

The Journal of Values-Based Leadership

Manuscript 1451

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Dominant Leadership Themes in the Pauline Epistles

Abstract

Paul's writings in the Bible, although primarily intended to serve spiritual ends, were found to also contain practical leadership wisdom long before these concepts were developed and formalized in secular leadership literature. Seven leadership themes emerged out of this conceptual study, namely: concepts of authority, responsibility, and accountability; the need for personal integrity among leaders; the need to build ethical organizations; situational leadership; fostering unity in diversity; the teaching role of leaders; and ensuring organizational continuity and organizational growth. This paper will benefit leadership theory along the line of increasing confidence in the use of the Bible as a source of leadership knowledge. It will also support leadership practice by providing a model of how effective leadership can be practiced despite operating in a turbulent ancient environment devoid of the resources, systems, and technologies of today's post-modern organizations. Although the contexts in Paul's epistles were churches, the leadership lessons they contained can be applied to business organizations, government entities, educational institutions, and society in general.

Introduction

The discussion of spiritual and religious dimensions in leadership has now become popular in business theory and practice (Manz, 2011). Elements of Abrahamic religions impact leadership by way of information, integration, or modification (Gumusay, 2019). The Bible, the holy book of Christianity, contains the most important truths about leadership (Eims, 2012). Being the most widely-read book down through the ages, its reach is so widespread, with more than six billion printed copies currently in circulation and an average of 100 million copies printed annually (Wordsrated.com, 2022). The book is the source of major beliefs in the monotheistic religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and in its pages are recorded teachings, principles, stories, and examples of both good and bad leadership.

Many studies took a deep dive into the Bible to draw out leadership lessons from one or a few prominent personalities. For instance, Borek et al. (2005) saw in Paul an example of a visionary leader; in Peter, a demonstration of a self-correcting leader; in Moses, a model of a

charismatic leader; and in Joseph, an exemplar of a strategic leader. The study built the case for Jesus being the only perfect leader, with all other leaders in different stages of their development. Morris (2006), on the other hand, found in Moses the desirable leadership traits of being faithful to the assigned mission despite enormous criticism and opposition; of building a leadership team that fostered greater effectiveness and efficiency in serving the people; and of effecting a smooth transition of power to Joshua, his successor, when it was the right time for him to do so. In another study, Friedman and Langbert (2000), zeroed in on Abraham as an example of a transformational leader as he motivated his clan to embrace the grand vision of moving from their home in Ur to the promised land of Canaan and then establishing there a new nation. In his willingness to offer his son, Isaac, if God willed it so, the patriarch demonstrated that a truly transformational leader must sacrifice his self-interests for the sake of realizing the shared vision.

There were also studies that captured good leadership traits worthy of emulation in some of the famous women in the Bible. Wolmark and Friedman (2021), for example, found such traits in Esther, Deborah, Abigail, and Ruth. Based on the accounts in the book of Esther, the paper noted Esther's demonstration of courage and empathy when she intervened before her husband, King Ahasuerus, to stop an evil plot by a high-ranking officer in the Persian court to unjustly kill all the Jews in their kingdom. Additionally, based on the story in the book of Judges, the paper recognized the bravery of the woman leader, Deborah, who led the army in overthrowing Canaanite rule over Israel; while based on the first book of Samuel, the study observed Abigail's accountability skills in preventing bloodshed between two men — Nabal and David — and their followers. Nabal, a wealthy landowner, was Abigail's husband, while David was at that time, a leader of an armed group that fled persecution at the hands of the reigning king, Saul. Accordingly, David and his men protected Nabal's property from bandits but when they asked for logistical aid, the landlord refused to extend a helping hand and hurled insults instead, creating the potential conflict that Abigail averted. Finally, based on the book of Ruth, the paper found in Ruth, a non-leader in the strict sense of the word, an exemplification of the important leadership trait of kindness. Despite being widowed, Ruth refused to leave her mother-in-law but cared for and worked for her.

The preceding papers approached the study of leadership by looking at examples of traits that good leaders in the Bible had. Another group of papers that are fewer in number took the opposite route by exploring bad traits and behaviors that leaders should avoid. One of such papers, Friedman and Friedman (2019), found that King Solomon's corruption of wealth, fame, and power was the major cause of his downfall. It was noted that the king lived an extravagant life at the expense of his subjects and his kingdom, maintained a harem for so many wives and concubines, and disobeyed God by following his pagan partners in the worship of other gods.

Several articles and books on leadership had Paul as their subject. Cooper (2005), in analyzing Paul's second letter to Timothy, found in the apostle a model of transformational leadership, inspiring positive change in his mentee through his teachings and examples. Whittington et al. (2005), in studying the apostle's first letter to the Thessalonians, saw in the man an exemplar of legacy leadership, making sure that future leaders are properly trained, and that they, in turn, will also train their successors. Based on the accounts of the Acts of the Apostles, Alexander (2022) described Paul's leadership style as dispersed, making use of both local and translocal leaders; while Dohan (2016) categorized the apostle's style as

situational, effectively dealing with specific issues and problems that arose in the churches of Thessalonica, Galatia, Corinth, Rome, and Philippi.

This paper is conceptual in nature. It analyzes the writings of Paul, book by book and line by line, to identify leadership themes that may inform leadership theory and practice. The focus on Paul is premised upon two reasons: first, Paul wrote extensively, with thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament normally credited to him; and second, the apostle, in organizing and leading different churches, exemplified by his deeds what effective leadership was. While previous related studies concentrated their efforts on one or some of Paul's letters, I have analyzed in this paper all the apostle's epistles, namely, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, and 2 Timothy, Philemon, and Titus. Doing so provided the paper with a comprehensive view which, occasionally, was also referenced with accounts in the Acts of the Apostles.

Paul, the leader, introduced himself as "a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee" (Phil 3:5). Born as Saul in Tarsus, Cilicia and educated under Gamaliel, he became a hardline follower of the Jewish law – even persecuting the early Christians, and putting some into prison and sentencing others to death. Nevertheless, a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ converted him from a persecutor of Christians to an apostle of Christ to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-22). Over the years, he then established and led several churches, such as those in Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus.

Although Paul occupied a position of leadership for churches or spiritual institutions, his writings and examples provided timeless lessons which were equally applicable in non-church organizations such as those in business, industry, and government. Thus, in this paper, I intend to join the scholarly discussion of leadership through the lens of the Bible, specifically vis-à-vis the letters of Paul. While many previous authors have written on this topic, most of them have based their papers on a pericope of the apostle's vast writings, focusing their works on a single or a selected number of books. In this paper, I analyzed all of Paul's thirteen epistles and identified leadership themes in a particular letter or across multiple letters.

I then supported each theme with a verbatim or paraphrased citation of specific verses in the epistles, and related these concepts with secular leadership literature. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of what the findings may mean to leadership theory and practice, followed by recommendations and directions for future research on this area of study.

Dominant Leadership Themes from Paul's Letters

My analysis of Paul's letters to churches and individuals led to the emergence of seven dominant themes. These are (1) concepts of authority, responsibility, and accountability; (2) the need for personal integrity among leaders, (3) the need to build ethical organizations, (4) situational leadership, (5) fostering unity in diversity, (6) the teaching role of leaders, and (7) ensuring organizational continuity and growth.

Concepts of Authority, Responsibility, and Accountability in Organizations

I saw in Paul's writings the early beginnings of modern managerial concepts of authority, responsibility, and accountability in organizations. He started all his letters to churches and individuals with opening statements that invoked his authority as their leader. He declared

that he was “sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father” (Gal 1:1). He referred to himself as an apostle, servant, and prisoner of Jesus Christ (Rom 1:1, 1 Cor 1:1, 2 Cor 1:1, Eph 1:1, Col 1:1, Tim 1:1, 2 Tim 1:1, Tit 1:1, Phil 1:1, Philem 1:1). In doing so, he emphasized that his authority and power emanated from the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15, Rev 17:14, Rev 19:16, Deut 10:17) — in other words, the supreme authority whose name is above all names (Phil 2:9). In connection to secular literature, Paul thus used what French and Raven (1959) referred to as legitimate power, or the “legitimate right of some individual or groups to prescribe behavior or beliefs for a person” (p. 265).

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, it was evident that the apostle viewed all forms of authority as coming from God. He wrote, “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established” (Rom 13:1).

Authority comes with commensurate responsibility. In the case of Paul, it was seen that with the authority given to him by Divine assignment was the mission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13, Acts 9:15, Gal 1:15-16). He expressed his vision as “to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation” (Rom 15:20). Both this mission and vision of the apostle for himself and the church were captured in Acts 13:47, with God commanding, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

Paul’s writings highlight the need for a leader to be faithful to the organization’s mission and vision. He instructed church members that if anyone, including himself, was to teach a gospel message different from what he originally taught, then that person should be rejected and condemned (Gal 1:8). Upon witnessing a fellow apostle, Peter, acting, on one occasion, in a manner contrary to the gospel message of unity between Jewish and Gentile believers, he rebuked him (Gal 2:11-14). In pursuing the church’s mission and vision of preaching the gospel, he said that what matters is not himself but Jesus Christ, the Lord (2 Cor 4:5).

Paul’s letters expressed the importance of motivating organizational members to take ownership of the collective mission and vision, and to emulate their leader in selflessly pursuing them. He urged them to imitate him just as he imitates Christ (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17, 4:9; 2 Thess 3:7-9; 2 Tim 3:10-11), and to Timothy, whom he trained as a fellow worker, he said, “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim 4:2).

Paul’s ownership of, and commitment to, the organizational mission and vision as a leader was articulated by modern business leaders. Jack Welch, in an interview with academics from the *Harvard Business Review*, once said, “Good business leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to completion” (Tichy & Charan, 1989). Collins and Porras (2008), on the other hand, wrote that the vision of the organization is anchored on the leader him[her]self, particularly in the guiding philosophy that [s]he articulates not in verbal eloquence but in daily action.

Early in time, Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, recognized the importance of defining the scope of a leader’s authority and responsibility. Aligned with the principle of unity of command, he wrote:

We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, a sphere that also includes you. We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we

did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in someone else's territory (2 Cor 10:13-16).

In both 2 Corinthians and Romans were Paul's writings on accountability. Accordingly, all men will appear before Christ to give an account of everything that they have done, and God will repay each person according to his deeds (2 Cor 5:10, Rom 14:12; 2:6). Secular theorists would call this vertical accountability, an organizational relationship whereby people of lower rank in the organizational hierarchy are made answerable to a person of higher rank (O'Donnell, 1998). The apostle also taught church members to be accountable to each other. In 1 Corinthians 5, he instructed the church to remove from its membership a man who was found to be committing a serious offense against church teachings. In Galatians 6:2, he urged church members to bear each other's burdens, and in 1 Corinthians 12:7, he admonished each one to use his God-given gifts for the common good. Secular theorists would, in turn, call these a practice of horizontal accountability, an organizational relationship whereby organizational members with more or less equal ranks are made answerable to each other (O'Donnell, 1998).

The Importance of Personal Integrity Among Leaders

Integrity, the quality of consistent moral uprightness, was emphasized in the leadership undertones of several Pauline epistles. In training Titus, Paul urged the young leader to be a role model in doing good and to teach with integrity, dignity, and sound speech (Titus 2:7-8). A similar instruction was given to Timothy, to "set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim 4:12), to compete according to the rules just as athletes do (2 Tim 2:5), to avoid the temptation of being corrupted by the love of money (1 Tim 6:10), and to unfalteringly keep the commandments of God (1 Tim 6:14). On the need for consistency in the moral conduct of leaders, Paul wrote, "Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we will also do when present" (2 Cor 10:11).

Paul also demonstrated humility in the practice of leadership. Although his training as an apostle and leader was extraordinary because it emanated from a direct revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:12), he did not puff up with pride. Three years after his conversion, it was recorded that he went to Jerusalem to confer with acknowledged apostles before him — Peter and James — and coordinate his ministry with them (Gal 1:18-19). Fourteen years later, Paul again went to Jerusalem, together with Barnabas, to discuss with Peter, James, John, and the other apostles, questions about the application or non-application of the Old Testament laws on newly-converted Gentiles. He did not decide by himself but was humble enough to defer the decision to the whole council (Gal 2:1-10). Likewise, although Paul was the leader of the church organizations he established, his writings showed that he was sufficiently unassuming to ask for their prayers (2 Thess 3:1; Eph 6:19). Whether being humble was a desirable leadership trait or not was verified by Sousa and Dierendonck (2017), who found that humility in leadership along the organization had a profound impact on the engagement of followers.

In selecting officials for an organization, which in the case of Paul was the church, Paul's writings prescribed certain qualities that mirror integrity. In appointing bishops, he wrote:

Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil (1 Tim 3:2-6).

To Titus, he wrote:

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might ... appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (Tit 1:5-9).

In appointing deacons, he commanded:

In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons (1 Tim 3:8-10).

Paul taught that leaders must practice what they preach, so they can become good role models to their followers. To the church in Rome, he wrote:

You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law (Rom 2:21-23)?

Paul's writings recognized that when followers succeed in imitating the good conduct of their leader, they themselves become role models to others. He noted that as the members of the Thessalonian church became imitators of God and of himself, they in turn became good examples to other believers in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess 1:6-7). Confident, also, that the church he established in Corinth could become a good example to others, the apostle wrote:

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Cor 3:2-3).

Modern leaders and followers could not agree more with Paul as he hit the nail on the head in extolling integrity as a desirable quality of leaders. For instance, in a survey that asked one thousand professionals in the U.S. what they thought should be the most important characteristic of a leader, 75 percent answered "integrity" (Robert Half Talent Resources, 2016). In another study that asked 195 leaders from fifteen different countries what they considered as the most important leadership competencies, "high ethical and moral

standards” topped the list, ahead of other competencies related to goal setting, communication, flexibility, commitment to training, openness to new ideas and approaches, group cohesiveness in success and failure, development of future leaders, and allowance for mistakes (Giles, 2016). Wei et al. (2020) confirmed that leadership integrity influenced worker productivity, while Sharma et al. (2020) found that ethical leadership, as moderated by trust, promoted organizational commitment and organizational identification. On role modeling integrity, Silitonga et al. (2019), in a study of 580 government officials, found that an official is most likely to avoid unethical behavior such as accepting bribes when they know of leaders and peers who refused them in the past. This was in line with Grigoropoulos (2019) who concluded that because leaders are the most influential members of the organization in affecting culture, then they must model desired behaviors.

The Need to Build Ethical Organizations

In Paul’s writings, integrity is not to be confined to the leader alone. Rather, integrity should flow to the followers so that an ethical organization may be built. In line with this, he taught his followers to do good and avoid evil (1 Thess 5:21-22), and to build each other up (Rom 15:2). To put this into practice, he instructed them, among others, to speak the truth, (Eph 4:25; Col 3:9), to live in peace and avoid quarrels (1 Thess 5:14, Eph 4:31, Col 3:8, Tit 3:2), and to be compassionate, kind, humble, meek, and patient in their dealings with each other (Col 3:12). And when religious discrimination was found to persist up to the present day – even in a democratic country as the United States (Cates, 2021) – Paul has, in his time, forbade it among believers. He said, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). The same message was seen in Colossians 3:11. More than anything else, the apostle advocated that his followers live the virtue of love (Col 3:14). He described this love to be more than romantic or sentimental love, saying:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth (1 Cor 13:4-6).

Paul’s writings on this subject connect very well with contemporary writings which emphasized the role of leaders in building ethical organizations and the benefits that organizations enjoy when such ethical organizations are built. For instance, Fehr et al. (2014) found that the moral values of a leader influence the development of concomitant positive behaviors of followers. Toor and Ofori (2009), on the other hand, reported on the positive relationship between ethical leadership and the willingness of employees to work beyond what is required of them.

Situational Leadership

In both his writings and actions, it was evident that Paul was an advocate and a practitioner of situational leadership. As a leader, depending on the needs of the situation, he was either soft or hard, people-oriented, or task-oriented. Capturing this flexibility in his approach were his words to the Corinthian church, “What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit” (1 Cor 4:21)?

As a people-oriented leader, Paul demonstrated a very loving and caring attitude toward his followers. He described himself, together with his co-workers, “Just as a nursing mother cares for her children” (1 Thess 2:7). He prayed for them without ceasing (Rom 1:9) and went to the extent of asking, “If I love you more, will you love me less” (2 Cor 12:15)? This love and care,

together with his faithfulness to his mission, he expressed not only in words but in deeds, teaching that God's kingdom is not based only on talk but on power (1 Cor 4:20). For this, he suffered willingly for the sake of the gospel and the people he loved. He wrote:

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked (2 Cor 11:24-27).

Culbertson (2018) found in Paul an apostolic style that invested heavily in the building of personal relationships, and rightly so, for as a leader, he worked extensively with such people as Barnabas, Timothy, Silas, Titus, Tychius, Epaproditus, Epaphras, Trophimus, Philemon, Onesimus, Onesiphorus, Erasthus, Aristarchus, Priscilla, Aquilla, Apollos, Luke, and Mark, all of whom were mentioned in his letters. These relationships worked to his advantage as he had assistants who were willing to help him perform his tasks. On occasions when he was away from a particular church that needed his attention because of a problem or issue, he sent co-workers to take his place, as in the case of Timothy to Corinth (1 Cor 4:17) and Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:3), and of Titus to Corinth (2 Cor 8:16-17).

Paul's writings also indicated that he took pride in the achievements of his people. Upon receiving the news from Timothy that the Thessalonian church persevered in faith and love despite being persecuted, he wrote a letter, telling them how he was so overjoyed and deeply encouraged (1 Thess 3:6-9). He commended the Corinthian church for maintaining the traditions he passed on to them (1 Cor 11:2), took pride in what they have become (2 Cor 7:4), and even boasted about them to the people of Macedonia and Achaia (2 Cor 9:1-2). For the obedience of the Roman church, he rejoiced (Rom 16:18), and for the faith and love of the Colossian church, he thanked God (Col 1:3-4). To Philemon, he wrote, "Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people" (Philem 1:7).

Modern leadership literature affirms the importance of giving positive feedback to subordinates. Chella (2020) found that appreciation nurtures the emotions of followers, while Clarke and Nomahaza (2017) and Wondim et al. (2020) confirmed that feedback from supervisors improves the task performance of subordinates. The latter paper also found a direct relationship between supervisor feedback and the information-seeking behavior of subordinates at work.

A further examination of Paul's epistles revealed that as a leader, he oscillated between people orientation to task orientation, depending on the circumstances of the situation. The fifth chapter of Corinthians portrays a disciplinarian Paul who was not afraid to castigate his followers when a task-related breach happened in the church. He did not make any compromises but expelled the offender from the organization. Moreover, he rebuked the other members of that church for not practicing horizontal accountability regarding fraternal correction.

He wrote:

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord (1 Cor 5:1-5).

For factionalism and disorderly conduct on the Lord's supper, he rebuked the same church in Corinth (1 Cor 11:17-21). In his second epistle to the church members, he warned them of his readiness to punish disobedience (2 Cor 10:6). Similarly, in his letters to Titus, he gave the instruction to silence people who perverted sound teaching (Tit 1:11) and to "encourage and rebuke with all authority" (Tit 2:15).

Paul's task orientation was also vividly captured in his writings about his quandary of whether to prefer death and be with the Lord or to live and serve the church. This was seen in Philippians 1:21-24:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

Keeping in mind the importance of task performance, he exhorted church members not to be lazy, but to work and support themselves (2 Thess 3:6-12), and to commit themselves fully to the works of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58). Nevertheless, showcasing his balance between the two orientations — people orientation and task orientation — Paul took time to explain that his rebukes were meant for the good of the people and for building them up, saying:

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us (2 Cor 7:8-9).

This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down (2 Cor 13:10).

Fostering Unity in Diversity

Paul's writings taught, and rightly so, the need for organizational members to be united despite their many differences. In the Corinthian church, he received a report that some members developed an unhealthy loyalty to their leaders and not to the Lord Jesus and his church. He corrected this error, writing them the following:

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought (1 Cor 1:10).

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it,

but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building (1 Cor 3:5-9).

In Paul's words, the church as an organization is a unified whole composed of many interdependent and interrelated parts. Each part is unique in its role and function, but each part is important in realizing the collective goal; hence, the groundwork for division of labor and specialization. He wrote:

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body (1 Cor 12:12-20).

Paul repeated this teaching in his letter to the Romans. He said that the church organization has members who not only have distinct functions but also different gifts or capabilities (Rom 12:4-8). Again, he expressed the same thought in his letter to the Ephesians, saying, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 11-12).

Paul's unity in diversity concept relates well with recent studies, such as those of Houghton et al. (2022), who recognized trade-offs between unity that stems from member homogeneity, and diversity that flows from member heterogeneity; Keebler (2021), who did not see differences in social norms as problematic for as long as these were not used as divisive tools against the universal aspiration of love; Cockayne (2019), who viewed transgression or sin as the cause of fragmentation in the church organization, which nevertheless stays united through the works of the Holy Spirit.

The Teaching Role of Leaders

In his writings and deeds, Paul recognized the importance of a good leader's teaching function. He wrote Timothy that a servant of God must be an apt teacher (2 Tim 2:24). He instructed him to subscribe to the standard of sound teaching (2 Tim 1:13), to "Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge" (1 Tim 6:20), and to be conscious of the fact that the goal of such instruction is love (1 Tim 1:3-5). He also advised another mentee, Titus, to "teach what is consistent with sound instruction" (Tit 2:1) and to "avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless" (Tit 3:9).

As a teacher, Paul knew the value of knowing his learners and adjusting his teaching strategies to suit their characteristics and needs. He wrote:

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To

those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Cor 9:20-23).

In preaching inside a synagogue in Antioch to an audience that was composed mainly of Jews who knew the Scriptures, he preached a message that covered salvation history from the Old Testament up to the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 13:16-41). This established a connection between him and his hearers, resulting in an enthusiastic reception of his message. On the other hand, in teaching Gentiles of Greek origin, he introduced the gospel by relying heavily on their prior knowledge of Stoic philosophy (Lee, 2006, 13-26). Moreover, he did not insist that Gentiles follow the entire Jewish law, declaring, "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal 5:13-14).

Paul also adjusted his teaching style according to the maturity of his learners in the knowledge and practice of the gospel message. He wrote:

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly— mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready (1 Cor 3:1-2).

Paul understood the effectiveness of using examples as he taught. He wrote, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). In teaching against sexual immorality, he cited the example of the 23,000 persons who died on a single day as a punishment for their sexual sins, and in teaching against putting God to the test, he cited the example of the complainers in the desert who were destroyed by serpents. "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11).

As a teacher, Paul taught with authenticity. In his letter to the Thessalonians, he said that he preached not to please men but God and that he did not use flattery words in his speech (1 Thess 2:4-5). Likewise, he said that his message was "not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction" (1Thess 1:5). He warned his audience not to be deceived by empty words, plausible arguments, and worldly philosophy that were not in alignment with the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 5:6; Col 2:4, 8).

Although Paul taught with great wisdom, he did not encourage blind obedience among his listeners. He advised them not to despise prophecies but to test everything taught to them (1 Thess 5:20-21). This was the same thing he allowed the Bereans to do as they "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11).

The benefit derived from attaining organizational vision as a result of encouraging employees to think critically and creatively was verified in modern studies, such as that of Felfe and Goihl (2002), while the reiteration of the main focus of teachers as that of facilitating the growth and development of others was seen in Reilly and Spears (2018).

Ensuring Organizational Continuity and Growth

Paul's writings showed his concern not only with the establishment of church organizations but also their continued existence, survival, and growth. As a leader, the apostle saw himself

as a good pioneer — a wise master builder who laid Jesus Christ as the foundation upon whom other leaders would build (1 Cor 3:10-11). Recognizing, however, that he would not be forever around to lead the churches he planted, Paul trained other leaders like Timothy, Titus, and others to take his place in these institutions. Acts 14:23 provides an example of an account of how he and Barnabas appointed elders in each of the new churches they organized. To Timothy and all other younger breed of leaders for that matter, he gave the instruction to entrust his teachings “to reliable people who [would] “also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim 2:2).

Paul encouraged not only leaders but church members to persist in following what he taught them orally and in writing (2 Thess 2:15), to “do so more and more” (1 Thess 4:1, 9-10), and to grow in the very mission for which he was sent to them — their faith in the gospel. He wrote:

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Eph 4:14-16).

Organizational continuity and organizational growth through delegation and succession planning were all regular items in Paul’s actions as a leader. The desirability of these leadership practices was verified by recent studies, such as by Thompson et al. (2019) which showed that as the span of supervision widens, the distance between leaders and followers increases thereby making it more difficult for the former to serve the latter’s needs, and by Berns and Klarner (2017) which concluded that succession planning is not a one-time event but a continuous process.

Discussion

In analyzing Paul’s epistles line by line, I found leadership themes that antedate their mention or discussion in all other classical books and articles on leadership that were subsequently published, although Paul made no use of the terminologies that are now universally accepted. Long before Frederick Taylor (1856-1915), Max Weber (1864-1920), Henri Fayol (1841-1925), Elton Mayo (1880-1949), Chester Barnard (1886-1961), Peter Drucker (1909-2005), and other renowned thinkers had formalized the study of leadership, Paul already theorized and applied the most fundamental of their principles.

Dominant among these themes were the following: (1) concepts of authority, responsibility, and accountability in organizations, (2) the importance of personal integrity among leaders, (3) the need to build ethical organizations, (4) situational leadership, (5) fostering unity in diversity, (6) the teaching role of leaders, and (7) ensuring organizational continuity, succession planning, and institutional growth.

Paul emphasized the importance of exercising leadership based on a legitimate source of authority which, in his case, was Divine appointment. He broadened this case by saying that all authority is ordained by God, and that with a leader’s authority comes his responsibility. He underscored the importance of leadership in defining and attaining the organizational mission and vision, modeling faithfulness and action toward these ends, and pressing for accountability for one’s performance, first to God and second to each other.

Personal integrity in leadership was captured in Paul's writings about role modeling in doing good, consistency in moral conduct, avoiding acts of corruption, and humility. The apostle was also very prescriptive in laying down the qualifications of leaders, particularly on their moral character.

The personal integrity of leaders is a prerequisite to the building of ethical organizations. Paul wrote extensively about instructions for church members to do good and avoid evil, build each other up and be truthful, peaceable, compassionate, kind, humble, meek, and patient. He forbade discrimination in organizational life, and he challenged all members to be motivated by the virtue of love.

Paul both wrote about and modeled situational leadership. Depending on the needs of the situation, he was either calm or abrasive in his leadership style, people-oriented or task-oriented. He genuinely loved and cared for his people, and made countless personal sacrifices for them. To work productively with others, he invested heavily in the building of interpersonal relationships. He took pride in the achievements of his followers and gave them positive feedback. On other occasions, he showed firmness in the use of his authority as he disciplined wrongdoers and castigated others for not exercising horizontal accountability. He discouraged factionalism and disorderly conduct, and warned his followers of his readiness to punish disobedience. Nevertheless, he made it clear to them that the purpose of his strictness was for their own good.

In writing about organizational unity in diversity, Paul used the analogy of the human body as one that was composed of many different parts that were both interdependent and interrelated. He taught that no part is superior or inferior to all the others in importance because each one played a unique role in making the body function as it should.

A major theme in Paul's writings was the need for leaders to become effective teachers of their followers. This they could do by holding to the standard of sound teaching, adhering to the truth, adjusting their teaching strategies to the characteristics and needs of their subordinates, and using examples for easier comprehension and appreciation of the subject matter. Paul also advocated the promotion of rational and critical thinking among learners, challenging them to test the correctness of the knowledge imparted to them.

Finally, in ensuring organizational continuity and organizational growth, Paul wrote about the development and appointment of new leaders, and he himself applied these instructions in the churches he established. He instructed both leaders and followers to persist not only in preserving the fundamental truths in their organizations, but also to grow more and more in accordance with his teachings.

All of these seven themes were found to be consistent with both classical and modern mainstream writings on the topic of leadership. Paul was therefore much ahead of his time; he was not only a spiritual writer, but he was also a leadership writer. Nevertheless, despite the seemingly high level of recognition for the apostle, it must be recognized that Paul was merely an agent in the writing of Scripture. God was the real author of the epistles from which the leadership themes found in this paper emerged. As he wrote, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

The findings in this paper reinforce the belief that leadership theory and practice can benefit from Biblical wisdom. Paul's epistles in the Bible can be used not only as spiritual books that

help guide human behavior, but also as leadership books that could assist any leader towards achieving the effective performance of his or her assigned functions. Paul's teachings on leadership, although posited in the context of the churches he established, are equally applicable to other types of organizations, such as those in business, government, education, and civic society. By putting these teachings into practice, he provided a model of effective leadership even in a turbulent ancient environment devoid of the vast resources, systems, and technologies of today's organizations.

Directions for Future Research

In closing, it is hereby recommended that the leadership themes in Paul's epistles be developed further into measurable constructs. This can be the subject of empirical studies that will advance the confluence of Biblical wisdom with secular knowledge in leadership theory and practice.

These are (1) concepts of authority, responsibility, and accountability; (2) the need for personal integrity among leaders, (3) the need to build ethical organizations, (4) situational leadership, (5) fostering unity in diversity, (6) the teaching role of leaders, and (7) ensuring organizational continuity and organizational growth.

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