

Preachers' Pen Points

How Leadership Affects Church Growth & Decline



One of the most significant controllable factors in church decline is the failure of church leaders to give the church a unified vision of evangelism and an efficient management of church work or goals. On the other hand, one of the most powerful contributions to church growth is an united, visionary, and dedicated leadership that inspires the church to involvement, growth, and service. The church looks to its elders, deacons, and preachers to provide this leadership through teaching, planning, and implementation of church work. As leadership guru John Maxwell says, “Everything rises and falls on leadership”. I truly believe it!

Leadership that hurts or helps

Leaders who are growing personally through private and joint Bible study can give the church the Scriptural guidance and teaching they need to grow personally and to work together toward divinely authorized goals (Ac. 20:28). When leaders refuse to study with open minds and to respect the teaching of the Scriptures, the church may suffer spiritual malaise and apostasy.

Leaders that are rigidly committed to traditions without adequate understanding of the principles that created them will find it difficult to make the needed changes the church must make to continue to effectively reach their changing communities with the gospel. Leaders who understand the principles of Scriptural authority will be able to make Scriptural adjustments in order for the church to work more effectively in their changing culture (Col. 3:17).

Leaders who treat each other with consideration and respect will maintain a happy working relationship and derive together positive and useful recommendations for the congregation (1 Tim. 5:17). However, when leaders fail to communicate kindly and work to undermine one another, the church will become frustrated and quickly lose respect.

When leaders misuse the people they are leading by harsh treatment or by refusal to listen to and address their concerns, the church will suffer (James 3:17). But when leaders love their flock and seek to engage them with warmth and with patience, and help them to develop their abilities with words of appreciation and encouragement the church will prosper.

When leaders do not involve the people in the discussion and implementation of church goals, the church will respond with indifference and a lack of involvement. Consequently, good leaders realize that the church is motivated by the opportunity to participate in the formation of church goals and to be fully informed about the church’s work. Though leaders Scripturally reserve for themselves the right to provide guidance to the church and to expect their advice to be respected based on their spiritual maturity, it is also important to generate the approval and support of the congregation through a reasoned approach to the congregation and an open discussion of the work (Ac. 6:1-6).

Let us all pray that God will raise up among us leaders who understand these things and are committed to leadership excellence.

—Johnny Felker

(Final note: I would urge each reader to be cautious in making unfair applications of these principles to our leaders past and present. Each member should understand that good leaders are ultimately powerless if they are not supported by good followers. More on this in my next article in this series.)