

Advice to Church Leaders III: Revealing Emotions

Text: ROMANS 1:8-15

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INTRODUCTION. During these past three weeks I have turned to the Bible in an attempt to find words that will encourage and challenge church leaders. And since every Christian should aspire to become a leader in the church, what I have said and will say today should eventually apply to the majority of us.

The first message I delivered in this series concerned itself with the topic of how to deal with criticism. The message the elder Apostle Paul delivered to the younger Timothy, recorded in 1 TIMOTHY 4, is very useful for leaders who find themselves under attack. When we are being criticized, we need to respond in a certain way. We need to work to silence the criticism while, at the same time, keeping our focus on doing what we know God wants us to do. I believe that is the defensive advice given to church leaders in 1 TIMOTHY 4.

But last week, when we turned to ROMANS 1, the emphasis shifted from defensive advice to offensive instruction. In the first seven verses of ROMANS 1 we observed how one of the greatest and strongest church leaders of all time went about establishing his identity and sharing a vision and defining his target group. When a leader does those three things well, he will become a tower of strength to his followers and a great frustration to his enemies.

Now today, we need to balance the picture out. Because if you only work hard at establishing your identity and sharing your vision and defining your target group without doing what today's scripture lesson is going to teach us to do, then your leadership will be deficient. It will lack warmth and tenderness. Today's scripture lesson has everything to do with emotions. It is about a leader's ability to allow himself to love the people he is leading. And, it is about a leader's need to reveal his emotion of love and caring to the people he is leading.

Of course, allowing ourselves to get emotionally involved is a very risky thing to do. People who do it usually end up making themselves vulnerable and getting hurt.

During my years of ministry in Taiwan, I had some experiences that will never forget. One day when I was riding as a passenger in my friend's car we passed by

an accident that had recently happened. The road we were traveling was not heavily traveled, and there was no other car in sight. What we saw was a man lying unconscious on the road with the motorcycle he had been riding on lying on its side about 50 feet from him. To my astonishment, my friend did not stop. He slowed down and swerved around the man so as not to hit him, but he did not stop. I said, "How can you not stop." He said that if we stopped and the man were dead or if he were to die while we were taking him to the hospital, we may very well be sued by the family. They might even accuse us of being the ones who hit him." But, I said, "doesn't it make you feel awful knowing that he might die because we failed to stop." And then, he shared with me a fact that others have also shared with me since then. "We Chinese are taught from childhood to suppress our emotions."

Listen, the guy had a point. If you allow yourself to become emotionally involved with the people around you, you will be taking a risk. You will increase your chances of getting hurt.

Nevertheless, today I am going to challenge you to take the risk and allow yourselves to become emotionally attached. If you have been taught to suppress your emotions, I want to challenge you to begin the process of learning how to release your emotions.

BECOMING EMOTIONALLY INVOLVED. Allowing ourselves to become emotionally attached to the people we are leading is the Biblical model that is set before us in ROMANS 1:8-15. Before looking at that model, I would like to explain why it is so important for us to balance the strong characteristics of a leader that we looked at last week with loving and caring emotions that we will be looking at today.

The strong characteristics talked about last week are absolutely essential to leadership. Whether or not we become emotionally engaged with the people we are leading, we need to establish our identity and clarify our message and determine our target group. Strong leadership can occur without emotional engagement. I have seen people do it, and I believe I have done it myself from time to time. If you adopt the model of the Apostle Paul's leadership presented in ROMANS 1:1-7, you will become a strong leader. Some people will admire you and some people will fear you. Your

confidence in yourself and your confidence in what you are doing will inspire some people and anger other people. You will be loved and you will be hated. That is the way it works 99% of the time.

So, you really don't have to become emotionally engaged to be a strong leader. However, my goal today is to convince all of us that we should get emotionally involved. We should because the Bible tells us that we should. The words recorded in ROMANS 12:15 read more like a command than a suggestion: "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." And, even though the words are spoken to Christians in general, Christian leaders are not exempt. Another reason why we should get emotionally involved is because it is impossible for people to completely disassociate the message from the messenger. If we refuse or fail to reveal to people our emotions of love and caring, it will have a negative impact on the message we are trying to communicate.

I remember once going to a photo studio with my family. The man taking the picture was a professional. He knew just how things should be set up and just where people should stand. But, he lacked warmth and emotion. His lack of emotion made us feel cold. I will never forget when it came time to take the picture, after he had us all positioned in the right places, he said, "Now pretend you are happy and smile."

I think a strong leader who does not emotionally engage with the people he leads is like that photographer. On the outside everything is going to appear right. But on the inside, something will be missing.

The message we are proclaiming should affect our whole being. The salvation we have experienced should impact our whole person, body and soul and spirit. Salvation is not just a spiritual and intellectual experience. It is also an emotional one, and the people we want to lead must see that it is.

So, Biblical mandate and a desire to increase the effectiveness of communicating the message are two good reasons to get emotionally involved. But, there is yet another reason, and it has to do with the fallen nature of people. People need to be reminded over and over again that they are loved and cared for, because their fallen natures cause doubts to arise in their minds. Husbands and wives need to reveal their emotions to each other on a regular basis. They need to say, "I love you." And, parents and children also need to reveal their love to each other.

As church leaders we should never assume that the people we are leading would not doubt our love for

them. Over a period of time doubts will enter into their minds. Sometimes the doubts will be justified because we have said or done things that give people the appearance that our love is not trustworthy. In such cases we must work to regain their trust while, at the same time, expressing our true emotions of care and concern. And then there will be other times when doubts will arise out of the insecurity and self-pity on the part of the people we are leading. Satan will take advantage of their weak fallen natures and cause the people we are trying to lead to think that we don't care about them when we really do.

Whether or not the doubts are justified, there will be doubts. And for this reason we need to work hard at revealing our **true** emotions of love and concern for the people we are leading, and we need to do it on a regular basis.

Now, let's take a look at ROMANS 1:8-15 and pay careful attention to the effort made by the Apostle Paul to reveal his emotions of love and concern for the church in Rome.

He begins in verse 8 by saying, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world." It was right for Paul not to assume that all who belonged to the church at Rome would feel he was interested in them. Paul had never met them before. He had not even lived in close proximity to them. He was coming from the East. Perhaps there was a false perception among those living in Rome that they were looked down upon by those from the church in Jerusalem. Our fallen natures often cause us to make comparisons and perceive things in ways that are not correct.

So, Paul began revealing his emotions by stating that he was truly interested in them. His interest was not based on any contact he had with them, nor was it based on the fact that they lived in Rome. It was based on the fact that they had a common faith and a common calling.

Have you ever marveled how two people who meet each other for the first time on their wedding day could actually end up with a marriage that survives? The fact that it happens is proof that physical contact and physical attraction are not the most important things in building a foundation to a relationship. A common faith and a common calling are far more important.

As leaders we should reveal our genuine interest in the people we are leading and let them know why we are interested in them. It is because of their faith in God, their desire to know and obey God and make Him known.

Continuing on with verse nine and the first half of verse 10 we read these words: "God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times." What kind of possible doubt does this emotional display of caring address?

One of the biggest challenges you will face as a church leader is the challenge of appearing too busy. Good leaders have a tendency to appear too busy to care about the needs of the average person. The Apostle Paul's own testimony portrays him as a tireless worker. In 1 THESSALONIANS 2:9 Paul wrote, "Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you." Paul was a busy man at Thessalonica. But, in his busyness, he was careful to reveal his emotions. In 1 THESSALONIANS 2:8 he wrote, "We loved you so much..."

Paul had never been to Rome, but he wanted them to know that he was not too busy to pray for them at all times. "As God is my witness, I want you to know that I pray for you at all times." As leaders in the church it is our duty to serve the church, but we must never forget that the "church" is each individual for whom Christ died, and each individual must become an object of our compassionate concern.

Then, look at the second half of verse ten. "And I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you." In other words, 'I really long to see you and the fact that I haven't been able to see you has nothing to do with my lack of desire.' God's slaves do not come and go as they please. They are directed, and constrained by the Holy Spirit (ACTS 16:6-10). As God's slave Paul prayed that "now at last by God's will the way may be opened." The more I read this section of scripture, the more I feel I am reading a love letter. It is so full of passion.

Move on to verses 11-12. "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith." Here we see the Apostle declaring the motive behind his emotion. The reason why he cares to come so much is because he desires to edify them with his gifts and he desires to be edified. He not only desires to help them, but he desires to be helped by them. That's about as honest as you can get.

We make ourselves vulnerable as leaders when we reveal to people that we need help. It may cause them to lose their confidence in our ability to lead. But we are weak human beings like everyone else.

Last Friday, I had planned to spend my day preparing

for a sermon and getting ready for a heavy weekend of ministry. But every time I tried to concentrate all I could think about was the four-year-old girl lying in a hospital bed, fighting for her life, and the suffering being experienced by her family. For two days I had trouble thinking about anything else, and I had trouble sleeping at night. For periods of time I found myself weeping uncontrollably. When I attended the Chinese New Year's Celebration last Friday night with all the joking and laughing, the last thing I felt like doing was participating in a lot of joking and laughing. By Saturday night, I felt like an emotional basket case. I know I am hired to this position to help other people know God more, but there are times that I desperately need the help of other people so that I, too, can draw close to God. You and I must take the risk of revealing our need to the people we are leading.

In verses 11 and 12 Paul not only addresses the possible doubts of people who thought he may be coming with ulterior motives, he also made himself vulnerable by revealing his own need to be helped by the church in Rome.

In verse 13 we see the Apostle addressing another possible doubt. It is one thing to tell people that we care about them and long to see them, but that is usually not enough to gain their trust. I can tell my family that I want to take them on a vacation, but unless I actually put it on the calendar and make reservations somewhere, they are likely to doubt my sincerity. It is not enough for a church committee to say, "we desire to make improvements." People want a plan. That is why so many hours were put into coming up with a three-year plan for our church.

Paul wanted the people in Rome to know that he had a plan. In fact, when his first plan did not work out, he tried a second plan. He planned many times to come to Rome. The fact that none of his plans worked out had to do with factors beyond his control. Paul eventually got to Rome, but not as he had planned. The important thing to understand here is that he had tried

When I first arrived at this church, I was handed a five-year plan for our church that was just being initiated. A year into that plan people were making demands for another plan. Now we have a three-year plan, but should we be surprised if yet another plan is called for before three years are up? I think the important thing is not that our plans are successful, but that we are planning. If there is no attempt at making any plans, then people will doubt the sincerity of our compassion for them as people and for their needs. It is better for the people to doubt our ability to make good plans than it is for them to doubt our love and concern for them. Paul wanted to remove any

such doubt. He wanted them to know that his love for them was sincere.

The words recorded in verses 14-15 reveal a sense of obligation. "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome." Paul's emotions were not in conflict with his calling. In fact, his emotion of eagerness to go to Rome and preach the gospel there was based on his calling. What He desired to do is also what He knew God wanted him to do. The people you are leading need to know that you believe you are called by God to lead them.

APPLICATION. I hope that last week and this week's brief survey of ROMANS 1:1-15 is able to leave you with a model of leadership that we all can use as we learn to lead ourselves. We need to be strong leaders with a clear understanding of who we are and vision of what we want to communicate and to whom we are communicating. But we also need to be leaders who are full of love and concern for those that we are leading. And we need to communicate our love and

concern, not only because the Bible mandates that we do, but because we will have trouble communicating the gospel message if we don't.

When the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome, he did not have in mind a group of scholars and theologians who would take the letter and use it as material with which they could debate one another. So often these days, that is how the letter is used. But I don't think anyone would be more surprised than Paul himself to see how this precious letter has been used so much by one group of people to win arguments and even inflict wounds upon another group of people.

Paul had passion in his heart to help people who needed help. He truly loved them and felt obligated to help them. That is why he wrote the letter. Unless we approach the Epistle of Romans the same way, we will be off course before we even get started. May God grant to all of us a balance in the way we lead so that the people we are trying to influence can receive the help they need through the gospel that we preach.