



Adelaide College

Fear the Lord and be wise

Restoration After the Exile

The Foundations for Building a Spiritual People

Lecture 9: The Characteristics of a Christian Leader (2)

We continue with the subject of what is required of us to be Christian leaders. In the previous lecture we looked at the basic need for spirituality. Now we turn to the human characteristics, which make a person a leader. By characteristics we mean those elements in our human make-up, which cause us to be us. Human personality is made up of a collection of characteristics, and the most important ones for a leader are mentioned below.

A Person of Feeling

Nehemiah was not like an iceberg. He had strong feelings. This is important because without feelings we will not be motivated to become leaders. The elements involved in feelings from the point of view of Christian leadership are:

1) Having a heart for God –

It is clear that Nehemiah loved the Lord. This was at the centre of his spirituality. In his prayer in Ch. 1 he includes himself among those “who delight in revering your name” (1:11). His service for God was not merely a matter of duty but of delight.

King David was another one who loved the Lord. In Ps. 40:8 he says, “I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart”. Such was his commitment to the Lord that, in spite of some serious failings at times, he wished to conform his whole way of life to the will of God, as prescribed in the Word of God (“the scroll,” of Ps. 40:7). Serving the Lord was part of that commitment. The reason for his love of the Lord was the salvation, which God gives to those who believe (Ps. 40:10). So we also who are saved should have a similar desire to do God’s will.

2) Having a heart for people –

Nehemiah not only loved the Lord, he loved people, especially the people of God. The strength of his love for the people of Jerusalem, and his concern for the difficulties they were in, is brought out in 1:4. He wept, mourned and fasted “for some days”. Without that love for the people he would never have run the risk of displeasing the Persian king by asking for leave of absence.

In the same way we will not face the inconveniences that are experienced by those who give their lives to serving others unless there is a basic love for those people. A love and concern for people shine out of the letters of the apostle Paul. This is what caused him to serve people without reserve. He writes to the Corinthian believers in 2 Cor. 12:15, "So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less?" His prayer for believers was that their "love may abound more and more" (Phil. 1:9).

3) Having a heart for a locality –

Nehemiah had a love for Jerusalem, as we see in 2:12. People do not exist in a vacuum. They live in localities, and sometimes the Lord will lay a particular place on our hearts, to pray and serve the people there.

This has often been the experience of Christians in receiving a call to the mission field to serve in a specific country, although it was John Wesley who said that the world was his parish, meaning that he loved people everywhere.

But we should stress that in talking about feelings we are not thinking of emotion for the sake of emotion. Some people get very emotional in a wrong way and for personal reasons. We are not talking about emotionalism even though there is a place for emotion in God's service. Neither are we thinking about emotion in the form of mood swings. Unstable emotions have to be dealt with if we are to do God's will in serving others. We need a balanced personality or at least be working towards that.

A Person of Commitment

Nehemiah committed himself to the people of Jerusalem initially for a period of 12 years (5:14). After returning to the Persian king for a time he went back for a further period of service.

Though the Lord may sometimes take us into a particular sphere of service for a short time of perhaps only a year or two, He will often call us to long-term service, and we have to be prepared for that. It is not up to us to choose how long we will stay in a certain locality. We have to know the Lord's mind, and if at first we find it hard to identify with a certain place the Lord will give us a love for that place and those people if He wants us there.

A Person of Wisdom and Courage

Nehemiah had to be very wise, almost cunning in dealing with the constant deception of the Samaritans. He saw through their offers of 'friendship' and 'concern' (6:2-13).

He was also very courageous right from the start in speaking to the Persian king about his desire to go to Jerusalem (2:2-3). He also withstood the hostility of his enemies, particularly the accusation by Sanballat that he was encouraging rebellion against king of Persia (6:5-9).

In addition Nehemiah had to face a 'fifth column' among his own people in the form of intimidation from a noble, named Tobiah, and his cronies. The high priest Eliashib especially sided with Tobiah against Nehemiah and even illegally provided him with accommodation in the temple (6:17-19; 13:4-5). Eliashib and his sons, one of which had married into the family of the Samaritan Sanballat, played a central part in the opposition, which Nehemiah experienced from some of the Jews (13:28).

A Person Able to Cope

A leader must be able to deal with difficulties as they arise and not give in to hostile pressures. He or she must be able to face influential opponents, just as Nehemiah faced the priests and nobles of his day who were, among other things, exploiting the poor (Ch. 5). God's leader must be willing to stand against the lowering of God's standards (13:15-27) and deal with those who were going back on the vows (outlined in Ch. 10), which they had made to do God's will.

A Person of Integrity

Above all, leaders should be persons of integrity. It should be a case of "what you see is what you get". If leaders appear to be genuine servants of the Lord that is what they should be. The leader should have a transparent personality.

Leaders should be honest and generous. Nehemiah and his brothers who worked with him did not serve the people for personal gain, unlike those who had governed the area of Judah before them (5:14-16). Nehemiah was exceptionally generous to the people he was serving (5:17-18). He was not interested in getting anything from them. He was not a time-server, like some are even in the Christian ministry.

Nehemiah, because he was a person of integrity, also did not "lord over the flock" but was very considerate in his dealings with the ordinary people so as not to be a burden to them (5:15). He did not turn leadership into a power game.

This was also the example of the apostle Paul, who "served the Lord with great humility and with tears" even when severely tested (Acts 20:19).

The person of integrity and honesty will also give credit and honour where it is due. Nehemiah gave recognition to his brother Hanani and a commander called Hananiah, "because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do" (7:2). Nehemiah was not concerned to stand out as the only leader of the people.

Summary

Nehemiah possessed a strong personality as well as the good characteristics required for good leadership. And a personality cult should never be allowed to develop. The person to stop that happening is the leader. Those who desire more recognition and honour than is due to them rob God of His honour, and that is a serious sin in Scripture (Mal. 1:6).



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