

## How to Lead

Romans 12:8e

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

Last week we talked about terrorism and how widespread it is in our world. We mentioned that the unique thing about terrorists is that they are bent on destruction of whatever order still exists in our world. Their aim is simply the creation of anarchy or chaos or lawlessness or rulelessness. We also said that lawlessness is one of those signs that the beginnings of the birth pangs of the end of the age are upon us. Jesus indicated in many ways that when you and I are faced with a choice between chaos and the only other choice--totalitarianism--we will choose totalitarianism, and that eventually when such chaos rages among us nationally and internationally, we will welcome that great anti-Christ figure that will rise up and impose order on world trade and international relations if we will submit our wills absolutely to him. Jesus indicated that we will in fact do that, and eventually the only thing that will deliver the world from absolute destruction is his return when he will defeat that figure, but only after many millions of us have been destroyed by that anti-Christ.

Now loved ones, that is the kind of truth that is described very clearly in the Bible and you might want to look at verses that express that word for word. II Thessalonians 2:1-10: "Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming. The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved."

I don't know if you know the meaning of verse 6: "And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time." That is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who works not only through Jesus' body but through the law courts, the police forces and all sources of authority, He is managing to restrain chaos in the world. I think every one of us will agree it is with great difficulty. Actually verse 7 is something that we can already see taking place. "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way." In other words, there will come a time when the Holy Spirit is no longer restraining chaos through what we call the "common grace" or the general revelation that is available to all people through the forces of law and order. Gradually that Holy Spirit will be grieved until he is no longer in a position to withhold chaos and lawlessness.

One of the chief gifts that God has used to hold back the tide of chaos which is always ready to burst upon us is leadership--the gift of leadership. Whether it is Abraham Lincoln in this country, whether it is Churchill in Britain or whether it is Ghandi in India, God has always used the gift of

leadership as the last bulwark that stands between humanity and chaos. We must admit it has amazed us how leaders tend to crop up just at the very moment when they are needed. It does seem that the gift of leadership is one of God's primary bulwarks to keep back the tide of lawlessness that will make way for the anti-Christ to come. That is why we all are so concerned about the Libyan thing. The issue is not whether there is a "hit squad" or not, is it? The real issue is that we all believe that there may be a hit squad, and that there are gunmen on the roof of the White House because they are beginning to take seriously the possibility that a man like Ghaddafi of Libya could actually send a hit squad to destroy the effective leader that we have in our country.

Loved ones, do you see that this is a pattern that is developing in our world? Do you see that Satan's primary aim is to destroy any effective leadership that there is? It is not an issue whether we agree with John F. Kennedy or not. The issue is not whether we agree with Robert Kennedy or not. The issue isn't what your politics are. The issue is that we are losing people who have been effective leaders among us, and that it is assuming a pattern of destruction that fits in with the whole prophecy in the Bible that eventually lawlessness and anarchy will break out among us. Now loved ones, that is actually what the spirit of lawlessness is about -- to destroy effective leadership wherever it exists, because it is one of the last protectors of this world of ours against the spirit of lawlessness.

It is every one of you here that is a dad or mom. I think you make a mistake here when you think it is Reagan. [Ronald Reagan -president of USA in 1980s] It is everyone of you here that is a dad or mom; it is every one of you who is a husband or wife. Now you who aren't one of those, it is every one of you that is an older brother or sister. I think sometimes we don't take that seriously. A senior roommate may say, "No, that isn't me." But yes, a senior roommate knows fine well he or she has an authority and can actually insure that some order remains in the home. It is the same with all of us who are leaders in Jesus' body--everyone who heads a family group, everybody who heads one of the houses, a Sunday school teacher, everybody who is a teacher in a day school or a professor at a university. Everyone of us who gives a lead to others. We, however weak we think we are, are part of God's last protection against the increasing tide of lawlessness that is moving towards the end times. Every one of us who is a choir director or heads up a work crew; everyone of us who is a boss in our own secular jobs, everyone who is a senior secretary, a foreman, a director, a president or a manager. Loved ones, everyone of us who takes the lead either habitually or from time to time are part of the gift of leadership that God has placed in this world to protect us in these last days. And you and I are either making it easier or harder for the spirit of lawlessness to take over. Whether we are involved in refusing to lead where we know we should be leading or whether we are involved in insensitive dictatorship, we are either making it easier or harder for the spirit of lawlessness to take over our world. That is why I thought we should spend just one more Sunday talking particularly about how to lead. Obviously we can't cover the whole subject but at least we could learn some things.

Now maybe you would look at that verse again, and I would just mention to you the various translations that occur in different English versions of the Bible. Romans 12:8 is part of a series of verses that detail the gifts that God gives. Of course leadership is a gift. Verse 8 runs: "He who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal"--and the word is actually "proistemi." It does not mean "give aid"; it means he who stands in front, who takes the lead, who is in a position of authority, who is a leader, let him do it with zeal. Now I'll read you some of the other translations. The King James Version runs: "He who ruleth, with diligence." Phillip's English translation says, "Let the man who wields authority think of his responsibility." The New English Bible reads: "If you are a leader exert yourself to lead." The

Living Bible runs: "If God has given you administrative ability and put you in charge of the work of others, take the responsibility seriously."

Jesus, of course, is the best commentator on the meaning of the Greek word that is translated "zeal". It is the word "spoude" and it means "with zeal, with enthusiasm, with eagerness, with speed, with haste and with despatch." You should lead with enthusiasm, with despatch, with haste, with promptness, with eagerness, with conscientiousness and with careful earnestness. It includes all those things. Jesus is the best commentator by his words and life.

So I would point you to some of his words. Matthew 9:35-36 is one of those compassionate and pitiful verses in the real meaning of the word pitiful--full of pity. "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." That is what your children are if you don't lead them; that is what your Sunday school class is if you won't exercise authority; that is what your family group is; that is what your house is. You who are bosses through the week, you may not believe it, but that is what your employees are--they are sheep without a shepherd. God only gives leadership to you because it is needed. If you don't exercise that leadership in love, they are sheep without a shepherd. They are unprotected and will be savaged by the wolves of chaos around them.

I don't know if you have seen it with your loved ones, I've certainly seen it with mine. If you don't lead the wee souls are lost, not because they are less clever than you, but because you are the leader. If you won't speak up, chaos rages. The lynching mob always results from a leader who has not led. Loved ones, those dear ones of yours are sheep without a shepherd, they are lost and they will be consumed.

Do you see what a high and holy honor it is for you or me to lead anybody? Who are you? Who am I? We are poor, pitiful little creatures and the great God of the universe is so gracious as to give to you a person who looks to you for leadership. One is one too many for anyone of us. It is a high and holy and sacred honor that anybody should look to us, so don't take it casually. Those dear souls depend on you to lead them, and if you don't lead them their blood will be upon your head. I know this miserable, permissive society of ours has encouraged us not to lead, but that is false! That is anti-Christ stuff. The world is dying; your sheep are sheep without a shepherd if you do not lead.

It follows on from there if you look at another comment that is quoted of Jesus in Ephesians 5:25. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." The first job of the leader is to love those who follow him. Jesus did not get into a corner and say, "That miserable church! It won't follow me! They won't follow me! They won't obey me; they won't look up to me as their great leader!" Jesus got a towel and basin and won the heart of the church and gave himself up for her. Then he took a cross and gave himself up completely. To lead somebody you first love them. That means as a leader you are a strange, different kind of person. Where other people say, "God, my family, then myself," you are one, unfortunate or fortunate, who is called to say, "God, my family, those whom I lead." If you are sitting there crying and saying, "Where does 'self' come in?" It doesn't! If you say, "Who will look after my 'self'?" Better ask Jesus. He would probably say, "I'm in good shape. My Father looks after me, and I assure you he will look after you."

Loved ones, a leader's first job is to put the welfare and the security of those who follow him in

place of himself. That is what that verse really means. We are just in the silliness of our society's heresies. We have misinterpreted the plainest statement that God made--love your neighbor as yourself. We say, "I can't love my neighbor unless I love myself. So I'll love myself. Now I can love my neighbor." That is silly stuff. Jesus made it plain. He didn't love himself in the sense that he looked after himself or protected himself, but he put others first. He loved them instead of himself. That is what we need to do. He puts the welfare of those who follow him in place of his own welfare and He forgets about Himself.

Now, the killer is, many of us are very ready to give up our children or our wives. That is, we say to them, "The affection that I give you is 'Corban'--given to God--and I can't give it to you. I have to give it to those whom I lead." That is heresy! The truth is you love God with all your heart, your family with all your heart, and then instead of loving yourself, you love those whom you lead. What happens when you forget yourself like that is you find you have plenty of affection and time to go around for everybody--God, your family and those whom you lead. Actually, loved ones, do you realize it is self--big ugly self--that seems to make it impossible to lead and love those whom you lead, and love those who live with you at the same time. The first task is to love those whom we lead.

Do you know what results then? What results is such empathy with the dear hearts that trust you, that you never give them a command that they won't obey. That is the secret of leadership. You know them so well that you never give them a command they won't obey. You know what they will do before you tell them to do it. Except a rare occasion as Jesus did at times when you give them a command that you know they will disobey so as to reveal their hearts to them. But a leader is not somebody who is caught off balance by the rebellion of those who follow him. He is someone who knows them so well, loves them so well, walks in their shoes, puts his heart in their heart so well, that he knows how they will respond. And so he leads them gently on from easy steps to hard steps.

Now apart from that leading from behind, which all good leadership is--leading from behind, leading from the moccasins and shoes of those who follow you--there is a real leading from in front. A leader has to be somebody who leads in front too. A leader is one who looks for chaos wherever he can find it. He almost glories when he sees a dirty job and rushes towards it. He almost glories in a difficult, embarrassing situation that he can deal with. A leader is someone who leads forward in front. He is not somebody who does Gallup Polls and says, "Now what do you all think?" or "Would you tell me what I should do?" He is not a guy who tries to lead by the vote of the majority. He is not a fellow who tries to lead by the decision of a committee and then he will be the spokesman. He is a guy or a girl who leads from in front and never hesitates to run towards a difficult situation or confrontation when he needs to. I don't know if you have decided that in yourself, but you have to be like that. You can't be a leader and hope to avoid difficult situations. You can't be a leader and hope to get everybody else to do the dirty jobs. You must be the first guy to do the dirty job. You must be the first girl to deal with the difficult, embarrassing situation. So a leader leads from the front.

A leader is also someone who leads somewhere. He is somebody who moves by intuition of God so that he has plans and designs that fit in with the overall purposes of whatever operation he is part of, and that is what preoccupies his mind. That is the main thrust of his thinking. He isn't thinking all the time, "Am I a good leader or a bad leader?" He hasn't time for that stuff. He doesn't think, "Do people agree or disagree with me?" He hasn't time for that. He doesn't think, "Is this person trying to undermine my leadership or not?" He doesn't think, "Is my future secure?" He doesn't think, "Am I comfortable in my position?" He or she is a man or woman who is preoccupied with where

they are going, with the objectives that they have in mind, and then they move relentlessly, continuously and irrevocably toward those objectives all the time. A leader is one who leads somewhere. If he is sensible he will know that there are snipers all around. The job of the lawless world is to snipe at leaders. That is an occupational hazard that he has, but he has to keep moving in a definite direction. Loved ones, those are some of the things I think that a good leader does, and he does them with enthusiasm, zeal, encouragement and devotion.

What is the heart of a good leader? The heart of a good leader is probably the same heart that is in Jesus. The inertia of this fallen world, the immovability of this fallen world is so solid that it will only yield to faith that destroys the principalities and powers that hold it in position. So everyone who leads knows that at the end of the day there is something mysterious about leadership. There is something kind of miraculous about it. Every leader realized what Bismarck said. If there was an iron man it was Bismarck of Germany. He said every statesman listens for the footsteps of God. And every leader listens for the footsteps of God, because he knows that it isn't his leadership ability that makes the world change. It is him simply doing what God's Spirit guides him to do at the right moment, and then God seems to send billions of angels and they change the situation.

Now, out of love for us, He gives to those of us who follow and those who lead some feeling that maybe we have something to do with it. Actually we don't have anything to do with it. It is God in his miraculous power that destroys the walls of Jericho. It is God in his miraculous power that hauls us through this recession and brings us into some kind of financial stability. All leaders do is what God guides them in the intuition of their spirit to do and let the chips fall where they may. Of course what is crippling all of us who are leaders today, is the preoccupation with where the chips will fall. There is a great lack of courage, a great lack of grand abandonment, which is the fun of leadership, a great preoccupation with ourselves and what everybody thinks of us. Loved ones, the heart of a leader, be it a mom or a dad or a wife or a teacher or a foreman or a manager, is they commit themselves into a faith enterprise, whatever will happen to themselves.

Maybe that is best exemplified in Jesus. To lead you do it yourself first. If you call people to take up a cross you take up the cross first yourself. Then you delegate a little of the weight of it to somebody following you, just as a father delegates the clearing of the front path to his eight year old or a sales manager delegates the dealing with the sixty day receivables to his colleague. A leader takes up the cross first and then delegates a little of the weight of it to somebody who is following him. Then he orientates that person to what he has asked them to do--tells them all the implications of it, explains to them so that the person understands it as completely as the leader himself. Then he invigilates, he watches lovingly over the person so that that person develops steadfastness and consistency over the months and years, much as a shepherd watches carefully over his sheep. You delegate, you orientate and you invigilate until the others begin to do what you are doing, and then you find yourself multiplying. That is God's plan for us.

Even if you just lead a little dog or if you lead a child, that is a great privilege. Then if you are privileged enough to lead a wife or a number of people at work or to lead people in the body of Jesus, lead with diligence, with promptness and willingness and self forgetfulness. God at the last day will show us our fruit. Until then never look at what fruit you have. Be too busy leading. If you will be faithful, loved ones, God may be able to grant us some more years to contact the four billion loved ones who do not know him in this world of ours. We need all the time we can win, so I encourage you to lead, and lead with diligence.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we have so often taken the little job of leadership casually, thinking it is unimportant. Lord, we see you are testing us to see what we are going to do with one talent before you give us five. You are looking at us and saying, "If you are faithful over a little thing, I will make you a master of a great thing. Lord, we would repent of any casual, irresponsible attitude we have had claiming it was unimportant. Lord Jesus we see the care you took with just twelve men. Lord, we thank you when we consider how little we are when compared with you and we see how much you have given into our care. Lord, we would commit ourselves to leading -- to holding back this tide of lawlessness as long as you give us grace to do it, so that you may speak to the hearts of those billions in Africa, Asian, Australia and South America and China who do not know you. Lord, we commit ourselves to lead with delight and joy from this day forward.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us today and throughout this week. Amen.