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LEADERSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP

Part 2: The Costs of Leadership

by Gary North

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish (Luke 14:28-30).

Jesus instructed us to count the costs of our dreams and actions. This is a crucially important principle in every area of life. It is not easy to follow this principle. When we do accurately count the costs of our decisions, however, our success becomes far more attainable. Much of the wealth of the modern world is based on the fourteenth-century invention of double-entry bookkeeping. It was no easy task to discover a means of counting the costs of a business's operations. Double-entry bookkeeping literally revolutionized the world.

Jesus warned us to count the costs in advance. Counting them retroactively can produce a disaster, He said. It can lead to one's public humiliation. But how can we count anything in advance? We cannot do this with great accuracy. We see the future as through a glass, darkly (1 Cor. 13:12). At best, we can make informed estimates about future costs and benefits. We should do our best to consider everything we can think of that might go wrong with our plans. We should acknowledge the reality of the anonymous Murphy's world-famous law: "If anything can go wrong, it will." Also its corollary: "At the worst possible time."

Because men are self-centered, believing that they deserve the best that this world has to offer—and also the next world—we tend to overestimate the future benefits of our actions. Similarly, we tend to underestimate the costs. We think that net returns to us will normally be positive and high. This is a very risky assumption, Jesus warned. To overcome this tendency toward high-risk ventures, He admonished us to estimate the costs. The text indicates that the bad things that can happen to us should be our focus in constructing our plans. That is to say, the good things will take care of themselves. It was Adam's sin that he refused to count the costs, while he simultaneously overestimated the benefits. In a sin-filled world, the bad things that can happen should be at the center of our attention as we formulate our plans. This is a fundamental biblical principle of success: **try to eliminate the likelihood of the bad things that might reasonably happen.** This principle is encapsulated in the investor's motto: "Cut your losses, and let your profits run."

Today, we are told about the power of positive thinking. Liberal preacher Norman Vincent Peale—a member of a denomination that is formally Calvinist—wrote a best-selling book with this title in the early 1950's. This outlook is basic to what is sometimes called the "think and grow

rich" movement, the title of a famous book by Napoleon Hill. This movement has proclaimed an almost mystical-magical view of positive thinking: mind over matter, mind over history. This is utterly opposed to Jesus' message in Luke 14. We are to plan rationally, not visualize hopefully. We are to focus our attention in advance on the bad things that might thwart our plans. We are not to be overwhelmed by the thought of the bad things that can happen, any more than Jesus was overwhelmed at the prospects of His crucifixion. We are to make contingency plans to overcome these bad possibilities. But we totally misread the Scriptures if we see the story of the garden of Gethsemane—the Second Adam's garden of ethical testing—as "Jesus Goes on a Picnic." It should be called instead: "Jesus Makes a Depressing Cost-Benefit Estimate."

Underestimating the Costs of Leadership

It is not easy to count the costs. What is all too easy is to underestimate them. Consider the estimate made by James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Matt. 4:1), regarding the costs of leadership.

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father (Matt. 20:20-23).

They would both drink of His cup, they assured Him confidently. Yet what was Jesus' own assessment of this price, the estimate He made in Gethsemane? "And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). He had accurately counted the cost. It was higher than He wanted to pay, but for God's sake, he offered to pay it. The sons of Zebedee and their mother, however, had not counted the cost. They were only too ready to pay a cost that they had not accurately estimated. Their willingness to rush in where the Son of God feared to tread was matched by the other disciples.

And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gen-

titles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:24-28).

Jesus reiterated the biblical principle of leadership on another occasion: "And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all" (Mark 9:33-35).

Sacrifice: Covenantal vs. Romantic

We see this principle taken to an illegitimate extreme in the naval principle that a captain should always go down with his ship. This is an evil principle. There is nothing sacred about a tool. A ship has no claim on its captain's life. A captain should remain on board his sinking ship until everyone else has left it. He is supposed to remain on board, not as a courageous gesture, not as a romantic gesture, but because he alone is authorized to give supreme orders. It is his authority to give orders that necessitates his remaining on board until there is no one else on board to give orders to. Then he should abandon the ship. Not to do so is to waste a precious resource: himself.

The most decisive naval battle of World War II was the Battle of Midway, June 4-6, 1942. At about 10:30 a.m., June 4, American dive bombers attacked three of Japan's four largest aircraft carriers. The fourth was out of the area; it was attacked and permanently disabled later in the day. All three carriers were destroyed. Yanagimoto, the captain of the stricken *Soryu*, refused to abandon ship. He was loved and respected by his crew. His men sent a Navy wrestling champion, Chief Petty Officer Abe, to remove the captain from the bridge, forcibly if necessary. But the grim determination of the captain prevented Abe from attempting to carry him to the waiting lifeboat. Abe turned back; as he departed, he heard the captain singing the national anthem. The ship carried 718 bodies to a watery grave, one more than was biblically authorized.

The next day, the disabled and abandoned fourth carrier, *Hiryu*, was deliberately sunk by Japanese torpedoes. Admiral Yamaguchi and Captain Kaku both refused to abandon ship despite the pleading of their men. The magnitude of this loss was described in 1955 by Mitsuo Fuchida, who had led the air attack on Pearl Harbor and who had barely escaped death at Midway (and who later became a Christian evangelist): "With the death of Admiral Yamaguchi the Japanese Navy lost one of its most brilliant officers. He had generally been considered the most likely successor to Admiral Yamamoto for the post of Commander in Chief Combined Fleet." The price of this pagan Japanese military tradition was too high.

Suicide for personal honor's sake is a pagan principle. It is also militarily foolish. In General Patton's immortal words to his troops: "Your job is not to die for your country. Your job is to get the other poor bastard to die for his country." What the Bible teaches is that **leaders should sacrifice their personal interests for the sake of God's interests**. These interests are represented hierarchically through a chain of command: superior authority (headquarters) and subordinate authority (troops). Like David, who killed a bear and a lion for the sake of the sheep trapped in the killers' mouths (1 Sam. 17:34-36), so is the leader in every battlefield. To stay at one's post until those under one's authority are safe is an act of loyalty to God. It is

not a romantic act; it is a covenantal act.

The Supreme Servant

Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. This is because He performed His Father's work flawlessly. He bore the sacrificial cup because this was His Father's will. Christ's perfect servitude is the judicial basis of His supreme command.

This supreme commander has many followers. God the Father drafts His Son's followers into the army of the Lord. They appear to be volunteering for service, but this is an illusion: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). The use of the Greek word translated here and elsewhere as "draw" indicates forcible removal from one place to another, in the sense of **dragged**:

Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, and hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken (John 21:11).

But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? (James 2:6).

When we say that a person has joined the armed services, our language conforms to the biblical model of authority. The phrase "civil service," as it applies to government bureaucrats, is formally correct. Those who exercise civil authority Paul calls **ministers** (Rom. 13:4). That is, they minister to the people by serving as God's agents of covenantal wrath against evil-doers (Rom. 13:4). The problem arises when these servants, who possess lawful government authority through ordination, cease to act as servants and begin to act as tyrants.

This risk is inherent in the nature of authority. The shift in attitude from servant to master is the product of two factors: the power inherent in the office and the sin inherent in men (James 4:1). Those who see the primary blessings of official authority as access to power and status rather than the blessing of serving God for His glory have misunderstood the nature of leadership. They are like those people who forget that God brings corporate blessings in history to those who obey His covenant law. They begin to worship their own power. Moses warned the Israelites against this move from covenantalism to humanism: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:17-18).

The Heresy of Subordinationism

If the basis of judicial office is service to God through service to men, then primary authority belongs to God. God possesses this supreme authority not on the basis of His service to others but on the basis of His absolute sovereignty. This authority is exercised hierarchically. In one sense, hierarchy even applies to the Godhead. Christian theology distinguishes between the ontological Trinity and the economical Trinity. The ontological Trinity refers to the equality of the three Persons of the Godhead. The economical Trinity refers to the division of labor within the Trinity, a division of labor which is visible in history through functional subordination. God the Son does the will of God the Father.

In the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds, God the Holy Spirit is said to be sent by both God the Father and God the Son. This was formally asserted by the Council of Toledo in A.D. 589: the Filioque. Eastern Christianity insists that the Holy Spirit is sent by the Son alone. The

Filioque is the distinguishing mark of the Western Church, with its judicial theology. Eastern Christianity is more mystical than judicial because its doctrine of hierarchy is more subordinationist - Father to Son to Holy Ghost - than it is corporate: Father and Son to Holy Ghost. God the Father is regarded as having a higher status than the Son; the Holy Ghost, closest to man, has the least status.

This subordinationist theology has had political implications for the East through the centuries. One might think that the subordination of the Holy Ghost to God the Father through God the Son would lead to a reduction in the authority of the State, since the State is the manifestation of creation. On the contrary, this view has enhanced State power, since history, as the domain of creation, is regarded as less fundamental than personal mystical illumination, especially illumination produced through suffering (kenoticism). The domain of the State has been granted a far greater degree of influence in history because mysticism has been stimulated by the subordinationism of Eastern Christianity's theology. Mysticism usually leads to the enhancement of State power, since the mystic does not regard history as an area of conquest. He regards a mystical escape from time as his primary spiritual task.

The Bible teaches otherwise. It teaches that God raises up leaders so that they can participate in the defeat of Satan's kingdom in history. David fought Goliath; he did not remain back home tending sheep while contemplating God's being.

The Structure of Biblical Authority

Covenantal leadership is gained on the basis of an oath. The oath invokes covenant law and covenant sanctions. The question is: Who administers the oath, and in whose name? Biblically, God is the sovereign master of the oath, but the question is: To whom does He delegate authority in history to enforce the oath? Biblically speaking, He delegates it to no single human authority. There is no final earthly court of appeal regarding anything. Only the Bible, as the Word of God, is God's unchanging verbal authority for man in history.

Under the Mosaic covenant, Samuel anointed both Saul and David. He had been reared by a priest, Eli, and presumably adopted by Eli. He possessed ecclesiastical authority, for he offered public sacrifices (I Sam. 15). But it is clear that his anointing of the first king in Israel was done through prior consultation with judicial representatives of the people. The elders of Israel came to him to demand a king (I Sam. 8:4). He warned them of the taxation to come: a tithe, equal to what they owed God through the church (I Sam. 8:15, 17).

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; . . . And the LORD said to Samuel, Harken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city (I Sam. 8:19, 22).

The point is, the civil agents of the nation represented the people before Samuel. God recognized this chain of command: from the heirs of those who had sworn the original national covenant (Ex. 19) to their civil representatives. They, in turn, appealed to Samuel, who was God's theological representative in Israel at that time. Thus, the anointing of the first king was a corporate affair: shared responsibility. Unquestionably, the chain of authority was bottom-up in the civil realm: from the people to their representatives. It was top-down ecclesiastically: from Samuel to the anointed king. It was two-way authority, with the king in the middle. Once anointed, the king had to read God's law for himself (Deut. 17), but he was supposed to listen to the priests in matters

ecclesiastical. When Saul refused by offering sacrifice on his own, Samuel challenged him publicly (I Sam. 15). Saul forfeited the kingdom definitively at that point. But the transfer of authority had to take time. David was not to grab the robes of authority prematurely, which David fully understood (I Sam. 24).

The point should be clear: authority is neither exclusively bottom-up nor exclusively top-down. God holds responsible all those who take the oath. Thus, when the civil ruler sins, the nation is threatened by God's negative sanctions. Similarly, when the people sin corporately, the nation is equally threatened. Under the Mosaic law, God required a public sacrifice in each instance: congregational sin (Lev. 4:13-21) and kingly sin (Lev. 4:22-27). The king can call the people to account; the people can call the king to account; the priest can call all to account; and the king or people can call the priest to account. Everyone is accountable in history. No one is outside the authority of at least one of the Bible's three covenantal hierarchies.

Separation and Authority

To take a covenantal oath a person necessarily separates himself from all those who have not taken the oath. Church members are separate covenantally from non-members. Husbands and wives are separated from other family units. Citizens are separate from non-citizens. Officers are separate from those under their authority. There can be no leadership within any Christian covenantal organization without prior separation. People are judicially separate because their oaths are separate: different degrees of responsibility and different sanctions. Separation is by covenant oath.

The military recognizes this. There are distinctions between non-commissioned officers and commissioned officers, with different rules governing each. An officer, for example, is not permitted to strike anyone under his authority who is not an officer. The officer is presumed to be a gentleman - a holdover from earlier times when there were legally identifiable ranks in society. Gentlemen did not engage in physical conflict with those who were not gentlemen. In American military tradition, only one rank mediates between officers and the ranks: the warrant officer, who rank is in between sergeants and second lieutenants. There are very few of them. The warrant officer alone has equal access to both the officers' club and the non-commissioned officers' club: places where oath-bound equals meet voluntarily to celebrate through eating and drinking (and singing and sometimes fighting). The only other place of voluntary celebration through eating and drinking is in religious worship services. Here alone do all ranks meet together on an equal basis under God. The chaplain possesses sovereign authority over both officers and non-coms in this case. They all have separated themselves from the rank and file.

Separation is both functional and judicial. With greater official authority comes greater personal responsibility. The phrase describing an unpleasant task or aspect of a job, "It goes with the territory," is biblically appropriate. A legal boundary - "the territory" - separates those inside from those outside. Those inside bear greater burdens. In other words, the cost of performance is higher.

There is a well known phrase: "It's lonely at the top." This phrase is accurate. The best example in history is Jesus on the cross: "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). But with respect to the lake of fire, the phrase is equally accurate. Loneliness - judicial separation from God - is the ultimate condemnation.

There are two kinds of loneliness: judicial and functional.

An office is a judicial boundary. In a bureaucratic order, the office is separate from the person. The archetype of this separation is the priest. He may be an evil person, but his administration of the sacraments is still judicially valid and judicially binding for as long as he holds office. People may separate themselves from an evil priest because of his character, but they come to him for the sacraments because of his office. It can also work the other way: an evil person may come to him for nefarious purposes but never approach him to receive the sacraments.

In most cases, the higher the office, the greater the separation, both judicially and functionally. The functional separation of the famous celebrity, for example, can be very great, but the separation of the high office is greater. An example of this separation took place shortly after Ronald Reagan was elected President. As a former actor, Reagan knew the comic Don Rickles, whose comedy is based on his biting sarcasm. Reagan asked him to do one of his routines for him, which would obviously involve a verbal assault on him. Rickles refused. "I can't do that, Mr. President," he said. He correctly viewed Reagan the old Hollywood actor as now judicially and functionally separate from Reagan the President. Their shared celebrity status was overshadowed by the separateness of Reagan's office.

If a political leader is not present in the room, he is fair game in modern life, so long as there is no national crisis threatening everyone. Political cartoonists have almost unlimited power to ridicule the President, but not the Presidency. Cartoonist Herbert Block - "Herblock" - had savagely attacked Richard Nixon for years when he was Vice President, 1953-61. Nixon sometimes kept his young daughters from seeing these cartoons. Herblock always pictured Nixon with a dark shadow of a beard, which was true - it is said to have lost Nixon the Presidency in his first televised debate with Senator John F. Kennedy in 1960. When Nixon was elected President in 1968, Herblock drew a cartoon of himself as a barber giving Nixon a shave. That was Herblock's one nod to official authority.

The one major exception to this limitation in American life - no in-person ridicule of the President - is the annual dinner put on by the elite organization of the Washington press corps, the Gridiron Club. Only members may attend; proceedings are "off the record." The President is invited to attend and sometimes does. He can expect to be subjected to a "roast," where skits or other forms of supposedly good-natured fun are aimed at him. This event is a kind of comic saturnalia operated by those without judicial authority but possessing great functional power: the news media. But this event is bounded. It is held only once a year, and the sarcasm is supposed to be good-natured.

The more power a leader possesses, the more he can expect to be isolated: by those under his authority and by the public. He becomes a representative. As such, both his allies and his enemies see him as the incarnation of those he represents. He can rarely be sure who his friends are. He has peers in other areas of service; he also has people trying to get close to him to pursue hidden agendas; but he has few friends. Those who hold an office can never be sure of the motivation of those around them. Retired General and Bishop Albion Knight once told me that a leader should have about five other people in mind who he thinks will not wither "under fire" if they go into battle. It is not easy to locate five such allies, let alone friends.

The Net Return on Power

Because there are inescapable hierarchies in the administration of authority, greater status or greater power serve as lures to those who are asked to bear greater burdens. To be at the top of a hierarchy is regarded as something worth attaining. People who do not understand the covenantal nature of leadership tend to overestimate its return for two reasons: underestimating the costs and overestimating the benefits. They do not appreciate Christ's warning:

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47-48).

The overestimation of the net return to power leads people who should avoid power like a plague to pursue it. The more centralized this power and the more unbounded, the more likely the worst will get on top. The most ruthless will grab for the robes of authority. The way to avoid this is to decentralize power, limit its boundaries, and remind people of the costs of covenantal service. The personal rewards of service should be few. The power to do good means the power to do evil; covenantal authority should therefore be limited.

This is why politicians and pastors should not demand or expect large financial rewards - not because their jobs are not important but rather because they are. A politician should be expected to go back to work outside of politics. A pastor should have a job - tentmaking - on the side, in order to deflect accusations of his misuse of the office, and also to gain a source of income outside the church, thereby reducing the threat of the congregation's negative sanctions if he speaks the truth from the pulpit.

Conclusion

Leadership has inescapable costs. It should be pursued only by those who have counted the costs. Leadership in covenantal offices should be accepted by those who are service-oriented. Such offices should be regarded by all as a personal liability in history rather than a source of net temporal rewards. When the U.S. Marines adopted their slogan, "We're looking for a few good men," they had the right idea. The kingdom of God is in need of a few righteous people who are equipped to lead.

Economist Ludwig von Mises was once asked what he would do if he were given the power to restructure the U.S. economy. His one-word answer was proper: "Resign." He understood how dangerous such extensive power would be: to himself and to those under his authority.

The Christian who fancies himself a potential leader should seek an office that is both personally demanding and unrewarding in terms of personal financial gain and recognition. Service is primary; rewards are merely the hoped-for result. This is true in both profit-seeking endeavors and non-profit. A leader must also be prepared to be spoken of poorly, no matter how good his service. When it comes to public recognition, envy is vastly more common than love.