

# BIBLICAL ECONOMICS TODAY

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## LEADERSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP

### Part 10: Leaders Require Followers

by Gary North

*And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away (1 Ki. 19:14).*

Elijah was at his wits' end. He knew that he had been faithful to God. At Mount Carmel, God's demonstration of power had persuaded the representatives of the people to slay the false priests. It looked as though they were ready to renew the covenant. As God's prophet, Elijah would have become their spiritual leader: announcing God's law, threatening God's historical sanctions, and training up a new generation of priests to replace the false priests. Yet within weeks, he was isolated on a mountain, hiding from the wrath of the king's wife.

He had no followers. That was his problem as he saw it. "I, even I only, am left." How does a man serve God as a prophet if there is no one left who believes him?

#### Sanctions

God gave him the answer. Elijah had announced a warning to the nation, as every prophet had to: God's covenant sanctions. As in the case of every Old Covenant prophet, God promised to stand behind Elijah and impose those sanctions (1 Ki. 19:17). This was the mark of a true prophet: because the prophet announced both God's law and God's sanctions in history, God would impose the promised covenantal sanctions, thereby confirming the prophet's judicial word.

Sanctions – point four of the biblical covenant model – were the validating mark of a prophet. His God-given authority to declare God's word as an anointed individual, yet outside the ecclesiastical hierarchy, was demonstrated by the presence of God's sanctions, both positive and negative. This is why Elijah challenged the false priests in terms of a public display of God's fire, symbolic of the ultimate negative sanction.

The disciple of the prophet might hope to inherit the prophetic office, but without the power to invoke supernatural sanctions, the mantle would prove useless. God said not to fear anyone who would announce things that did not come to pass (Deut. 18:22). If he also told them to follow false gods, he had to be executed (Deut. 18:20). It was this that had brought the false priests on Mount Carmel under the people's lawful sanctions.

There have been no prophets since the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The office was annulled because God's covenantally binding verbal revelation in history has ceased. The Bible is complete. God no longer guarantees to any person that He will

support that person's warning of imminent sanctions. There is no divine threat attached to any supposed "new word" from God. This is another reason why we should conclude that John wrote the Book of Revelation prior to A.D. 70. Had he written it after that final Mosaic sanction in history, then the office of prophet cannot be said to be annulled in New Testament times.

#### Representation

It was not simply that God promised to impose negative sanctions in history against those who refused to obey Elijah. God also pointed out that there were 7,000 people remaining in the land who had not bowed the knee to Baal, 7,000 pairs of lips that had not kissed him (1 Ki. 19:18). That meant that Elijah had followers. They were not visible to him. Even as a prophet, he had not known that they were there. But God had reserved unto Himself 7,000 covenant-keepers who had not been so intimidated by the prevailing culture that they would break their covenant through a public act of covenant renewal with a false god.

They were Elijah's followers, yet he did not know they were there. How could they be followers if their leader was unaware of their existence? Because of the representative aspect of the covenant: point two. What Elijah did in public they would honor in private. When he challenged the false priests, word went out. God's prophet had publicly defeated the court priests. This confirmed Elijah as the leader of an invisible army of 7,000. They could not hear him directly, but his representative act of defiance became their act of defiance. He confirmed publicly before the nation what they were doing privately: refusing to bend the knee to a false god.

The biblical doctrine of representation means that a person can be a leader even though he does not have visible followers. What he does in public represents those who share his faith and his vision. Tyrants understand this, which is why they seek to break the resistance of known enemy leaders. They impose threats, torture, and other sanctions in an attempt to break the will of the leader. They understand that if the leader publicly breaks, this will undermine the will to resist among many of his followers. Tyrants may not know who these followers are, but they know that surrender by a leader is a representative act. A portion of his followers will leave the field of battle. They, too, will surrender – not in some public act of contrition, but inwardly. This is what the tyrant seeks.

Everyone understands that evil or stupid things done by leaders have repercussions among their followers. When leaders of the opposition do evil or stupid things, today's

establishment media go on the offensive. When the establishment's leaders do similar or worse things, the media remain as silent as they can get away with. The press deliberately covered up John F. Kennedy's almost daily acts of adultery. The man was addicted to illicit sex. He would get splitting headaches "withdrawal symptoms" if his Secret Service agents would not bring him new flesh to consume every few days. The press knew what was going on, and the press actively "spiked" the story. The same was true of Martin Luther King, Jr. He was addicted to adultery. But Jimmy Swaggart, another addict, did not enjoy comparable immunity from media scrutiny.

### Stages of Confrontation

Prior to the confrontation on Mount Carmel, Elijah had spent three and a half years outside the land, living inconspicuously with a widow and her son (1 Ki. 17). Meanwhile, the king's official, Obadiah, had hidden a hundred prophets in a cave (1 Ki. 18:4). The prophets were silent in the land. The establishment was visibly triumphant. But the rain had ceased. Whose fault was that? Who would be blamed by the people? Not the prophets, who were in hiding. The establishment had many followers, but these followers were not prospering. Bad times had come, and there was no convenient prophet to blame.

The prophet's job was to call attention to the broken covenant when times were good. Then he waited. God promised to impose negative corporate sanctions if the people refused to repent. So, the first stage of the prophet's job was two-fold: (1) announce the broken covenant and remind men of the attached sanctions; (2) get out of the way and let God bring the sanctions. This led to the second stage of the prophet's ministry: his return after the sanctions to call the people to repentance once again. This is what Elijah did on Mount Carmel.

When this failed to gain national repentance, Elijah fled into the wilderness in despair. He was all alone, he imagined. The sanctions had done no good. What God then told him was that stage one and stage two were themselves preliminary. There would be a successor prophet and additional sanctions.

The prophet's job was a lonely one. Except for Jonah, who preached to a pagan society, none of the prophets was able to gain a responsive hearing from the nation until after God had imposed negative sanctions. In Elijah's case, he never did gain a permanent response. He died with the nation still in open rebellion, still under the domination of perverse leaders. His recent recruit, Elisha, continued his ministry.

### Recruiting Disciples

How should we recruit disciples? The covenantal office of prophet no longer exists. "Follow me" is today greeted with: "Why should I?" So, the person doing the recruiting must have something of value to offer the recruit. He must make it clear what this valuable asset is and how it corresponds to the desires and abilities of the potential disciple. He must first present the benefit; then he must present evidence that he is capable of teaching the recruit how to achieve it for himself.

The most impressive evidence is the recruiter's reputation for performing the crucial skill. Word spreads when someone does a superior job. Buyers and users want to gain access to superior services. As demand grows, the enterprise experiences success. This creates demand by potential disciples who want to master the skill. A period of subordination - discipleship - is the proper means of transferring any subtle skill. This is the recruiter's hook.

The disciple has something to gain: knowledge of the means of success. His mentor has three things to gain: (1) the added productivity offered by an increase in the division of

labor; (2) a successor in his work; (3) a reputation as a leader with some followers.

Old Testament prophets used miracles to demonstrate the benefits of obedience. Sometimes these miracles provided benefits. Healing is the best example. Other times they were negative sanctions. But they all demonstrated the authority of the prophet's office. With the annulment of the prophetic office, the evidence must be less direct.

This is not to say that miraculous healings never take place today, but they are not judicially prophetic; they are priestly. The institutional church brings healing through its ordained hierarchy (James 5:14). God endows the church with such demonstrable authority; He no longer endows individuals who are not working under the authority of the church. Beware of the person who announces that he is God's prophet, especially when - as is likely - he is not in subordination to a local church. He may believe that he can invoke God's negative sanctions in history, but he is more likely to come under such sanctions.

### Screening Disciples

The disciple must be disciplined: first by the mentor or the mentor's organization; ultimately by inner restraint. **Self-discipline is the crucial aspect of discipleship.** No organization can afford to police everything under its authority. If it tries, it will meet resistance. Many will depart.

The self-disciplined person is attracted to even more self-disciplined people. The example of near-total dedication becomes a major recruiting factor. The better the example, the better the quality of the disciples. Good men attract good men.

When good men become successful, however, they also attract power-seekers. Power-seekers want a shortcut to power. They want to bypass the long process of subordination. Every successful organization must find ways to screen out such people. The primary biblical screening factors are confession, tithing, and service. The practice of monastic orders of having initiates do the grunt work for a year or more is wise: until a man is willing to do the lowest-prestige tasks, he is not safe to place in a position of great responsibility. He learns to serve from the bottom up. He learns what it is to subordinate himself. Subordination to God is the primary model: confession and tithing. Subordination to the recruiting agency is the secondary model.

A recruiting system that fails to employ a screening system is a doomed system. Because we want our organizations to grow, we have a tendency to delay the screening process. Screening out disciples reduces short-term growth. But "Come one, come all!" is a prescription for disaster. Even for a profit-seeking seller, such a strategy is suicidal. When an advertiser asks a seller, "Who should buy your product?" he knows he is dealing with a doomed marketing strategy if the seller answers "everyone." Nobody sells a product so universally desirable that his sales campaign can be aimed at everyone. Perhaps it really is good for everyone - redemption comes to mind - but any advertising strategy that targets everyone will motivate hardly anyone to buy.

So, every program seeking successful growth must employ both kinds of sanctions: positive and negative. It must attract, and it must repel. It must welcome, and it must send away.

### Fatal Attraction

Power always attracts followers. Ahab had no problem in recruiting followers. He possessed power. But such followers are as fleeting as power is. Remove the leaders' power, and you remove most of their followers.

There are still vocal Communists in Russia, but not in the numbers that there were prior to August 21, 1991. But the

Communists prior to 1991 were Communists in name only. Their faith had waned a generation earlier, as Solzhenitsyn had told the West for two decades. The recruits grew cynical over time. Kourdakov's 1973 book, *The Persecutor*, made that much plain. Alcoholism had replaced ideology in the lives of mature Communist leaders – a weakness shared by millions of non-Communists in the USSR. Today's Russian Communists still proclaim the old faith, but there are not many of them any more. The old Communist internationalism in Russia has been replaced by the familiar false political religions of hedonism, nationalism, anti-semitism, and the pursuit of power.

There are still Nazis in Germany and even the United States. These true believers persist in small numbers, but because they are without the instruments of political power, they must compete for recruits against all the other proclaimers of salvation, both personal and social. A totally defeated movement rarely rises again, and surely not while carrying the banners of their defeated predecessors. There are no mass rallies with men carrying swastika flags.

If there is a political lesson to be learned here, it is this: **all political power attracts, and absolute political power attracts fatally.** The kinds of followers who are drawn to the displays of supreme power in history are not reliable. Like moths flitting close to a flame, they are fatally attracted to the trappings of power. This century, more than any, has displayed such trappings. Think of the May Day parades in the USSR, decade after decade, when the nation's leaders stood at attention for hours while mobile weapons rolled by. Hitler and Mussolini had similar parades. Most bizarre of all is modern France's celebration of Bastille Day, when mounted cavalry, dressed in 19th-century uniforms, ride majestically to commemorate the savage overthrow of lawful and limited authority. The trappings of power have covered everything. The biblical phrase, "trust not in chariots," has not been widely quoted in this century by national leaders.

But power, like alcohol, has many competing brands. There is brand loyalty among beer drinkers, but this loyalty is not absolute. When the supply of one brand is cut short, there are many others available. Serious beer drinkers do not stop drinking just because their favorite brand is unavailable. It is the effect of the alcohol, not the brand, that becomes the basis of the continued self-indulgence. So it is with power.

### Succession

An inescapable problem in every organization is succession. This is one problem the church has solved. The church and its imitators survive, generation after generation. How may other organizations have survived the tests of time as long as religious organizations? I can think of none. The only institutions in the West that can lay claim to equal are certain political institutions – the British Crown and Parliament – and, most resistant to change, the universities. Oxford and Cambridge still thrive. They were originally training centers for theologians and lawyers. They still perform a quasi-priestly function. The content of their confessions has changed; their robes and rituals continue.

How does any man's work survive? Only through succession. But very few family-based enterprises survive as family enterprises for as long as three generations. The DuPonts, the Sassoons, and the Rothschilds are exceptional in this respect. Family enterprises require "new blood": people whose ambition and drive to excel have not been undermined by generations of the enterprise-deadening comforts of automatic income. The Old Money in any society requires recruits to maintain itself.

The church offers to every man a marvelous opportunity: membership in an organization that will survive beyond eternity (Rev. 21). Jesus spoke of treasures laid up in heaven for the

individual. But building up these personal heavenly treasures has effects in the future. The gospel changes lives. Convert by convert, the adopted family of God extends its influence to the end of time and beyond. The fulfillment of this promise of continuity is unique to the church. God's word does not return to Him void. This means that it does not return to Him institutionally void. The healing work of the gospel transforms culture.

### Eschatology

Succession or continuity is a desire in the heart of every man. The dominion impulse relies on it. Men want to believe that the good that they do in history will extend beyond their death. But modern Christianity denies such a hope to covenant-keepers. Worse; it affirms such a hope for covenant-breakers. Both premillennialism and amillennialism teach that with respect to anything beyond the narrow confines of the institutional church, good will be overcome by evil. Compound growth is said to apply to evil, not to good. "Leaven in the Bible always refers to evil," we are assured, and leaven symbolizes growth. Both of these eschatologies affirm what Shakespeare had Mark Antony say at Caesar's funeral: "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones." This is the heart of pessimillennial social theory.

Premillennialism teaches that a grim social continuity lies ahead: the Great Tribulation. Historic premillennialism teaches that Christians will go through it. Any efforts to overcome its perverse cultural effects are socially fruitless, however uplifting psychologically they may be. Dispensationalism teaches that prior to this seven-year period, the entire body of believers will be removed from history: a cosmic discontinuity removing Christians from the continuity of cultural defeat. This means that during the tribulation era, the entire legacy of the New Testament church will either be uprooted or captured by covenant-breakers. Every good work by every Christian in history must culminate a huge loss: an inheritance stolen by evil-doers. Pessimillennialism re-writes Proverbs 13:33b: the wealth of the just is laid up for the sinner.

Christendom is today regarded as a naive hope at best or a satanic deception at worst. There can be no ultimate legacy of good in history, we are assured. All of history is a threat to covenant-keepers. Nothing but divine intervention can save covenant-keepers from destruction: either the premillennial Rapture or the amillennial Second Coming. The processes of history are inherently perverse, bringing defeat and despair for Christians. The more committed that Christians become in their attempts to reverse the drift toward cultural decadence, the more frustrated they must become unless they avoid this by living in a mental fantasy world. Such is the message of pessimillennialism.

Pessimillennial theologians tell their followers to keep smiling while keeping a stiff upper lip. This is as difficult a task psychologically as it is physically.

Amillennialism defends continuity, but it is a continuity of defeat. Generation after generation, the church will become more isolated, more on the defensive. The cultural legacy of Christianity will be swallowed up by anti-Christianity. Herman Hanko, the leading theologian of the amillennial Protestant Reformed Church, has insisted that "in the context of sin, of a sinful world, of a world of depraved, totally depraved people, there is no solution to the world's problems. There cannot be." (*The Christian's Social Calling and the Second Coming of Christ*, May 6, 1970, p. 8). Therefore, "all the world's attempts to solve these problems are necessarily going to make these problems worse" (p. 8). And what of the future of the church? "The Church is always a hut in a cucumber patch, a besieged city" (p. 9). Christians are Cucumber Patch dolls.

Dispensational theologian John Walvoord, the former president of Dallas Seminary, announced forthrightly: "We know that our efforts to make society Christianized is [sic] futile because the Bible doesn't teach it." (*Christianity Today* [Feb. 6, 1987], p. 5-1.) Is this pessimistic? No, just realistic. Again: "Well, I personally object to the idea that premillennialism is pessimistic. We are simply realistic in believing that man cannot change the world" (p. 11-1).

It is postmillennialism alone that insists that the good works of covenant-breakers can and will compound in history, overcoming the compound growth of covenant-breakers. Succession is therefore not a threat to the church but a long-term benefit. Hanko was correct almost a generation ago: "In the first place, many who strongly advocate christian social involvement almost always fall into the error of post-millennialism. That is the error of teaching that the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is realized here in this present world by a slow but steady process of social, economic and political evolution" (*Christian's Social Calling*, pp. 1-2). He used the humanist's beloved word **evolution** in order to tar and feather postmillennialism. Had he substituted the Christian term **reformation**, he would have called attention to the psychologically unpleasant reality of amillennialism: it denies the eschatological possibility of successful Christian reformation - in state, or society.

Try to recruit men to such a vision of the future. You will not recruit men dedicated to a life devoted to the task of comprehensive reformation.

### Reformation

The ideal of Christendom rests on the doctrine of the ascension. Jesus not only rose from the dead; He ascended to the right hand of God in heaven. He rules over the universe. All power in heaven and earth has been transferred to Him (Matt. 28:18-20). Through his ascension His church can have faith in succession - not a succession of defeat but succession of reformation.

The Protestant Reformation cut short Northern Europe's decline into Renaissance paganism and debauchery. Then it was overcome by several powerful forces: Protestant scholasticism (Aristotelian rationalism) within the camp, Enlightenment rationalism inside and outside the camp, Erastian politics (the king's religion rules the realm), political pluralism (no covenantal oath to God to maintain citizenship), and in our era, Darwinism. But the Reformation did save Europe from self-destruction.

Those who view Luther and Calvin as merely ecclesiastical reformers miss the larger story: they were cultural reformers who transformed Northern Europe. We cannot understand German culture apart from the unifying power of Luther's translation of the Bible and his hymns. We cannot correctly understand the origins of capitalism without understanding Calvin's theology of self-government and self-discipline. We cannot understand modern democratic politics apart from Book IV, Chapter 20 of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which sets forth the doctrine of the right of political revolution when led by lesser magistrates.

The heirs of the Protestant Reformation, when they know anything about this formative era, fail to understand the magnitude of what the Reformers accomplished. Worse; they resent the implication that every generation of Christians is called by God to extend that comprehensive Reformation. This

thought reminds them of the huge responsibility that belongs to the church in every era. Protestants and Lutherans have preferred to circumscribe the Reformation's accomplishments because they have preferred to circumscribe their personal responsibility as transformers of culture. God has granted them their desire, sending leanness into their souls.

### The Remnant

In every era, God preserves a remnant. He is never left without faithful representatives in history. Like the 7,000 of Elijah's day, there are Christians who have not bowed the knee to the spiritual heirs of Baal. But a lot of them have.

The remnant has a task: to disciple those who will listen. The remnant looks forward to comprehensive reformation, restoration, and renewal. The remnant calls for revival, but not the emotional hot flashes of the lower-middle-class tent meeting. The revival hoped for by the remnant is the revival of justice in the broadest sense. This means a revival of faith in Christ and Christendom. It means a revival of interest in God's Bible-revealed law.

The remnant operates on the fringes of the church today. The broad church has lost faith in the possibility of Christendom. The remnant has not lost this faith. It recruits, screens, and recruits again. It does so quietly, in the shadows of power, for its members recognize that the proof of their comprehensive claims takes time, patience, sacrifice, and generations of minor successes that overcome losses. The secret of success is faithfulness: generation after generation. Success rests on the legitimacy and possibility of succession, of compound growth.

When succession is interrupted through defections, Christendom's timetable is interrupted. When Charles II returned to the British throne in 1660, he overcame the Puritans' premature experiment in self-rule. Anglo-American Protestantism has been burdened with the implications of that Restoration for over three centuries. Not many Protestants have ever heard of the Restoration, yet it extends its pluralist-unitarian worldview into the lives of all of us.

So, we need to make recruits. The Restoration of 1660 must be overcome. It will not be overcome by more of the same.

### Conclusion

Leaders require followers. To attract reliable followers, leaders must be able to promise benefits to those who will commit their lives to the extension of Christendom. Then they must follow with the proof. The best proof is long-term personal success in the face of a culture that rejects what we believe. The second-best proof is a string of disciples who have gone and done likewise. Men commit to stories. God gave us stories of commitment in the Bible. These stories are still relevant today.

Followers must not be regaled with stories of easy successes. They must understand the words of Francis Parkman, author of *The Oregon Trail*: "He who would do some great things in this short life must apply himself to work with such a concentration of force as, to idle spectators who live only to amuse themselves, looks like insanity." Understanding, they must then commit. And then they must follow through on their commitment. Putting their hand to the plow, they must not turn back. This is the example the remnant requires: leaders who follow through.

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