

LEADERS WHO NEED LEADERS (Exodus 18)

We shall now embark on a series of write-ups on leadership as 2014 is election year. New and incumbent leaders (including deacons, elders and pastors) will be put up before God's people for another three years of service. It is important that God's people know the meaning of Christian leadership and the qualifications of godly leaders before they cast their important votes. They will answer to God if they vote the wrong leader into office or even fail to vote the right leader in! Every member (21 years and older) is entrusted with this very important responsibility. They must not fail God. They need to vote based upon godly criteria and not worldly ones.

The adage "no man is an island" applies to all believers but more so to leaders in God's church. God did not give all the spiritual gifts to one single believer! No matter how gifted the leader is, he still needs other leaders to serve with him. He may be the best administrator but when the church grows, more people will be needed to be his "hands and feet." The work of the Lord is vast and at times very demanding. The leader cannot be everywhere and do everything. He is not omnipresent like God. Even if he is the best preacher or teacher, he cannot minister at every fellowship as some of these fellowships have meetings that occur simultaneously. There is no exception. All leaders need other leaders.

1. Time is of the Essence

Sometimes when we do not have helpers to assist or co-labourers, we may end up wasting everybody's time. A long queue could form to see the pastor for just a few minutes and they might have to wait hours in the process. We may have the best Bible knowledge in the church and are able to give the best advice but we cannot help everyone. We need other leaders to share the load.

Moses, the man of God, was faced with such a dilemma. The people of Israel had just come out of the land of bondage. Moses was the man whom God used to humble mighty Pharaoh and his army and the entire nation into letting the people of Israel leave Egypt after they had been in bondage for 430 years. They had seen the strong hand of the LORD in the ten plagues and also in God subduing Pharaoh and his mighty army when the Red Sea swallowed them. When the people of Israel ran out of water and food, Moses was the man whom God used to give them water and food. When Israel was attacked by the hated and cowardly Amalekites, God heard Moses' prayer and defeated them. Moses was there for them ever since they realized that the LORD had sent him to lead them out of Egypt. He was with them every step of the way and had become indispensable in their lives and sojourn through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Moses had been the leader par excellence who had never failed them.

When they were in the wilderness and had set up camp, many of the people of Israel encountered problems. They needed Moses to advise them and solve their teething problems. This was the scene that Jethro, Moses' father-in-law saw. Exodus 18:13-14, "*And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening. And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?*" Moses could not do anything but sit there from morning to evening listening to the people's problems. The people would spend the entire day queuing up to see Moses and were also not able to do anything else. The advice given by Moses probably took less than 5 minutes but they waited for perhaps hours for his precious advice.

Moses' reply to Jethro was, *"Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws (Exodus 18:15-16)."* Moses did the right thing by letting the people who came to him "know the statutes of God." Giving the right advice according to the Bible is a very good thing. Moses did not give the wrong advice. The people received help from Moses. But the problem was not a matter of "bad" or "wrong" advice. The problem was that Moses could have been doing more important things which only he could do. He was the leader of the people of God that numbered more than 2 million! He had 2 million problems before him! There were definitely great and weightier matters that only Moses could deal with and less complex matters that others could deal with! Jethro saw that what Moses was doing was not wise. Moses' counsel for simple issues could just as well have been given by others. Jethro's advice was insightful, for he said to Moses, *"The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone (Exodus 18:17-18)."*

A "one-man" leadership was too much even for the great and multi-gifted man of God like Moses. He would have worn himself out in no time. To "wear away" means "to wilt." Moses would wilt like a dried up plant if he did not share the load. Then he would have been of no use to God and the people of Israel.

The people would probably be exhausted as well. Jethro did not say that Moses did not give good advice. Jethro did not also say that there were others who were better than Moses in giving advice. In fact, it was probably true that there was no one in all of Israel wiser than Moses or who could give better advice. The issue was not whether others were better than Moses, but that Moses and the people who wanted to see him were not spending their time wisely and fruitfully. Moses needed to share the load even if others were not as good as he was. They needed to do the work in order to improve and learn from their mistakes.

2. Distribution of Labour

The solution to this problem was to share the workload. Moses had to distribute his responsibilities and duties to other leaders. That means that Moses needed to appoint leaders who could help him. Jethro's advice was very wise indeed. The advice may be divided into two parts. The first part is in Exodus 18:19-20, *"Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do."* Moses needed to point Israel to God all the time. The way to do that was to teach the Word of God. When Moses taught the Word of God, the recipients would then be able to point those who need help to God. This is the potency of Jethro's good advice.

The task of teaching the Word of God would definitely be curtailed if Moses spent most of his time listening to one problem after another. If Moses spent his time teaching the Word of God to the masses, the masses would be blessed. The scope and scale of Moses' ministry was unique to him and few could teach like Moses or have the insight of the Word of God like him! From among the masses, some could become teachers to assist him. "Ordinances" refer to religious activities ordained by God for the people of Israel which they must keep on a regular basis, such as the feasts of unleavened bread, tabernacles, etc. This was important in Israel's life as these ordinances would regulate Israel's relationship with their God. The "laws" here

refer to all statutes and precepts including but not limited to the Decalogue. These laws would regulate Israel's societal life as they functioned as a new nation in the Promised Land. Moses had to teach them to obey these ordinances and laws. The teaching must come first before there can be obedience. Obeying the Word of God was the heartbeat of Israel's existence. Without the Word of God to guide Israel, Israel would live a meaningless existence. That is why it was so important that Moses did not get tied down by listening to all sorts of personal problems which could be left to many other leaders. They would not be able to teach like Moses but they definitely could do the counseling that Moses was doing.

The second part of Jethro's advice is in Exodus 18:21-23, *"Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee."* The need for leaders to assist Moses was there. The hard part was where to find these leaders. What criteria must these leaders have so that they did not become a hindrance but a blessing.

Moses must seek out godly leaders whom Jethro described here as "able men" who could give godly advice too. These able men must have three qualities:-

- **They must fear God** – To fear God means to be afraid of God. This is a good kind of fear. Every since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, man has always been afraid. Man is afraid of his future, his boss, the dark, animals and creepy crawlies, the unknown, viruses, and most of all, the monster called death! But when a person is born again, he need only fear God. This fear of God is the beginning of wisdom that drives him to accept Christ as his Lord and Saviour. This fear of God comes about when he realizes that he is a sinner because he has broken God's laws and that if he dies in his sins, he will end up in hell. God will send him there! After he accepts Christ and becomes a believer, the fear of God does not go away. This fear of God is different. Before salvation he fears that God will send him to hell after death. This new fear of God for believers is a healthy fear that keeps him from sinning. He does not want his God to be angry with him. He wants to please his God. He knows that his God is no respecter of persons.

When he fears God he does not fear man. There are many leaders who are man pleasers. They speak words that will please man. If they receive threats, these man-centered leaders would capitulate and become the pawns of these "fearsome" men. But when leaders fear God, they will not succumb to threats of death or to loss of property or freedom. They will fear nothing except their God. The fear of God gives them the courage that they need to do what is right all the time. These leaders will obey God's Word at all costs. They will not budge in their convictions and leadership positions. They will do their best to make all decisions according to God's Word and for His glory.

- **They must be men of truth** – These are men who also fear God. The first quality leads to the second. Without the first quality of fearing God, they cannot be men of truth! They must love God's truth. God's truth is the basis for the evaluation of all truths! This means that they need to know God's Word. The study of God's Word is paramount. Since God's perfect and holy Word is infinite, they will forever be students of God's Word. Leaders who do not study God's Word will be useless in the service of God.

They will make wrong decisions. Not only will they be useless in this sense, they will also hurt people by their bad advice. They will ruin the lives of those who listen to their bad advice. There is an elder who told church members that he is not interested in theology (which is the study of God's Word). His confession simply means that he hates God's truth. Not only is his leadership questionable, his salvation is also to be questioned. The Bible says that the Word of God is milk and meat to every believer. Every believer is spiritually alive because he has been born again, like a baby who is born into this world and who will drink milk and eat meat as he matures. This means that the elder could be spiritually dead, i.e. not born again in the first place! This is very terrifying but nevertheless true!

Leaders who love God's truth will always love all truths. Those who have no love for God's truth will also not love truth! Truth is always the basis for all decisions. When two persons come to a leader to arbitrate, truth will guide the leader in his decision making. He will not look at faces. He will be objective and courageous, will do what is right and will always take the side of truth in all that he decides. There is another elder who hates the truth. Two persons in the church had a quarrel and went to him for advice. Person A went to him first. After listening to A, the elder said that he was right and the other person was wrong! This encouraged A. Then person B went to him and told his story. The elder said that B was right and person A was wrong! Person B was also very encouraged. The elder left the matter as it was. Both A and B thought well of the elder and voted for him at the next church election. But the problem was that A and B were still angry with each other and the matter was unresolved. It should have been nipped in the bud when the problem was only in seedling form. Ultimately, it "bloomed" and the families "exploded" at one another! Sadly, this kind of elders is not rare. They are a dime a dozen. They destroy churches. Everywhere they go, they will ruin lives. Moses needed men of truth to help him make truthful decisions.

- **They must hate covetousness** – The next qualification naturally follows from the above two qualifications. The leaders must hate covetousness. To covet is to desire and take someone or something that belongs to others. The covetous person can be bought, either with money or luxury goods or even sex! The decision of the covetous varies from person to person; it depends on who can pay him what he wants the most. Again, these leaders are very common nowadays. There are pastors and elders who covet like bees for honey. There is a pastor who is so covetous that he is not ashamed to show it. When he speaks to someone, his eyes would scan the person from top to toe like a cashier who holds a scanner at the checkout counter scanning groceries. If this "pastor" sees a pen in the pocket or a watch on the wrist that is of some value, he is not ashamed to say that it is a very nice pen or watch, hoping that it would be offered to him as a gift. These covetous leaders have no shame. They would very blatantly show others that they are greedy. They would "butter up" to the rich ones in the congregation for personal gain.

However, leaders who hate covetousness cannot be bought with anything. Their lives are simple and without vice. They do not care for the things of the world. They would spend their lives using whatever material things that God has blessed them with for the betterment of their spiritual lives and to assist them in becoming better servants of God. To them, godliness with contentment is great gain! To have more material things means having to answer to God more for how they are to be used. Wealth is measured by the intangibles and not the tangibles.

These able leaders were to be appointed over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Matters that were too difficult for them to handle would be referred to Moses. This distribution of labour would enhance Moses' ministry and at the same time would build up the faith of the people in Israel.

Jethro's advice, if accepted, would reap great benefits. He concluded with Exodus 18:23, "*If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace.*" The benefits would be received by all and God would be glorified and the people edified. A wise leader knows that he needs other leaders. Calvary Pandan needs godly leaders, more so now than ever before as we see the day of the Lord fast approaching! Please pray for godly leaders and for yourself as you vote. Amen.