

A Gold Medal Evangelism Team Leader, Part Two

As leaders in the field of Biblical evangelism, we know that our goal is to win. We want to win souls and win believers over to Biblical evangelism. Winning involves a high cost, which we examined in the first part of this essay. Although we are willing to pay that price, it does not mean that we are willing to “win at all costs.” In our society, someone who wants to win “at all costs” is someone who might even be willing to sacrifice his or her integrity in order to win the prize. In the past, evangelists have often times been rightly accused of doing that very thing. For some, the word “evangelist” is synonymous with the words “hypocrite”, “charlatan”, and “con-artist.” As Biblical evangelists, the onus is on us to live lives of integrity because the eternal destinies of the lost hang in the balance. This brings us to our second goal from 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

2. Our second goal is to lead with integrity.

It was recently pointed out on the message board that the word “integrity” is the most checked word on Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary. It seems ironic that in a culture where real integrity is slighted that people are interested in finding out what the word means. Perhaps there is an underlying hunger in our culture to see men and women of integrity in action.

So what does the word mean? According to the Second College Edition of The American Heritage Dictionary it means, “Rigid adherence to a code or standard of values” (pages 667-668). As believers, we have the highest code, the highest standard; the Word of God. We, of all people, ought to lead the way in integrity. How can we be leaders of integrity according to 1 Corinthians 9:26?

Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

The first way we can lead with integrity is to lead with confidence. In verse 26 Paul speaks with certainty. Using the analogy of the runner, he runs with confidence. Switching to the analogy of the boxer, he swings his fists as one that is looking to land devastating blows on his opponent, not as a shadow boxer. In other words, Paul is goal oriented. He is purpose driven (tongue planted firmly in cheek). He’s not out for a Sunday morning stroll; he’s running the race to win. He’s not playing patty-cake; he’s coming out of his corner swinging.

Are you focused? Or do the smallest things distract you from succeeding as a leader?

Sometimes small things that appear worthy of our attention distract us. A good example of this comes from Sanders' book, "Spiritual Discipleship":

"There is an interesting Greek story of Atlanta and Hippomenes. The fleet-footed Atlanta challenged any young man to a race. The reward of victory would be her hand in marriage. The penalty of defeat would be death. She must have been a very attractive girl, for a number of men accepted the challenge, only to lose the race and their lives as well.

"Hippomenes, too, accepted her challenge, but before setting out on the race, he secreted on his person three golden apples. When the race began, Atlanta easily outstripped him. He took out a golden apple and rolled it in front of her. The glitter of the gold caught her eye, and as she stopped to pick it up, he shot past her. She quickly recovered and again outdistanced him. Another golden apple rolled across her track, and again she stopped to pick it up, allowing Hippomenes again to sweep past her. The goal was near and he was ahead, but once more she overtook him. Seizing his last chance, he rolled the third apple, and while Atlanta waived, Hippomenes reached the tape. They were married and lived happily ever after!" (page 87)

Our enemy is skilled in the art of rolling golden apples in front of us (Galatians 5:7). It is only when we love the Lord and the lost more than the dainties of this world that we will be as focused as we should be. What are some of the golden apples that Satan has rolled in front of you?

But how is confidence a matter of integrity? In our pluralistic culture confidence is interpreted as arrogance, especially when it comes to making truth claims. Should we act as if we are uncertain about the truth for the sake of appeasing the intellectuals? Won't this help us communicate the Gospel more effectively if we allow that we might be wrong? Won't the lost see us as more "reasonable" if we are open to questioning the Gospel?

God forbid! If we know the truth about the only message that can save from sin, judgment and Hell we lack integrity if we act like we aren't sure about its truth! Worse, we are liars! Nevertheless, without naming names, there are ministries out there that claim to be evangelistic which give the impression to the lost that we are willing to renegotiate certain elements of the Gospel. When we give the lost the impression that we are not sure that they must repent and believe the Gospel in order to go to Heaven, we lie to them.

But to bring it back to the way that we lead our evangelism teams, we need to lead these soundly saved believers with confidence. We need to prayerfully make our plans and then execute them. Once we are convinced that the Lord has shown us where we need to do our next outreach, we need to follow through with that plan no matter what golden apple the enemy rolls in front of us. If we make plans with our teams and then change those plans on a regular basis, our team members will begin to question our stability and ability as leaders. Our instability in planning can easily be interpreted as an integrity issue. Some might even begin to accuse us of lying if we promise to do one thing and then do another.

This is not to say that we should not be sensitive to the leading of the Lord. If we make plans and then the Lord reveals that we should be leading our teams elsewhere, we obviously need to listen to Him. Satan can use people on our teams to create dissension and bring false accusations. Most of the time, the Lord has to re-direct us at the last minute because we haven't sought His leading enough in our plans to begin with. This is why it's so important to bathe our planning in prayer. Then we can lead our teams with confidence, knowing that it's the Lord's will we are doing and not ours.

On to verse 27:

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

The second way that we can lead with integrity is to radically pursue self denial. In the context of verses 26-27 Paul is literally saying that he delivers the "knock-out punch" to himself. He wants to bring his body under "subjection": this means literally to "bring into servitude". In other words, Paul is saying that he brings his physical body and its desires into service to a surrendered life.

How does that happen? It comes back to what the Lord Jesus said in Luke 9:23. It's a daily act of denial of self, willingness to die, and radical obedience to Christ. It also relates to what Paul said in Romans 6:13. We need to surrender ourselves to God and our bodies as instruments of righteousness.

Once we have done that, self is irrelevant. The words "my ministry", "my accomplishments", "my goals" are stricken from our vocabularies. One who is truly crucified with Christ is dead and self is no longer an issue. We cannot be offended because dead men do not have any rights.

A.W. Tozer once wrote, "The victorious Christian neither exalts nor downgrades himself. His interests have shifted from self to Christ. What he is or is not no longer concerns him. He believes that he has been crucified with Christ and he is not willing to either praise or deprecate such a man."

Are you easily offended by your team members? By the lost who don't know any better? If so, you have not self inflicted the knock out punch. You have not been nailed to the cross in identification with Christ. You have not surrendered. Remember that "minister" means "to serve." No one can serve with a proud spirit. A servant is by definition humble. Considering how proud we are in the flesh, what is required is that we be broken. Nothing has the power to break like a cross.

What is the danger if we don't submit to this spiritual discipline of surrender? The end of verse 27 serves us warning: we can be disqualified.

John MacArthur writes, "Paul drew this metaphor of disqualification straight from the Isthmian games. When the games began a herald would enter the stadium with great pageantry. A trumpet was blown to call everyone to attention. Then the herald stood on a platform. He would announce the contest, read the names of all the contestants, and proclaim the rules. Of course, the rules were absolute and binding. Any infraction meant immediate disqualification. *Paul said he did not want to be the guy who proclaimed the rules but then disqualified himself by violating them*" (The Book On Leadership, pages 159-160).

If we are not disciplined in the area of absolute surrender, we run the risk of being labeled "hypocrite." Very little needs to be said about this; the very thought of being a hypocrite is enough to turn our stomachs. It certainly turns the stomachs of those who are lost! Imagine the horror of a shipwrecked ministry, all because we are not willing to be disciplined by the Cross of Christ. Because we would rather have our agendas than to walk with Christ in humility.

Ultimately ministries are not destroyed in the dark of some cheap motel room. They are not shipwrecked because of unlimited access to a checkbook. They are ruined when we succumb to the temptation to believe that we are indispensable because we are "something." That's where the downfall begins. It might end in a motel room or in jail, but it begins with pride. If only pride were as revolting to us as the thought of the cheap motel or stealing!

Every great athlete started with a commitment. They had an experience when they were inspired by other great athletes or the possibility of winning the gold medal. Likewise, every great leader starts with a once and for all, life changing commitment to subject themselves to the rigorous discipline of the Christian life. They embrace denying themselves, placing themselves at risk for the sake of reaching the lost, sacrificing all in order to advance the Kingdom of God, exchanging worldly pursuits for the things that really matter. But it all starts with that once and for all, life changing commitment to do whatever it takes to win in the eyes of our Lord.

Have you made that commitment?

Works Cited

MacArthur Jr., John The Book On Leadership n.p.: Nelson Books, 2004.

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