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The Original Model for Godly Leadership

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

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Much like in today's "me first" society, self-absorption was one of the defining characteristics of Roman culture. Self-improvement, self-promotion, and self-aggrandizement were the pillars of its social structure. Self-*sacrifice* was a foreign concept.

The pervasive, extreme selfishness wasn't limited to the wealthy and political elite. Christ had repeated run-ins with Jewish religious leaders who reflected the same kind of overt self-interest in their piety, arrogance, and hypocrisy.

That's why Christ's example of leadership as a humble shepherd was so countercultural. It was the exact opposite of the attitudes that dominated that entire society.

The idea of servant leadership did not originate with the metaphor of shepherding. Humble sacrifice for the sake of others is how human leadership was supposed to work from the very beginning of creation, even before Adam fell. Human society was ordered by God's own design, and the family was the first unit of human government—the building block for all other social structures. Adam was the head and Eve his helper (Genesis 2:18).

Moreover, by the mystery of divine foreknowledge, Adam's relationship with Eve was designed specifically to illustrate Christ's sacrificial love for His people (Ephesians 5:23). Christ's care for His people is therefore the model for every husband (1 Corinthians 11:3). And since the husband was the original, prototypical leader in the human realm, Christlike lovingkindness is a defining element of true leadership as God designed it.

That's why in God's own plan for the family, the husband, not the wife, is the designated head. While the husband-wife relationship is a true, loving, mutual *partnership*, the roles are not reversible. Scripture expressly and repeatedly says the husband is to take the leadership role in the family (1 Corinthians 11:3-10; Ephesians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1-6). For similar reasons, men, not women, are to be leaders in the church (1 Timothy 2:11–14; 1 Corinthians 11:5; 14:34-36).

The principle of male headship has been badly abused at times, and of course it is at odds with the feminist agenda embraced by today's secularized Western culture. The wife's role properly understood does not diminish her; it exalts her. Again, headship as God designed it is nothing like

dictatorship. The godly husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church: with the heart of a servant, not a slave master. His chief duties to her include tenderness, service, honor, and self-sacrifice. He sets her welfare above his, and her protection, purity, and satisfaction mean more to him than his personal comforts.

The faithful wife is her husband's devoted helper, committed to him alone, just as the church is faithful to Christ.

Together, husband and wife oversee and care for the children. When marriage and family are functioning according to God's design, the parents' authority over the children is the perfect expression of gentle, loving, well-balanced leadership. The caring nurture and affection of a devoted mother exemplifies the tender side of leadership. The faithful provision and protective supervision of a loving father exemplifies the strong yet self-sacrificial aspect of leadership. Every true leader and shepherd of God's flock must possess both maternal and paternal qualities. In other words, a balanced picture of how leadership should function was woven into the very fabric of the family from the start of creation.

The apostle Paul clearly saw it that way, and his own leadership style reflected both maternal and paternal qualities in full measure. He used familial metaphors to stress his care and lovingkindness. He pleaded tenderly and patiently with his people, modeling the very best and most important aspects of authentic leadership.

In his first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul employs both parental figures side by side to describe his style of leadership. This brief passage in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 is one of the most important statements in all of Scripture about faithful church leadership. This is how spiritual leaders ought to see their role:

We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

There we see two sides of spiritual leadership in perfect balance: the tenderness of compassionate, motherly care alongside the fortitude and strength of fatherly love. Each of those warrants our thoughtful study and careful understanding.

And that's where we'll pick it up next time.

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