observations of a humanist and see the truth of God. It is for this reason that Christians can find common ground with any religion, philosophy, or worldview, by finding the truth embedded in it by common grace and the peripheral truth of Satan's lies. This does not mean that all religions, philosophies, and worldviews are true but that they all, falling under the sovereignty of God and His common grace, contain truth that can be found through and thus steered toward the Gospel. That which Satan meant to deceive and destroy, when viewed through the lens of the Gospel drives the believer to delight in the truth of the Gospel and rejoice in the God who orchestrated it. Contrary to those described in Romans 1, this knowledge should lead us to glorify God and give Him thanks when we perceive what can be known about Him through Creation. So let us now view the humanistic philosophies of leadership described earlier through the lens of the Gospel.

Viewing Leadership Through the Gospel Lens

In order to view any worldly idea through the lens of the Gospel, we must first start with the Gospel itself. We must affirm the holy and Triune God, who is both transcendent and personal, who is absolutely righteous and perfect, requiring any in His presence to be perfectly righteous also. We must affirm that we are unrighteous, that we are sinners by nature and choice, with no hope of saving ourselves. Even our best falls short of God's righteous standard (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:23). If even our best is not good enough, we have no hope of escaping the clutches of sin and being righteous before God. Our only hope would be if we could live a perfect life, without ever sinning, being fully obedient to God every moment of every day for our entire lives. Even one mistake is disqualifying, since breaking one part of God's law is the same as breaking the entire law (James 2:10). Therefore, there would then be only one way to gain righteousness: for someone else to earn it for us.

If somehow someone could live a perfect life, that person would gain righteousness, but only for himself. This would be unhelpful unless there was some way for that person's righteousness to be transferred to our account. But that would still leave our sin, which must be paid for by eternal separation from God in hell. Only if this righteous person was somehow able to take on and pay for our sins would we then be able to be righteous before God. In order to accomplish this, the person must be fully man but also fully God. This person is none other than Jesus Christ. He descended from heaven to be born as a human being and lived a perfect life as a man, earning a perfect record of obedience to God. He then took all of our sins upon Himself, dying on a cross and thus taking on the full wrath of God for our sin in our place. Once He had died, paying the full price for sin, he rose from the dead and ascended back to heaven, showing that God the Father had accepted Christ's sacrifice for sin. Since we cannot receive this through common grace, it must be revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. Through faith and repentance, we see our sin paid for and our righteousness earned by Christ. We can thus stand before God as righteous based on Christ's merits rather than our own. At once, God initiates the work of salvation in our lives. Instantaneously at the point of salvation, God reconciles us to Himself and adopts us into His family, guaranteeing our eternal inheritance. Our sin is imputed to Christ and his righteousness is imputed to us, justifying us before God. He then counts us as righteous through faith. The Holy Spirit then begins the work of sanctification in us, steadily conforming us to the image of Christ. This work is not finished until we are raised and glorified, being finally conformed to the perfect image of Christ. This is the Gospel, the foundation of all life for a Christian, as well as the lens through which the entire world must be viewed.²⁶

With the foundation of the Gospel, the Christian's view of work and leadership are transformed. We have already discussed the Protestant Work Ethic and its effect on Western civilization, but how does it affect leadership in the workplace? Tim Keller describes how the Gospel transforms our view business.

The gospel-centered business would have a discernable vision for serving the customer in some unique way, a lack of adversarial relationships and exploitation, an extremely strong emphasis on excellence and product quality, and an ethical environment that goes "all the way down" to the bottom of the organizational chart and to the realities of daily behavior, even when high ethics means loss of margin. In the business animated by the gospel worldview, profit is simply one of many important bottom lines.²⁷

Just as God has placed Christians in all vocations in their unique time and place in order to cultivate His Kingdom to His Glory, the Christian in leadership has been placed in such a position to lead the organization to this Gospel-centric vision. Contrary to Ackoff's observation of Industrial Age managers viewing themselves as demigods, Christian leaders view themselves in humility. One who is a sinner who was called by God and saved by grace alone has no room to boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). The Gospel tells us who God is and who we are, showing the brutal reality of our sin in no uncertain terms. Christians thus cannot think of themselves in the lofty terms that the Industrial Age manager did. Such thinking has more in common with atheistic

²⁶ A more thorough explanation can be found in virtually any systematic theology. Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* or *Bible Doctrine* or John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue's *Biblical Doctrine* are more approachable while Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* better fits the academically inclined.

²⁷ Timothy J. Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*, New York: Riverhead Books: 2012: 167.

evolution, which was uncoincidentally popular during the period. If the world was devoid of a moral code, then it naturally followed that the ideas of evolution would greatly influence society. If survival of the fittest was the natural law, then that law must extend to society as well. As large companies overtook small shops as the drivers of the economy, their managers became “the fittest”. Since Christianity was still prevalent in both the United States and Europe, Ackoff naturally attributed the managers’ lofty view of themselves to the Christian doctrine of *Imago Dei*—man being made in the image of God. Instead, their lofty self-exaltation is nothing but the original lie in the Garden, that man can become like God, which has appeared throughout history. In our day, one of its primary forms is our culture of narcissism and self-esteem (i.e., sinful pride). Such is the result of looking for answers inside ourselves. Instead, Scripture bids us to look outside of ourselves to what God has said, beginning with His Law.

Leadership in the Old Testament

The Mosaic Law, starting with the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and continuing through Moses’ last words in Deuteronomy, contained all of the laws by which the nation of Israel was to both worship God and govern themselves—including laws applicable to what we would now call leadership in the workplace. But before we examine them, it is important to understand the various types of laws and their relevance to Christians today.²⁸ The first is the moral laws, which are rooted in God’s unchangeable character and are thus universally applicable. In the Law, God describes Himself this way: “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation” (Exodus 34:6-7). If the Christian leader is to imitate Christ—who is the exact image of God—he or she should be similarly merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and full of both love and justice. The moral laws are summed up by Jesus: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40). Thus, in order to obey God’s moral law, the Christian leader must act in everything out of love for God and others. The second type of law is ceremonial, dealing with the various feasts, rituals, and other specific aspects of the Jewish religion. These were perfectly fulfilled by Christ and are thus no longer binding for Christians. The final type is the civil or judicial law, which was specific to how Israel was to be governed. Since the nation of Israel as a theocracy no longer exists, these laws are likewise no longer binding. However, these laws are applications of the moral law and are thus universally applicable, meaning the Christian has much to learn from them.²⁹ Thus, John Calvin noted that while governments are free to make laws that best suit their circumstances, those laws must be toward the ultimate end of loving God and others.³⁰ The same is true of organizational policies. Recall how Herzberg found that company policy and administration were the top cause of dissatisfaction. It is safe to say that such policies are demotivating because they are unloving. Therefore, the Christian leader must set policies that display love for God and others, just as we see throughout the Mosaic Law.

²⁸ Westminster Confession of Faith, Section XIX.

²⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: Translated from the First French Edition of 1541* by Robert White, Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust: 2014: 768-769.

³⁰ *Ibid*: 769.

The first law specifically impacting the workplace is the Fourth Commandment, stating that all people, slave and free, were to rest on the seventh day (Exodus 20:8-11). By the Reformed understanding, this falls under the moral law, being rooted in God's rest after creation. Still, some aspects of it are ceremonial, as the Sabbath is a Jewish ceremony. Therefore, while the ceremonial aspect of the Fifth Commandment was fulfilled by Christ and is thus no longer binding, the underlying concepts of work-rest balance and the discipline of devoting adequate time away from work to worship God are still as applicable today as they were at Mount Sinai.³¹ The fact that all people are included in this command means both leaders and their people equally require this rest and balance. Calvin also understood the Eighth Commandment (against stealing) to include not serving others as we should, specifically calling out demanding, bullying, or demeaning management as a violation of this commandment.³²

Not long after the Ten Commandments come various laws about slaves, which would be considered civil laws. These establish the temporary nature of slavery in Israel (Exodus 21:1-3) and place limits on discipline (Exodus 21:20-21, 26-27). Elsewhere, the Law forbids ruthlessly ruling over them (Leviticus 25:43, 46, 53). When combined with commands in Exodus 22 prohibiting oppression of various vulnerable people, it is clear that the Christian leader is to care for workers rather than exploit them. This is further developed in Leviticus. The section ending with "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18) includes "You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning" (Leviticus 19:13 cf. Deuteronomy 24:14-15). This means that Christian leaders who does not pay workers promptly and fairly are robbing their neighbors not loving them. This also includes paying fair wages and taking employees' needs outside of work into consideration, just as we want others to do for us. But this fairness extends beyond wages. Later on, God gives this command: "You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity." (Leviticus 19:35). Thus, the Christian leader is honest and fair in all dealings with employees, customers, and society.

But love for neighbor does not exclude rebuke when necessary. This section ends with: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." (Leviticus 19:17-18). Here, loving your neighbors means rebuking them in cases where withholding that rebuke would be harmful to them. Still, this rebuke must clearly be done for their benefit and not held against them in a grudge.

A final civil law worthy of consideration governs how kings are to rule. This includes prohibitions against accumulating excessive horses, wives, or wealth in ways that would mimic the surrounding nations and cause king and country to stray from God (Deuteronomy 17:16-17). For the Christian leader, this means focusing on honoring God and serving employees rather than exploiting them to gain wealth, which will be discussed more later. But the most surprising yet useful command in this section deals with the king's relation to the Law:

when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the

³¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: Translated from the First French Edition of 1541* by Robert White, Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust: 2014: 139, 142.

³² *Ibid*: 155-157.

words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left (Deuteronomy 17:18-20a).

This command placed as first priority for any king the obligation to hand copy the Law and then read, study, and obey it all of his life. For the Christian leader, this underscores the importance of knowing the Scriptures well, spending ample time studying all of God's Word, and being careful to obey everything God commands. This copy of the law was also to be done under the authority of the priests, ensuring the resulting copy was actually God's Word and not twisted to the king's advantage. Thus, the Christian leader needs to be under the teaching and authority of the local church. Finally, all of this was to keep the king humble, reminding him that he was but a man who was subject to God's laws like any other. The Christian leader must therefore be similarly humble toward others and submissive to God.

Much can be gleaned about leadership from the wisdom literature as well. While Proverbs does not directly address leaders in the workplace, it describes many traits of the righteous man to emulate and many pitfalls to avoid. Proverbs is all about wisdom, and wisdom can be described as righteousness applied as fits the occasion. Proverbs is clear that the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10), so true wisdom comes only from God and must be given by God. This requires trusting in God to guide us through Scripture rather than leaning on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6). Throughout the book, we meet various contrasted characters that apply wisdom and its opposites to various situations. The character to be emulated is the wise or righteous man, who is described as patient, generous, humble, caring, prudent, upright, kind, content, honest, careful, self-controlled, well-spoken, intentional, slow to anger, long-term focused, open to reason and rebuke, and diligent. Characters to avoid include the wicked, fool, sluggard, brawler, simpleton, glutton, gossip, and unfaithful spouse. In addition to general foolishness, these are described as hasty, greedy, quick to anger and rage, liars, selfish, argumentative, hostile against reason, oppressive, short-sighted, morally compromising, arrogant, and foolish talkers. The Christian leader should strive to exemplify the former while shunning the latter. Proverbs also tells of the importance of leadership: "Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14) as well as the importance of conducting business honestly (Proverbs 16:11, 20:10). In applying this wisdom, it is important to remember that the various blessings and curses in all of the wisdom literature are generalities rather than firm promises. In our world, much is not as it should be, but God is just and will right all wrongs one day.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon looks back on everything he did and observed in his life coming to the conclusion that because of the Fall, everything is meaningless, but God gives meaning to the futility of life under the curse. Specifically regarding work, Solomon notes that no matter how strenuously or diligently anyone works—and no matter how noble the task—everyone ultimately dies and thus does not profit from it even though "his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 2:23). Yet as we discussed earlier, work predated the Fall and is part of God's good will for mankind, so Solomon follows this up with: "There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God" (Ecclesiastes 2:24). Solomon ends the book summing up how every Christian leader—and every Christian in general—should live: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep

his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Finally, much can be learned about leadership from the lives of various people whose lives are recorded in the Old Testament, from Abraham and Moses to Daniel and Nehemiah. We will discuss two specific examples later, but more detailed profiles are covered in *Servants of the Servant* by Don N. Howell, Jr. Finally, the model for leadership seen throughout the Old Testament but most notably in the prophets is that of the shepherd, which will be discussed later.

Leadership According to Jesus

Jesus also addressed the topic of leadership: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28). Though this passage speaks primarily of leadership within the church, it can certainly be applied to every sphere of life, including the workplace. This comment comes in the context of a conflict between the disciples. James and John (via their mother) had just asked Jesus to be in the highest place of honor and power in His kingdom, which caused the other disciples to view them with disdain. Essentially, they desired positions of leadership for their power, prestige, and perks. How many leaders in our day seek leadership for those same reasons? Jesus here compares their aspirations to that of any earthly leader throughout time—here the “rulers of the Gentiles” such as Herod, Pilate, and Caesar. Thus, the earthly ambitions of corporate leaders in the Industrial Revolution have been around for millennia such that their practices that we consider deplorable today are actually quite normal and to be expected from all men who desire to be like gods.

Jesus contrasts this worldly standard of leadership with what He is calling the disciples—and all who would follow them—to practice: “It shall not be so among you”. Jesus provides the true purpose of leadership: those that aspire to leadership must ultimately aspire to serve others. In this, He holds Himself up as the example. Being the ultimate leader, Jesus as the fully-divine second person of the Trinity came to earth to offer both a life and death in service to all He would call to follow Him. In the broader context, Jesus spoke these words on the way to Jerusalem not long before His death. Jesus did not come to be served—though as God He deserves all service that anyone could render and infinitely more—but to serve His people for our ultimate good, ultimately serving the greater purpose of God the Father to accomplish redemption. In this way, Jesus sets a new standard of others-focused leadership where the aim is service not status, and the ambition is for the greater good of others and glory of God rather than service and glorification of self. Rather than being superior to the employees, the Christian boss is called to humbly serve them. The disciples ultimately learned this lesson, as evidenced by the fact that Peter and John refer to themselves as servants (2 Peter 1:1, Revelation 1:1). This was the true beginning of servant leadership. One of the champions of servant leadership, James Hunter, claimed that Jesus exemplified the definition of leadership—“the skill of influencing people to work enthusiastically toward goals identified toward the common good”—as the greatest leader who has ever lived.³³ In contrast to the way in which most earthly leaders “lord it over” people (power), Jesus was unparalleled in His ability to lead with influence. Hunter noted that leading with power works in the short term but is damaging in the long term which the world

³³ James C. Hunter, *The Servant: A Simple Story About the True Essence of Leadership*, New York, NY: Currency: 2012: 27-28, 76-77.

is now discovering—hence the need to lead with authority (influence) and thus the resulting rise in popularity of servant leadership.³⁴ For the Christian, being Christlike is the ultimate goal, so the Christian leader follows Christ's example by serving others and exercising influence to persuade—rather than power to coerce—people to strive toward goals that advance the greater good rather than the leader. This theme is seen throughout Scripture.

Paul's Teaching on Leadership

One of the few passages of Scripture speaking directly to leaders in the workplace is Ephesians 6:9: "Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him". Paul's direction to the Colossians is similar: "Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven" (Colossians 4:1). Both verses end sections that can generally be summed up as "rules for godly households" found in Ephesians 5:22-6:9 and Colossians 3:18-4:1. Both contain similar exhortations and are organized similarly, talking of the relationship between wives and husbands (Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19), children and parents (Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20-21), and servants and masters (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1). In both, this section comes after a variety of general commands for life in the Church. Essentially, they are part of the larger topic of applying the Gospel in the context of the church. Therefore, to understand Ephesians 6:9, we must start in Ephesians 5:15:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:15-21)

This passage is generic and all-encompassing. Walking in wisdom, using time wisely, and understanding God's will are certainly not reserved for any single aspect of life but should be displayed in everything we do. The second half of the passage is equally broad, describing what a life filled with the Holy Spirit looks like. Spirit-filled people worship God rightly and exhort each other to do the same, maintain an attitude of thankfulness to God, and submit to each other. It is clear from context that these traits are to be constantly displayed regardless of circumstances. This includes submission. Just like worship and thankfulness, submission is to be a hallmark of all interactions between all believers. All Christians must therefore submit to all other Christians at all times. If that sounds preposterous or even impossible, perhaps we have lost the true meaning of the term "submission". If we are to obey God's command through the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:21, we must understand what submission means.

In Ephesians 5:21, "submitting to one another" could also be rendered "subjecting yourselves to one another". This is a military term that literally means "to rank under".³⁵ It is a willful and deliberate act of placing yourself under another, such as in the Oath of Enlistment

³⁴ James C. Hunter, *The Servant: A Simple Story About the True Essence of Leadership*, New York, NY: Currency: 2012: 30-32.

³⁵ W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson: 1996: 606-607.

taken by all American military enlistees, which includes the commitment to “obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of officers appointed over me according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice.” No one is compelled to take this oath, but all who wish to serve declare it publicly and thus choose to abide by its terms. Swearing the oath is voluntary, but once someone has sworn it, that person is obligated to follow it. Thus, submission is a choice taken for a purpose greater than the individual.

But what choice is the Christian called to make by submitting to one another? Certainly this cannot mean unconditional obedience of every desire of everyone we meet. That would violate other commands in Scripture, such as parents disciplining children, pastors protecting their churches from heresy, and all believers confronting one another for various sins. To define submission, we begin with the greater context of Ephesians 5:21. Paul transitions from laying the foundation of the Gospel (Ephesians 1-3) to its implications on life within the Body of Christ with these words: “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3). The calling to which Paul refers is the call of the Gospel: to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Based on this, living in a manner worthy of the Gospel is characterized by humility, gentleness, patience, and endurance for the purpose of unity, with the ultimate goal of helping people individually and collectively mature into the image of Christ (Ephesians 4:15). This also means speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:25) while treating one another with kindness and care, ever quick to forgive (Ephesians 4:32). All of these are for the benefit of someone else, not ourselves. The motivation for all of these actions is Christ (Ephesians 4:1,7-8,13,15-16,21-24,30,32, 5:2,14,20,21). Based on this, we can observe that it is a willful act done to benefit someone else.

To truly define submission, we must take a detour to Philippians, where Paul provides more clarity: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). Here, we see the heart of submission: counting others as more significant and looking to their interests not our own. To illustrate this, Paul holds up Jesus as the ultimate example:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

This is not a single example of submission from Jesus’ life (though there are many such examples), but instead Jesus’ entire life is the example of humble submission. This begins with who He is. Paul reminds the Philippians that Jesus was, is, and always will be God—the second person of the Trinity. Nothing He could ever do and nothing that could ever be done to Him would make Him any less God. Nevertheless, He “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped”. But instead of using His divinity to shield Himself from “the dirty work”, He chose to

lay aside His divine rights in order to accomplish a greater purpose. In the greatest expression of humility in history, Jesus Christ descended from heaven to earth. The almighty King of Kings and Lord of Lords made Himself nothing, being born to an oppressed peasant couple in an obscure town on the fringe of the Roman Empire. He then further demonstrated humility “by becoming obedient to the point of death...on a cross” (verse 7). Jesus Christ was obedient to God the Father in life and death for the greater purpose of redemption. His life and death were to glorify God the Father by accomplishing salvation. God the Father in turn glorified Jesus by exalting Him above all created beings (Psalm 2, Psalm 110, Hebrews 1). In short, Jesus put our needs ahead of His own in order to accomplish the greater purpose of salvation.

From this example of Jesus, we can define submission in the context of Ephesians 5:21. Here, *submission is choosing to live sacrificially by putting the needs of others and their ultimate good ahead of ourselves motivated by a healthy fear of God and following the example of Christ.* In this way, it is possible (and commanded in Scripture) to submit to others in all circumstances, forming the foundation for the “godly household” section that follows Ephesians 5:21 (Ephesians 5:22-6:9). If submission is putting the needs of others ahead of our own needs as Jesus did, then every command in that section is a form of submission. Thus, Ephesians 5:22-6:9 applies the concept of general submission in Ephesians 5:21 to the context of specific relationships, namely marriage, family, and work. It is also important to note that all of these relationships are temporary, earthly reflections of eternal, heavenly realities. Earthly marriage ends with death but is meant to reflect the eternal marriage between Jesus and the Church. The earthly parent-child relationship is also finite but points to our adoption as sons of God. Finally, the earthly distinction between employee and employer will likewise cease, replaced by the reality of Christ as the King perfectly leading His redeemed people in accomplishing His Will. The hierarchy will be replaced by the ultimate “flat organizational structure”. Submission in every human relationship must be undergirded by this reality, which Paul makes clear to the Galatians: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

These realities undergird all of Paul’s “household commands” in Ephesians 5:22-6:9. In each relationship someone (wives, children, and servants) is temporarily subject to someone else (husbands, fathers, and masters). In all cases, the one in the lower position is called to submit to the one in the higher position, who is in turn charged to lovingly care for the one in the lower position. Each of these relationships deserves its own book, so I will only be able to briefly summarize what submission looks like in each relationship, ending with our subject of masters, which we would now refer to as leaders or bosses in the workplace.

In marriage, both spouses are called to reflect the relationship between Christ and the Church by continuing the Christ-initiated reversal of the curse of the Fall. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony with each other and with God, with Adam fulfilling the role of head and Eve the role of helper, unified in purpose. After the Fall, that relationship was cursed with conflict. Instead of unity and harmony, husband and wife would have desires for their own benefit contrary to the other, leading to oppression and subversion. Paul’s commands to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:22-33 are essentially a call to reverse that. Wives are called to be subject to their husbands as the Church is to Christ rather than desiring to subvert them. Husbands are called to sacrificially love their wives as Christ loved the Church—a love that compelled Jesus to humble himself in the Incarnation, endure enumerable hardships while living in perfect obedience to God, and suffer infinitely more than we could ever imagine in order to atone for sin. Furthermore, husbands are called to love their wives just as they love themselves,

which Paul defines as nurturing and cherishing. For the husband, the call to leadership is a call to unlimited and incessant sacrifice for the good of his wife (i.e., submission).³⁶

A similar call of submission is seen in the parent-child relationship of Ephesians 6:1-4. Both parents and children are called to put the others' interests ahead of their own. For children, the term "submit" is replaced by "obey", which literally means "listen and attend to".³⁷ This is followed by a direct quote of the Fifth Commandment, extolling them to "honor" their parents, thus seeking their parents' good for their own good "that it may go well with you". Parents (specifically fathers) are then called to raise their children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" without causing them to become angry or discouraged (Ephesians 6:4). This type of discipline and instruction is focused on the ultimate good of the child rather than the immediate good of the parent. Thus, the call of leadership for parents is a similar call to unlimited and incessant sacrifice for the long-term good of their children (again, submission).

This finally brings us to the workplace and ultimately the immediate context for Paul's direction to masters in Ephesians 6:9.

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him. (Ephesians 6:5-9)

Just like the previous relationships, the servant-master relationship here is earthly and temporary. Therefore, just as he commanded the children, Paul commands servants to obey (i.e., "listen and attend to") their masters. This obedience is to be done with healthy reverence and sincerity, seeking the good of the master and the organization. Such genuine service comes ultimately from a fear of Christ and a desire to serve Him through serving the earthly master. Similar to children, obedience for servants comes with a promise of reward from the perfectly just God who judges without partiality. Such a servant works not for his or her immediate good or recognition but for the good of the master and organization, even if unnoticed, knowing that God always notices and will leave no good deed unrewarded in the end.

Then we get to masters in Ephesians 6:9. Unlike those in leadership positions in the previous relationships (husbands and fathers), Paul does not give masters a different command than servants but says "do the same to them". Therefore, everything Paul just mentioned for servants is equally applicable to masters. This means Paul is telling masters to obey (listen and attend to) their servants with fear and sincerity as if they were serving Christ. This service must be genuine, not done to be seen by others but seeking an eternal reward from God, who sees what they do in secret. Paul ends with a command he didn't give servants. He tells masters to stop threatening their servants because just as our perfectly just God sees and rewards good, He

³⁶ For a more in-depth look at this, see John Piper and Wayne Grudem (ed.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 1991, specifically these chapters: "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship" by Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., "Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church" by George W. Knight III, and "Wives Like Sarah, and the Husbands Who Honor Them" by Wayne Grudem.

³⁷ W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson: 1996: 438.

also sees and punishes oppression. Paul once again reminds these masters that their position over their servants is temporary. Now, let's break this down a bit further:

- *Masters obey your servants*: bosses should “obey” their employees by listening to them and attending to their needs—i.e. equipping them to do the job and removing barriers from their path. In following the theme of submission from the entire passage, bosses must put the needs of their people and the organization ahead of their own. This form of serving is really the essence of leadership, which must always be exercised for the good of those who are led.
- *With fear and trembling and a sincere heart*: bosses should prioritize serving their people, knowing that God has placed them in their care and will judge them based in large part on how well they serve their people, not by any earthly metrics.
- *Not by way of eye service as people-pleasers*: bosses should serve their people for the good of the organization, not to be seen by others. The point of serving employees is not to be liked and recognized, nor is it to manipulate them into better performance. Instead, obeying this passage means genuinely seeking the good of those being led and the organization as a whole rather than any personal gain.
- *Doing the will of God from the heart*: Ultimately, the Christian boss must serve God first and foremost in every aspect of life, including leadership. This means first discerning the will of God from the Word of God and applying that to every situation. Again, this must be genuine (from the heart), born out of an intense desire to love God and people well by serving them well.
- *Rendering service with a good will*: Though the method of service differs with the office of servant vs. master, the attitude of service is the same.

Paul then tells masters to cease trying to manage by threats, reminding them of their ultimate master: God. Veith sums this up: “Masters are not to threaten those under their authority. They are to remember that they too have a master. If they mistreat their servants, they will be held accountable to their Master in heaven. They must realize that they too are under authority, the source of their own, but that He, unlike the social system, shows no partiality”.³⁸ This leads to a reversal of the traditional role. The boss is not to lord authority over employees but to use that authority to serve them. Just as the employees’ talents and abilities are gifts of God for the good of others, so the boss’s authority is a gift of God for the good of others—namely the employees. Thus, good leadership is itself an act of service.

The end of the verse emphasizes the impartiality of God as a motive for bosses to not threaten their employees, harkening back to the impartiality of God in verse 8. In verse 9, that impartiality deals with God’s righteous judgment, but in verse 8, it deals specifically with God’s promise to reward good work. Just like the employee, the boss is called to work as for the Lord, giving a greater purpose to the work than the work itself. Ultimately, that purpose is to glorify God and advance His Kingdom—a purpose infinitely larger and greater than any individual or organization. Gospel-centered leaders—regardless of whether or not the organization in which they lead is dominated by the Christian worldview—see their role as working to advance the Kingdom in their particular vocation and industry, causing them to strive for rewards from God not man. It is also important to note that Paul’s command here essentially makes “carrot and stick” management sinful. While there is ample Scriptural precedent (and even commands) to

³⁸ Gene E. Veith, *God at Work*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 2012: 71.

lead in tough ways and provide discipline when appropriate, Scripture is clear that the one administering the discipline must act out of love for and in the interest of the ultimate good of the one being disciplined. Thus, the discipline itself is an act of service. Most “carrot and stick” methods are the opposite of service.

Elsewhere, Paul’s list of qualifications for elders can be applied to leaders in all spheres. In both 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-8, that list begins with “above reproach”, which means that leaders are to be of such impeccable character that accusations against them would be dismissed as ridiculous by any logical person. Being above reproach means their opponents must say with Daniel’s, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God” (Daniel 6:5). The Christian leader—along with all other Christians—should aspire to be similarly above reproach. Paul goes on to describe the elder who is above reproach as one who cannot be legitimately charged with infidelity, debauchery, or insubordination (Titus 1:6). Mirroring the virtues of Proverbs, Paul describes such a person as “sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable...gentle” (1 Timothy 3:3), “a lover of good...upright, holy, and disciplined” (Titus 1:8) who has a proven track record of skilled management. Mirroring the negative traits of Proverbs, Paul describes such a man as not arrogant, quickly angered, given to addictions, violent, greedy, or quarrelsome (1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7). Maintaining such a reputation is critical so that they don’t “become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:7). All of this applies to the Christian leader in any sphere, so the Christian leader in the workplace does well to strive to match Paul’s description.

Ultimately the leader Paul is describing is motivated by eternal rather than immediate profit, which stands in stark contrast to our society’s obsession with immediate gain, even at the expense of long-term organizational health. Following Milton Friedman’s philosophy that the sole purpose of a business is to make money now, numerous companies have sacrificed the future to maximize profit in the present. From using layoffs to hit arbitrary goals to cheating customers by unreasonably boosting prices, this finite mindset often costs companies severely in the long term. Thus, the secular world is beginning to see the folly of this finite mindset. After pointing out these flaws, Simon Sinek recommends an infinite mindset in his book *The Infinite Game*. This mindset focuses on protecting and nurturing the long-term ability of the organization to continue advancing what he calls a “Just Cause”, which is a grand vision of the future for which people are willing to sacrifice to help advance.³⁹ Infinite-minded leaders prioritize taking care of their people, often sacrificing short-term profit in pursuit of their Just Cause. This takes great courage, as it seems foolish to outsiders. However, these leaders are convinced not only that such short-term sacrifice both ethically right and logically prudent, but that it will bring future gain.⁴⁰ By this definition, the Kingdom of God is the ultimate Just Cause. Following the example of Christ, who endured the cross “for the joy set before Him” (Hebrews 12:2), Christian bosses make short-term sacrifices to care for their people in expectation that God will reward them with a weight of glory that far exceeds momentary afflictions (Romans 8:18).

This completely changes the perspective of the Christian on leadership. Instead of simply directing employees, the Christian boss serves employees through leadership in directing and coordinating their work to advance their Just Cause.⁴¹ Like any good service, the focus is on the object of service rather than the servant. Therefore, *the focus of Christian leadership is to serve*

³⁹ Simon Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, Portfolio: 2019: 6-9, 95.

⁴⁰ Ibid: 199-212.

⁴¹ Gene E. Veith, *God at Work*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 2012: 72-73.

employees by caring for them and coordinating their efforts for their good and to advance the organization's greater cause to the ultimate glory of God. Instead of always telling people what to do, such a boss will give overall direction and ask what the employees need in order to do the job better. As stated earlier, this is the foundation of “servant leadership”.⁴² Though Theory Y and new views on motivation have begun to popularize the idea of servant leadership, it really has its roots in the Gospel. After all, the highest honor bestowed on various biblical leaders like Moses and Joshua was “servant of the Lord”, setting a pattern of the leader as the *primus inter pares*, or first among equals, seen particularly in the apostles.⁴³ But rather than arrive at this conclusion from the Gospel, secular scholars have touted servant leadership because it works. Recall how the investigators of the 1841 train collision chose to model their recommended management structure after the military rather than the church. While the church has often exhibited a style of leadership that more mirrors the military than contrasts it, a study of its apostolic roots reveals the roots of servant leadership. If they had done that instead, society may have had a century's head start on adopting servant leadership. As bosses everywhere see the failure of the “carrot and stick”, they search for better methods, inadvertently rediscovering truth that has been known to the Church since the time of Christ.

Viewing the world through the lens of the Gospel, it should be of little surprise that observational science has arrived at some of the same conclusions. Through common grace, humanists like McGregor, Herzberg, Ackoff, and Sinek have observed the same truth that has been known and celebrated in Christianity for centuries. But Scripture has more to do with this transformation than simply common grace. One name conspicuously absent from the preceding list is Deming. Reading Deming's books, *Out of the Crisis* and *The New Economics* one sees that Scripture was an integral part of his understanding of the world, permeating his writings on management, particularly in his understanding of systems, which was foundational to the transformational management method he pioneered. This is most apparent when he introduces systems in *The New Economics*, starting the chapter by quoting Ecclesiastes 2:24, that there is nothing better or a man than to eat and drink and find pleasure in his work. He then describes Paul's understanding of systems through his description of the body in 1 Corinthians 12, which we will unpack to find practical applications to Christian leaders at all levels by looking at its greater purpose in 1 Corinthians 13.⁴⁴

A Still More Excellent Way

When one thinks of leadership, 1 Corinthians 13—“the love chapter”—likely doesn't come immediately to mind. Anyone who has been to a Christian wedding has probably heard: “Love is patient, love is kind”, etc. However, if you read the rest of the chapter, it becomes apparent the Apostle Paul is not specifically talking about marriage. Instead, this is part of a larger discussion on spiritual gifts that spans from 1 Corinthians 12 to 14. In chapter 12, Paul lays out the reason for spiritual gifts: to build up and promote unity in the Church. In chapter 14, he addresses the use of specific spiritual gifts. Sandwiched between these is the aforementioned description of love. While it may seem out of place in a discussion on spiritual gifts, it is

⁴² James C. Hunter, *The Servant: A Simple Story About the True Essence of Leadership*, New York, NY: Currency: 2012: 27; Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey Into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness [25th Anniversary Edition]*: Paulist Press: 2001.

⁴³ Don N. Howell, Jr., *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock: 2003: 4-11, 16, 207.

⁴⁴ W. Edwards Deming, *The New Economics: For Industry, Government, Education*, Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology: 1994, Chapter 3.

actually the foundation of this passage, as evidenced by Paul calling love the “more excellent way”. To examine this, we start in chapter 12 with Paul’s description of the Church as a body. In *New Economics*, W. Edwards Deming used this very passage to describe organizations in terms of systems, thus applying it to any organization.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. (1 Corinthians 12:14-26)

From this passage, we like Deming can make several observations pertinent to leadership. First is unity in diversity. There is one body, which is designed to work toward a common purpose. That body is made up of many members—not independent and replaceable parts, but interdependent and necessary members. The parts are all different but vital. Without any particular part, the performance of the body as a whole is degraded. Paul deals with people that feel they don’t fit in the body due to their differences by affirming that those differences actually make them more vital to the body, not less. This is really the foundation of the current understanding of organizations as systems, characterized by interactions.

These interactions are complex, with no way to simplify them. Even the simplest organizations are thus inherently complex, just as the human body. As our knowledge of life grows, we see the inherent complexity of even the simplest forms of life. We are also seeing that this complexity cannot be simplified. Intelligent Design proponents have coined the term “Irreducible Complexity” to describe this phenomenon. This should not be surprising, as creation bears the Divine Imprint of God’s nature.⁴⁵ The Trinity can be thought of as the perfect system: God the Father, Son, and Spirit perfectly unified. Unlike earthly systems; however, the Triune God has the power of existence within Himself, independent of creation. Our earthly systems are infinitely dependent though, depending ultimately on God.

Thus, no longer can a simple organizational chart and catchy mission statement truly describe the purpose and function of an organization. The more leaders understand this, the more they will become aware of their lack of understanding. This should have a humbling effect. The leader who grasps this quickly understands that he or she lacks adequate knowledge to fully understand the organization, much less direct it. Instead of employees being dependent on the leader for direction, the leader becomes dependent on the employees for their expertise in

⁴⁵ “Divine Imprint” concept taken from Dr. Del Tackett, “The Truth Project”, *Focus on the Family*, 2006.

their jobs. In a secular setting, this realization came to L. David Marquet when he took command of the nuclear submarine USS Santa Fe. At the time, as in previous eras, the captain needed to be the master of every part of the ship. When his assignment was switched shortly before taking command, Marquet realized he lacked the time to master this new boat. Therefore, he depended on the knowledge of his followers. This humble dependence led to him developing and implementing a new leadership style that empowered his followers, transforming the boat. The full story along with his various tips and methods are found in his book *Turn the Ship Around*. In essence, he was practicing servant leadership.⁴⁶ To apply this, ***the Christian leader must humbly acknowledge both a lack of understanding of the organization's complexities and a dependence on the knowledge, skills, and experience of subordinates.***

Paul also deals with the member that judges others based on their differences, pointing out the futility of shunning a member due to a difference in role or ability. He then affirms again that the differences are vital, but this time, he addresses the relative magnitude of ability as well: “On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require” (1 Corinthians 12:22-24).

Here, Paul acknowledges the differences in type and scale of ability, calling the Church not to treat everyone the same but to capitalize on their strengths while compensating for their weaknesses. Instead of the evolutionary idea of shunning the weak for the overall betterment of the organization, Paul stresses that the weak are indispensable. But Paul goes even further. He says that these parts “seem to be weaker”, not that they actually are weaker. This is an important distinction. On the surface, some parts seem weaker, but are just as important to the functioning of the organization as the parts that seem stronger. Deming noted that much of the supposed weakness of employees was actually due to problems in the underlying system rather than the individual.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the interactions between members are dictated by these relationships. Paul talks of treating less honorable parts with greater honor and unpresentable parts with greater modesty. This means every relational interaction is undergirded by an understanding of the other person's uniqueness and role. The world has also realized the importance of relational interactions in the corporate setting, giving rise to the popularity of Emotional Intelligence. It involves being aware of yourself and your emotions as well as others and theirs, then using that knowledge to manage your emotions and actions while also effectively managing the relationship. Bradberry and Greaves succinctly and practically explain this in their book *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*.⁴⁸

Paul's final point in this passage is on unity. The rejoicing or suffering of one member of the body affects all others. In any organization, events outside of the organization that affect members of the organization have an impact on overall performance, though that impact is often difficult to ascertain. The Christian leader must therefore be aware of these effects.

Paul's body analogy ends in 1 Corinthians 12:31, “And I will show you a still more excellent way.” He then begins one of his most famous passages. This brings us to our final and most important application to leadership: love. If we want to remove management by fear (Deming's Point 8) we must replace it with love, as “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 3:18).

⁴⁶ L. David Marquet, *Turn the Ship Around: A True Story of Turning Followers Into Leaders*, New York: Penguin Books: 2012.

⁴⁷ W. Edwards Deming, *Out of the Crisis*, Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology: 1986: 314-319.

⁴⁸ Travis Bradberry & Jean Greaves, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, San Diego: TalentSmart: 2009.

Such a powerful love is no feeble feeling but an ironclad commitment to sacrifice for the good of others. Love is not only foundational to our relationships within the church but is also crucial to relationships in the workplace. To illustrate, Vieth stated it like this: “The purpose of vocation is to love and serve one’s neighbor. This is the test, the criterion, and the guide for how to live out each and every vocation anyone can be called to”.⁴⁹ This is especially true for leadership, as he continues with, “The boss is to love and serve the employees, his neighbors who are under his authority. They, in turn, are to love and serve him”.⁵⁰ In Ephesians 6, this love is shown when leadership is conducted without threats, considering employees as equals and worthy of honor rather than underlings to be used and abused.

Taking this a step further, after arguing the necessity of love as the foundation for the various members of the body, Paul describes love: “*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). The Christian leader should earnestly seek to exemplify this list of attributes. Let us now substitute “the boss” in place of “love” in this passage to apply it to the Christian boss.

The boss is patient and kind to all, being quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry (James 1:19). Such a boss listens patiently to employees, especially to problems and concerns. When providing feedback, the boss is always trying to build up and encourage the employees, even when the feedback itself must be negative. The goal of such feedback must always be rehabilitation and improvement rather than emotionally charged belittling. Gentle explanation and restoration are vital, being much more effective than ridicule. This does not mean the tone cannot be strong nor the rebuke cutting and direct. On the contrary, a stern rebuke given from genuine care and love can be quite effective, but the foundation of care and love must be previously established. This is the difference between condescending, accusatory correction and truly effective feedback; the difference between effective communication and a resounding gong of meaningless noise.

The boss is not envious of others inside or outside the organization, *nor is the boss boastful* of personal accomplishments. Such a boss shares successes, always saying “we” and praising the accomplishments of employees. Likewise, the boss owns and admits to failure, being quick to accept responsibility rather than throwing employees under the buss. The secular world has begun to see the value of such a leader as well. In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins examined the path to success for eleven companies that had transformed from average to excellent and maintained that excellence for at least fifteen years. In all of these companies, he found the same type of senior leaders: men of extreme humility. These men were quick to attribute their success to the people around them and the circumstances in general. When those were inadequate to explain their success, they chalked it up to luck. Their subordinates told a different story, pointing to those leaders as key to the transformation.⁵¹ The Christian leader should be characterized by such humility.

Closely linked to the lack of envy and boasting, *the boss is not arrogant or rude*. The boss uses emotional intelligence to guide all personal interactions. The NIV renders this as “does not dishonor others”. As previously discussed, even in the difficult interactions, the boss

⁴⁹ Gene E. Veith, *God at Work*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 2012: 39.

⁵⁰ Ibid: 44.

⁵¹ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don't*, New York: HarperCollins: 2001: 17-40.

maintains the honor due all people as being made in the image of God. The boss shows honor to employees and customers alike, regardless of status, affirming their value to the organization. Thus, employees are proud to work in the organization, understanding their value as part of something bigger than themselves, leading to a strong devotion to the organization.

Additionally, *the boss does not insist on his own way*, but seeks the good of the employees and the organization in everything. The question is not “what can I gain?” but “what is best for my people and the organization?”. This requires the humility to listen to subordinates and use their strengths and wisdom to shape the organization’s course. This boss does not seek to leave a personal legacy on the organization, but seeks the long-term health of the organization. This means raising up successors so that the organization’s success can continue long after any particular boss has left. This means one of the greatest responsibilities of these long-term-focused leaders is to replace themselves.

The boss is not irritable or resentful, maintaining an overall positive attitude despite unpleasant circumstances. This does not mean the boss must be hypocritically happy or ignorant of trials but should seek to maintain joy and hope in all circumstances. This boss is honest about struggles while never losing hope, strengthening followers to face the struggles rather than trying to avoid them. Even when the boss struggles with this, the honest effort will itself be contagious and effective in making sure the followers do not lose hope.

The NIV translates “not irritable or resentful” as “not easily angered” and “keeps no record of wrongs”. For the former, the boss may get angry, but keeps that anger close control, since “the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:20). For the latter, the boss forgives but still hold people accountable when appropriate. The key here is “when appropriate”, which is restricted to disciplinary actions and to correcting errors attributable to that particular employee. Deming talks at length in *Out of the Crisis* of the difference between errors with common causes as opposed to special causes. Common causes are those that are independent of people and are caused by the system itself. No amount of teaching or motivation to employees can fix common cause defects. Special causes are attributable to individuals and can be fixed through teaching, correction, and personal improvement. A common error of many organizations is to treat common cause defects like special cause defects, addressing the person in order to correct the problem. This is counterproductive, as it does not fix the problem and only leads to resent from the employee. Deming estimated that about 94% of defects are common cause and only 6% are special cause.⁵² Deming’s contemporary, Joseph Juran, puts the numbers at 85% from the system and 15% from the individual, but Myron Tribus notes that much of that 15% attributed to the individual can be traced back to management.⁵³ With this in mind, the boss is slow to blame individuals, instead looking at the system first. If the individual is responsible for the defect, the boss must gently correct the error and then move on without holding a grudge for the error. The underlying assumption is that most employees desire to do a good job and are both knowledgeable and capable. Their failures usually link back to the system and ultimately to management, who are responsible for training and equipping them. This mindset helps the boss maintain an attitude of humble service, taking responsibility for the organization’s failures rather than blaming the nearest employee.

The boss does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. Such a boss utterly rejects even the appearance of dishonest gain. This goes back to loving your neighbor, not just the neighbor within the company. The system view of the organization recognizes that those

⁵² W. Edwards Deming, *Out of the Crisis*, Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology: 1986: 315.

⁵³ Myron Tribus, “The Germ Theory of Management”, *Swiss Deming Institute*, 31 March 2002: 7.

outside the organization both affect and are affected by the actions within the organization. Though the secular world would call them stakeholders, they are neighbors to be loved and served. Many see the goal of the company as simply to make money, but this cannot be done alone. In *It's Not Luck*, Eliyahu Goldratt explains that the goal of making money is constrained by the need to satisfy the market (with more than just products) and provide a stable environment for employees. Both the goal and constraints end with the statement “both now and in the future”, emphasizing the long-term focus required. Though there is some tension between the goal and constraints, in the long term, they actually support one another. Pursuing the goal of profit while neglecting to satisfy the market (in an ethical and socially acceptable manner) or provide a stable environment (job stability, working conditions, etc.) for employees is detrimental in the long term.⁵⁴ As Sinek pointed out, the corporate world is littered with examples of successful companies falling from grace when their dishonest practices were discovered, tarnishing their reputation and long-term health. The quick profit acquired dishonestly is swallowed up by both lost sales and lost public trust once that dishonesty is brought to light. The Wells Fargo fake account scandal and unethical price gouging of EpiPen are only two examples of this all-too-common practice.⁵⁵ Like all sin, the temptation to cheat, cut corners, and lie promises quick profits, but is disastrous in the long term. The Christian boss is wise to resist such temptations, instead rejoicing in the truth—even when that truth hurts them personally or the organization in the short term.

The boss bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Bearing with employees in love, the boss patiently guides, aids, and restores relationships of employees for their good. The boss trusts the employees and their trust is reciprocal, allowing for their mutual interdependence upon each other, which leads to better organizational success. As previously mentioned, the boss maintains hope and keeps the employees from losing hope. Finally, the boss endures hardships right along with the employees. Such a boss is in for the long haul. Too many people in leadership positions hop from job to job and company to company so quickly that they cannot truly understand the culture and climate of the company they are in, much less adequately lead for lasting success. This exacerbates the troubles that accompany a short-term mindset. Instead, the Christian boss should be devoted to the organization for the long term, seeking its success for years to come. As previously discussed, at times this will require decisions that will negatively impact the organization in the short term, requiring even more courageous leadership to keep employees from losing hope. Possibly the most drastic example of this is during the Last Supper, when Jesus applied this to his disciples.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:12-15)

Here, Jesus leaves the societal view of servants simply and blindly following orders by calling His disciples into a closer relationship with Him as friends. Under this new relational structure, they are now privy to His plan, as He stated that everything He had received from God the Father He gave to them. Even after the resurrection, this continued with Jesus revealing

⁵⁴ Eliyahu M. Goldratt, *It's Not Luck*, North River Press: 1994: 270-277.

⁵⁵ Simon Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, Portfolio: 2019: 131-153.

more and more of Himself and His plan to them. He was preparing them to continue His work after His ascension. Christian bosses thus pour themselves into their employees, ensuring they know the vision and direction of the organization, empowering them to use their talents and abilities to further that vision. In such an environment, micromanagement is fruitless and counterproductive. Instead of barking out orders and micromanaging, the boss must mentor, inform, and orchestrate. The conductor of an orchestra does not produce a single note or tell each player what notes to play. With a score containing the notes of dozens of instruments being played simultaneously, no single conductor could adequately track them all, much less actively manage them. Instead, the conductor relies on the individual musicians to know their parts and follow his or her lead. The conductor is then responsible for coordinating their efforts toward their common purpose. The Christian leader must do the same. In all of this, love is both the foundation and motivation for the Christian boss.

Creating the Culture: Two Biblical Examples

Ultimately, it is not enough for the Christian leader to merely exemplify the aforementioned traits of servant leadership and love. While that is challenging enough, the Christian leader must also foster a culture where those traits are exhibited by and expected of everyone. Such is the epitome of a healthy organizational culture, which even secular scholars espouse as the vital primary responsibility of leadership. From Deming's 14 Points to Siné's exhortation to build trusting teams, it is a well-known and accepted tenet of modern leadership philosophy that leaders are responsible for creating and protecting the culture within their organizations. For the Christian, the general nature of submission in Ephesians 5:21 and the universal nature of 1 Corinthians 13 provide the standard for the culture the Christian leader strives to create. In such a culture, the boss serves the employees and expects them to serve one another. The boss sets an example of patience, kindness, humility, and selflessness and expects the same from all subordinates. This is a lofty and challenging standard, particularly if subordinates do not share the boss's faith. Still, it is not unprecedented. Scripture gives an example of just such a leader in Boaz.

In the time of the Judges—a low point in Israel's history with its anarchy and chaos in which “there was no king in Israel” and “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6, 21:25)—Boaz stands out as a righteous example to be emulated. Certainly, as the “kinsman redeemer” he prefigures his descendent and ultimate Redeemer Jesus Christ, but within that context it is not difficult to see in Boaz a fine example of a godly leader in the workplace. We meet him in Ruth 2 when Ruth goes to glean in his field. Gleaning was a provision under the Mosaic Law to provide for the most vulnerable, including widows like Ruth, in which landowners were to leave some of their grain in the fields for the less-fortunate to harvest for themselves (Deuteronomy 24:19). Ultimately, Boaz went above and beyond the Law's requirements by not only allowing Ruth to glean what his reapers left behind but also letting her pick grain among the reapers and giving her as much additional grain as she could carry. This demonstrated that he not only followed the letter of the Law but also truly honored God by following the spirit of the Law, going above and beyond the Law to graciously show love as God does. But equally remarkable is the workplace culture he created.

Much can be learned about healthy culture from Boaz. On the first day Ruth was gleaning, Boaz came to the field after she had already been working for a while. He greets the workers with “The LORD be with you!” to which they respond “The LORD bless you.” (Ruth 2:4). Clearly, Boaz had created a culture where the worship and obedience of God were central.

While it may not be practical for the Christian leader to instill such a culture so overtly, the Christian leader should still make very clear that the culture he or she is trying to create for their good is ultimately in obedience to God. Next, Boaz immediately notices Ruth and asks the foreman about her, who responds with both her origin and work ethic. First, this demonstrates that Boaz knew his workers well enough to immediately recognize that Ruth was not one of his workers. Since Boaz was not there at the beginning of the day, this also shows that he had instilled in his foreman (and thus in all his workers) the fear of the LORD regarding the law about gleaning. Furthermore, this demonstrates that he had trained and empowered his subordinate leaders well, since the foreman both allowed Ruth to glean and praised her work ethic to Boaz. When he tells her to drink from the water the men had drawn (Ruth 2:9), he also demonstrates that he had created a culture where workers cared for one another. The fact that he was present for some but not all of the day also indicates a healthy balance between what Toyota calls *genchi genbutsu*—going to where the work is actually being done to see for yourself—and the appearance of micromanagement from being so persistently present that it negatively impacted the workers.⁵⁶ He trusted his workers and they trusted him.

But the greatest indicator of the culture Boaz had created was when he tells Ruth to continue to reap in his field and stay close to his workers, exclaiming: “Have I not charged the young men not to touch you?” (Ruth 2:9). In truth, he had not charged the young men not to touch her. She had just arrived that morning and he had just arrived moments prior to this conversation, so he didn’t have a chance to gather the reapers and say “don’t touch her”. He needed no such specific exhortation because he had already set and enforced that standard among his workers generally. He was therefore confident enough in the culture he created and maintained that he was sure Ruth was safer in the company of his workers than anywhere else. He also treated her with dignity and charged his workers to treat her with dignity, again pointing to a workplace culture where such treatment was expected. Finally, the narrative of Ruth 3-4 displays that Boaz was above reproach, as zealous to protect Ruth’s reputation as his own, and committed to quickly resolving problems affecting his workers. In this, it is important to note that Boaz always initiated in taking care of Ruth, indicating that he likely took similar initiative in seeking out and resolving issues impacting anyone he employed. All in all, Christian leaders should aspire to lead like Boaz.

Boaz’s great grandson, David, created a similar culture in his Mighty Men, whose exploits described in 2 Samuel 23 and 1 Chronicles 11 are nothing short of legendary. Many of these men began following David long before he became king and were fiercely loyal to him through various hardships. Like U.S. Navy SEALs today, they were both elite and tight-knit. In *Infinite Game*, Simon Sinek points out how the SEALs place a higher emphasis on trust than performance.⁵⁷ But not even the SEALs can attain the level of trust these men would have had for each other, spending decades together in combat. This makes David’s betrayal of them all the worse. In an effort to cover up his adultery with Bathsheba, David conspires to have her husband Uriah (one of David’s Mighty Men) killed in battle. To carry this out, David’s army (including the Mighty Men) would have to betray one of their own by leaving him to fight alone. This no doubt destroyed the close camaraderie that this elite team enjoyed. It is no stretch to say that this was one of the greatest leadership failures recorded in Scripture. Therefore, the Christian leader would do well to learn from it.

⁵⁶ Jeffrey K. Liker, *The Toyota Way*, New York, NY: McGraw-Hill: 2004: 223-236.

⁵⁷ Simon Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, Portfolio: 2019: 108-109.

David's leadership failure starts in the very setting of the narrative: "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to war, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel..." (2 Samuel 11:1). Despite the expectation that kings would lead their armies in battle, David stayed in the comfort of his palace and sent his army instead. The fact that Joab was a competent commander did not negate the fact that David was not where he should have been. Possibly more than any other king in Israel's history, David belonged on the battlefield with his men. He was at his best in the field, so it should come as no surprise that he was at his worst when he traded the hardships of battle for the ease of the palace. Basically, David delegated hardship and kept comfort for himself. Many leaders in our day do the same. Recent history is replete with examples of senior leaders distributing pain but retaining comfort, such as administering sweeping layoffs while reaping large bonuses and generally benefitting off of the hardships of their people. And just like David, it leads directly to their downfall, such that even the secular world has observed this trend. In "The Bathsheba Syndrome", Ludwig and Longenecker observed that the ethical failings that lead to the downfall of many senior leaders come not in times of hardship but in times of ease.⁵⁸ While hardship sharpens and trains us, comfort often has the opposite effect, making it the ultimate test of a leader. They noted that many senior leaders who climb the ranks through hard work and upright character are not adequately prepared for the power and privilege of their positions. Their newfound ease creates a sense of self-sufficiency and even entitlement that can lead to ethical failure and downfall. David failed that test then tried to mend the broken culture that his failure created by eloquent words from the top-floor office to be sent to the field: "Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another. Strengthen your attack against the city and overthrow it" (2 Samuel 11:25). Leaders in our day often use similar tactics that similarly fail to reap results. Trust once lost must be slowly rebuilt through diligent and arduous effort on the part of the leader. It is built through servant leadership and genuine care, and there are no shortcuts to build or rebuild it. Ultimately, David did rebuild that trust (more on that later), but doubtless not without years of hard work on his part. Therefore, the Christian leader must be zealous to both create and protect that culture of trust.

The Leader as Shepherd

One more biblical metaphor for leadership is worthy of examination: the shepherd. The Patriarchs (Genesis 45:34), Moses (Exodus 3:1), and David (1 Samuel 17:34) were all shepherds; God is referred to as the Shepherd of His people (Psalm 23:1, 28:9, 80:1); and Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). When Jesus said this, He was fulfilling Ezekiel 34, which both promises that God will shepherd His people and condemns the nation's leaders—the "shepherds of Israel". The Christian leader would do well to heed the warning of that condemnation:

Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. (Ezekiel 34:2b-4)

⁵⁸ Dean C. Ludwig and Clinton O. Longenecker, "The Bathsheba Syndrome: The Ethical Failure of Successful Leaders", *Journal of Business Ethics* 12: 1993: 265-273.

These leaders took care of themselves rather than their followers, even preying on their followers for their own benefit. Here we have a clear statement of what a leader must not be: self-serving; taking advantage of followers for personal gain while neglecting to care for them; neglecting to strengthen and heal the weak and ailing or lovingly correct the straying, but instead ruling harshly. How many government and private sector leaders are guilty of the same? Instead, all human shepherds should follow the Chief Shepherd. Cattle are driven by fear from behind, but sheep must be led by the shepherd, meaning the shepherd must tread the same ground before the sheep. That is exactly what Jesus did, leaving the plush “corner office” of heaven to walk the path of life with His disciples, pouring His energy into developing them so that their “business” would grow when He was gone. He sacrificed much for them, ultimately giving His life (John 10:11b). Thus, Jesus fulfills the promise of God in Ezekiel 34:15-16: “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak”.

In following the example of Christ in all aspects of life, the Christian leaders must shepherd well those under their charge. Imitate Christ by caring for followers as people—eternal and immensely valuable souls whom God has entrusted to your stewardship—rather than assets to be depleted for your own gain. Imitate Christ making His sheep lie down by creating a safe and healthy culture in the workplace devoid of unhealthy fear and division. Imitate Christ by gently correcting the errant, healing the wounded, and strengthening the weak. And imitate Christ by sacrificing for the good of your people, not vice versa. Imitate the Good Shepherd in all this lest His anger burn and he punishes you (Zechariah 10:3), but more importantly, imitate Christ as a good shepherd so that amidst a crooked and twisted generation that values profit over people, you will shine as a light pointing to the greatness of the Good Shepherd.

Your Spiritual Act of Worship

Christian leaders should also aspire to emulate Boaz’s motivation: love of God. Like any endeavor in life, when we strive for excellence in serving through leadership, we are exercising our calling from God and thus worshipping Him. After spending 11 chapters laying out the most comprehensive logical argument for salvation by faith alone in the entire Bible, Paul says this in Romans 12:1-2: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”.

What does it mean to present our bodies as living sacrifices? A sacrifice by definition is an act of worship, which the giver presents to the recipient at cost to himself or herself as a sign of love. If we are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, then everything we do in every aspect of life should be done at a cost to ourselves in honor of God. Whatever we do, we should strive to do it with excellence as unto the Lord. In addition, we worship when we carry out our calling; when we do what God created us to do. This is the essence of obedience: conforming to God’s design. When we disobey God, we are actually acting contrary to how He made us, but when we act in accordance with how He made us, we are worshipping Him. Throughout the psalms, there are countless references to various created things praising God, ranging from animals to plants to mountains.⁵⁹ How can these things worship God, especially when many are not alive or

⁵⁹ Psalm 98:7-8, Isaiah 55:12, Psalm 93:3, Psalm 89:5,12

conscious? They worship their Creator by acting in accordance to the way God designed them. The same can be said of any product we have ever used. When your car works well and reliably, it causes you to praise its maker. When it does not work reliably, your praise for its maker diminishes. The same is true of us. When we do not carry out our calling or strive for excellence, it does not lead people to praise our Maker. Conversely, when we live according to our calling and our design, we worship God and lead others to worship God. In leadership, this means surrendering all to God. Richard Stearns, former CEO of Lennox and World Vision, describes this “surrendered leader”:

A surrendered leader has nothing left to lose because they’ve already put everything in God’s hands. There’s nothing left to fear or protect. A surrendered leader can rise above the daily pressures and stresses of life and work. A surrendered leader is not bound by the same worries, concerns, and priorities that consume others....So when coworkers look at a surrendered leader, they see...a leader who tries to exemplify the qualities of Jesus: integrity, humility, encouragement, perseverance, and forgiveness. This kind of leader provokes questions....And the answers to those questions are found in the gospel, the good news that God loves them and that they too can embrace something bigger than themselves, something noble and pure and life-giving.⁶⁰

Finally, we must lead with zeal, passionately serving those under us out of service to and love for Christ. After the lofty call to live as sacrifices to God, Romans 12 briefly discusses various gifts similarly to 1 Corinthians 12. In calling the Romans to use these gifts, Paul speaks of leadership as follows: “the one who leads, with zeal” (Romans 12:8). He then addresses zeal again. “Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord” (Romans 12:9-11). All of these are strong words that denote that Paul’s exhortations should not be mindlessly followed but passionately pursued. Only by the Spirit’s power can we hope to live up to such a standard, so let us humbly pray for such an attitude of passionate service to those whom God has entrusted to us to His glory.

We Can’t Do This Alone

All of these charges are certainly daunting. If 1 Corinthians 13 is God’s standard for Christians in general and bosses in particular, the right and humble response is to acknowledge that no human can live up to that standard. No one has the internal capability to be always patient and kind, and never arrogant, boastful, proud, rude, or selfish. No one can refrain from ever being irritable or resentful, nor always maintain righteous motives or maintain hope in any circumstance. In this as in any aspect of the Christian life, we must humbly and constantly return to the Gospel. Just as we do not have the power of salvation within ourselves, we do not have the power to live out these commands. We must depend on the work of the Holy Spirit within us in order to lead in love. He is not only responsible for our regeneration but also our sanctification. Though regeneration is immediate, sanctification is a process that begins at salvation and does not end until glorification in heaven. Therefore, we are not magically experts at showing love from the moment of salvation, but by the power of the Spirit, we slowly and steadily grow in love. Similarly, our actions will constantly fail to bring worship to God, to

⁶⁰ Richard Stearns, *Lead Like it Matters to God: Values-Driven Leadership in a Success-Driven World*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press: 2021: 41.

speaking nothing of our motives. We will inevitably slip up, causing others to refrain from worshipping God. In all of our failings, there is infinite grace from an infinite God who has already paid an infinite price to remedy our failings. Thus, as we strive to constantly improve in this lofty task, we rest in the grace of a compassionate God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (Exodus 34:6).

But what of major ethical failures like David's? Fortunately, Scripture is clear that David was able to rebuild the trust of his Mighty Men. Years later, they stuck with him when he had to flee as his own son rebelled against him. How was he able to rebuild their trust? First, he was quick to repent. When the prophet Nathan rebuked him, he immediately repented of his sin. He did not make excuses or shift blame as Adam and Eve had, but owned his sin and confessed it (2 Samuel 12:13) both to God and to the nation (see Psalms 32 and 51). David was broken and contrite about his sin, not merely its consequences. Thus, the Christian leader must likewise be quick to repent of all sins and failures—large or small—to both God and others. Scripture tells us nothing else about David's process of restoration, but it doubtless included heartfelt repentance and change, genuine sorrow over sin, an attitude of humility, and a return to the upright attitude of servant leadership that had drawn his Mighty Men to him in the first place. The Christian leader must similarly address failures.

Finally, we need not be experts in this type of servant leadership order to impact our people in a positive way. The sincere effort alone will boost morale and increase trust. Deming may have said it best: "The boost in morale of the production worker, if he were to perceive a genuine attempt on the part of management to work on the 14 points...and to hold the production worker responsible only for what he can govern and not for handicaps placed on him by the system, would be hard to overestimate".⁶¹ This should encourage us to strive all the more to exhibit Christ-like leadership.

Conclusion

After examining some valuable secular leadership advice that God's common grace has allowed nonbelievers to discover and the deeper truths of Scripture as they relate to leadership, we find that our calling to live out the Gospel through leadership in the workplace where God has placed us is just as strong as in any other calling we may receive from God for the building of His Kingdom. So like Solomon, let us humbly pray for the wisdom to lead well. Let us equip ourselves both with the wisdom of those who God has gifted in leadership (whether believers or unbelievers) and the infinite wisdom of Scripture. Let us passionately serve those under us through wise leadership for their good, our customers' good, and the advancement of God's Kingdom. When we fail, let us be quick to repent to God and others, knowing that our Great High Priest knows our weaknesses, died to redeem us, and gives us the power through the Spirit to live according to His Will. To Him be all the glory, Amen. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

⁶¹ W. Edwards Deming, *Out of the Crisis*, Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology: 1986: 315.

Appendix: What About Women in Leadership?

As Christians seek to apply the whole of Scripture to leadership, a difficult question arises: is it biblical for women to pursue or exercise leadership in the workplace? On one hand, Paul's command to masters in Ephesians 6 is not explicitly masculine, implying that bosses could be women. But on the other hand, a number of passages seem to suggest that in at least some settings, women are not to be leaders. Therefore, it is necessary to honestly and humbly approach these passages, interpreting them in their proper context then applying them to leadership in the workplace. Since this is a socially-charged and controversial issue, it is tempting to bring a modern worldview to such passages and interpret them based on that worldview. But as always, Scripture must shape worldview, not vice versa.

The clearest verse seeming to prohibit women from leadership is 1 Timothy 2:12, where Paul says "I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man". As with all verses, it is important to take this verse in context to avoid misinterpretation. The immediate context seems to support a broad interpretation of this command, as the section starts in verse 8 with "I desire that in every place men should pray..." (1 Timothy 2:8). Furthermore, Paul's reason for not allowing women to "teach or exercise authority" over men is given in the following verse: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Timothy 2:14-15). Therefore, this command is rooted in the created order and the Fall. Adam was created first and given dominion on earth. Eve was then created to help him in that endeavor. The Fall reversed that order when Eve was deceived, leading her to eat first from the forbidden fruit and then convince Adam to do the same. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this passage does not solely blame Eve for the Fall. The same Paul who wrote 1 Timothy 2 also wrote Romans 5, where the blame is placed squarely on Adam's shoulders: "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin" (Romans 5:12). Eve was deceived, but Adam was not. Genesis 3:6 clearly states that Adam was with Eve. This means that Adam observed Satan tempting Eve and did not intervene. We get the idea that Adam knew what was happening and chose not to intervene. Adam knew the command of God regarding the tree and also knew God's promised consequences. Therefore, desiring the knowledge of good and evil more than God, Adam sat back while Eve ate the fruit, waiting to see if God would be true to His Word. When Eve didn't appear to suffer any ill effects, he determined it was safe for him to eat as well. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that Adam sacrificed Eve for his own desires. Adam's inaction blatantly violated his calling as a man and husband. Rather than selflessly lead, serve, and protect Eve, he selfishly and passively stood by, essentially allowing Eve to face God's wrath alone in a sadistic experiment to test God's trustworthiness. Thus, God rightly holds Adam ultimately responsible for the Fall while acknowledging that Eve was certainly complicit in it.

Since Adam and Eve comprised the first human institution, they can also be thought of as the first church and the first business. Those institutions were similarly to reflect the nature of God, meaning they have a created order as well. In the church, that order is most clearly seen in the relationship between the elders and church members. Just as wives are called to submit to their husbands, church members are called to submit to their elders. Likewise, just as husbands are called to selflessly love their wives, elders are called to lovingly care for (shepherd) their members.⁶² Within this framework, passages like 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and Titus 2 speak of different roles for men and women. These all fall into the context of corporate worship in the

⁶² 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14, 1 Timothy 5:17-20, Hebrews 13:7,17, 1 Peter 5:1-2, 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1

church, so they do not address the workplace. In addition to what we observed earlier in these passages, Matthew 20, Ephesians 6, and the relevant Mosaic laws do not specify gender, meaning that 1 Timothy 2 is the only passage that could be interpreted as precluding women from leadership in the workplace. To determine if it does indeed contain that prohibition, we must look deeper into its context.

The general context of 1 Timothy is Paul's instruction to Timothy—whom he had sent to be the leader of the leaders in the church in Ephesus—to appoint elders and deacons then instruct them, ensuring they led the church in accordance with Scripture, particularly to protect against false teachers. Specifically, Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to “charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith” (1 Timothy 1:3-4). Later on, Paul says “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:14-15). Paul sent Titus to Crete for much the same reason: “that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you” (Titus 1:5). Thus, while Timothy is certainly to instruct the Ephesian believers in godly living in all aspects of life, the underlying context remains focused on life in the church. This is also evident when 1 Timothy 2:12 is viewed in context:

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Timothy 2:8-14)

As with 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, various interpretations for this passage have been proposed—none of which can be definitively proven or backed. Some have proposed that those commands were for specific circumstances or specific people, while others say they are to be more broadly applied.⁶³ In all such cases, it is important to interpret Scripture based on the whole of Scripture while humbly admitting that any extrapolation from what is clear in Scripture may be wrong. In this section, verses 8 to 10 can be applied throughout the Christian life beyond corporate worship, but 1 Corinthians 14:33-34 (parallel to verses 11 and 12) focuses on the latter, specifically saying “in the churches”. Furthermore, verse 12 begins with “I do not permit”, which resembles instances where Paul differentiates between his own exhortations and the commands of God (1 Corinthians 7:19 vs. 7:12). While Paul was an apostle and thus had substantial authority in his direction, he understood the limits of his authority. Possibly more than anyone but Jesus, Paul understood his calling from God and was intensely focused on it. That focus was on preaching the Gospel, primarily among Gentiles, and planting healthy, growing churches to continually preach that same Gospel. So while his letters (like the rest of Scripture) contain all things pertaining to life and godliness, the commands become less frequent

⁶³ Douglas Moo, “What Does it Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?: 1 Timothy 2:11-15” in John Piper and Wayne Grudem ed. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 1991: 234-253.

and vaguer on matters outside the church. Therefore, we can conclude—albeit with some apprehension—that *1 Timothy 2:12 applies within the context of the church and thus does not preclude women from exercising leadership over men in the workplace*. For a more thorough explanation of this passage and its various potential interpretations, see Douglass Moo's chapter in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.⁶⁴

In Scripture, we also see a number of examples of women exercising leadership. The most famous of these is Deborah. Don Howell profiles Deborah in *Servants of the Servant*:

Leadership always involves taking the initiative. It is Deborah who summons Barak, a military leader from the tribe of Naphtali, and instructs him to recruit 10,000 warriors from Naphtali and Zebulun....Even with the prophetic word of promised victory, Barak insists on Deborah's accompanying him....The timidity of the warrior is matched by the courage of the prophetess...here is a willing and capable person that God was not at all embarrassed to exalt above all of her countrymen and countrywomen to accomplish a great deliverance. God neither chose Deborah because she was a woman nor passed her by for the same reason.⁶⁵

Similarly, when Nabal's foolishness threatened his entire household with David's wrath, Abigail exhibited exceptional leadership by taking charge and intercepting David with such skill and grace that one of the greatest warriors in all of Scripture was left disarmed and spellbound. From the interaction between Abigail and the servants, we can extrapolate that Nabal's foolishness and abrasive demeanor regularly caused the servants to look to Abigail for leadership. In terms of respect and influence—and likely in practical terms as well—Abigail was clearly the leader, and as a good leader, she took responsibility and risked her own safety for the good of others.⁶⁶ Thus, David sees God's use of Abigail's skill and character to prevent him from sinning, causing him to praise God as he praises her. While the leadership of Deborah and Abigail is certainly an indictment of the failure of Barak and Nabal to live up to the calling of leadership inherent in godly masculinity, it does not change the fact that both of these women were gifted leaders who were not sinning by exercising that leadership.⁶⁷ Finally, it must be stressed that leadership is among the traits of the ideal wife in Proverbs 31:10-31. It is safe to say she is not accomplishing all of that prosperous business alone but exercising leadership. Just as Solomon and Zerubbabel are described as building the first and second temples respectively, the Proverbs 31 wife is exercising leadership to accomplish these many works—leadership over servants, some of which may have been men. Such leadership does not undermine biblical masculinity and femininity but in fact supports it.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Douglas Moo, "What Does it Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?: 1 Timothy 2:11-15" in John Piper and Wayne Grudem ed. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 1991: 234-253.

⁶⁵ Don N. Howell, Jr., *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock: 2003: 49-52.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 79.

⁶⁷ John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined" in John Piper and Wayne Grudem ed. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 1991: 41-49.

⁶⁸ Vern Sheridan Poythress, "The Church as Family: Why Male Leadership in the Family Requires Male Leadership in the Church" in John Piper and Wayne Grudem ed. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 1991: 320-321.

In the New Testament, Lydia is described as “a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God” (Acts 16:14). It is clear that Lydia ran a successful business that likely employed several people. One final woman worthy of mention is Priscilla, who along with her husband Aquila made up the most important couple in Paul’s ministry. As fellow tentmakers, they hosted Paul in Corinth then travelled with him to Ephesus in Acts 18, where they together skillfully taught Apollos. In his Romans greetings, Paul praises them as “my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well” (Romans 16:3-4). Greetings in Romans 16 and 1 Corinthians 16 also mention churches meeting in their house, speaking to their leadership role in the churches of Rome and Ephesus. Of note, Priscilla is mentioned first in four of the six times they are mentioned together, fueling speculation that she was more prominent or of a higher social class than Aquila. If that is the case, it is possible that while they worked together in tentmaking, Priscilla exercised authority over Paul. Regardless, the fact that Priscilla and Aquila are always mentioned together demonstrates that they were a team. In all likelihood they led together, for which Paul praises them both.

In all of these cases, women were called to leadership and through their praiseworthy practice of it they glorified God. It is also clear that these women were gifted with the traits necessary for leadership, which aligns with Scripture’s teaching on spiritual gifts. These gifts are given by the Holy Spirit as He sees fit and for the betterment of all. Paul beings the most extensive discussion of these gifts with: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good....All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11). And obeying Scripture regarding gifts requires using them (Romans 12:6a). Since God does not tempt anyone to sin, it is unreasonable to think that the Holy Spirit would gift some women for leadership while also prohibiting them from leadership. These gifts should be exercised with wisdom, discretion, and humility under the counsel and authority of wise leaders in a manner appropriate to the circumstances.

Since Scripture does not outline situations in which a woman’s leadership would be inappropriate in the workplace in the same way it addresses those circumstances in the church and home, the more general concept of biblical manhood and womanhood must be applied to the myriad of possible situations in which a woman could exercise leadership over a man. Leadership in such circumstances obeys Scripture if it strengthens rather than undermines God’s design of masculinity and femininity. John Piper defines such masculinity as “a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man’s differing relationships” and femininity as “a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman’s differing relationships”.⁶⁹ He pointed out that leadership can be described as exerting influence along a spectrum from non-directive (persuasion) to directive within a relationship spanning the spectrum of impersonal to personal, stating that a woman’s leadership over a man would be inappropriate if it was both personal and directive.⁷⁰ Such leadership would usurp God’s design for masculinity and femininity in much the same way as the Fall. While there are doubtless some relationships in which leadership that is both personal and directive may be inescapable, in most cases leadership can be exercised in ways that are either impersonal and directive or

⁶⁹ John Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined” in John Piper and Wayne Grudem ed. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 1991: 41.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*: 59-63.

personal and non-directive. This means that in the vast majority of circumstances, a woman can exercise leadership over men in the workplace in a manner that is biblical and supportive of God's design of manhood and womanhood. In the impersonal relationships found in most situations, a woman can be directive in leadership "in such a way that she signals her endorsement of his unique duty as a man to feel a responsibility of strength and protection and leadership toward...women in general".⁷¹ For more personal relationships, it is equally biblical for a woman to exercise leadership in more non-directive ways, as beautifully demonstrated by Abigail. Fortunately, an emphasis on non-directive methods fits nicely with the general model of biblical leadership we have been discussing all along. Servant leadership in general submission to others out of reverence for Christ naturally avoids the need for directive leadership in most cases, meaning that if a woman follows Scriptures general direction on leadership in the workplace that we have laid out, she can lead in such a way that there would be very few workplace situations in which her leadership would have the potential of being unbiblical.

Finally, in many cases it is not merely biblically allowable for women to exercise leadership in the workplace but beneficial and even recommended. The model of servant leadership emphasizes teams of leaders with diverse abilities—which would naturally include the diverse abilities of men and women. As Paul told the Athenians in Acts 17, God puts everyone in a particular place at a particular time in order to accomplish His purposes. Just as He has composed the Church and the family with people possessing various different traits—and those differences are an asset rather than a liability—so our workplaces are made up of different people. Scripture teaches that we are interdependent, and that is particularly true of men and women (1 Corinthians 11:11-12). If men and women are interdependent in the created order, it stands to reason that men and women are interdependent in the workplace as well—including in leadership. Just as the differing traits of men and women are an asset in marriage, they are also an asset in leadership teams in the workplace. All in all, Scripture does not preclude or discourage women from taking on leadership roles and exercising leadership in the workplace.

⁷¹ John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined" in John Piper and Wayne Grudem ed. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 1991: 63.