

Leading Counter Culturally

"True leadership in my opinion is not difficult. Yet true leaders are few and far between," writes Jeff Kennett. We are drawn towards powerful speakers and compelling visionaries who have commenced denominations like Martin Luther, Rick Warren, and Bill Hybels. Timothy Gombis suggests we naively assume that Paul is someone just like these people. We imagine Paul must have been a compelling figure, a charismatic and decisive leader, a powerful speaker. Wrong. Neither Jesus, nor Paul, are this type of leader.

Churches place a high priority on spiritual leadership, and rightly so. People aspire to be the authority figure in church leadership. But the New Testament paints a completely different counter-culture picture of spiritual leadership. Jesus says: "you want to be a leader in my kingdom? Great. But my leadership model runs counter-culture to that applauded by society. Jesus explains, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:24-28; 23:6-12.

Paul reports his physical condition "was a trial" to the Galatians, (Gal. 4:13-14). An apocryphal text states that Paul was "a man small in size, bald-headed, bow-legged, stocky with eyebrows meeting and a rather long-nose." Paul's physical appearance must have been repulsive.

Surprisingly to us, Paul doesn't apologize for his unimpressive personal presence. Instead, Paul believes this makes him even more fit to be a preacher/teacher, church planter. Paul admits his inferior speaking skills. He avoids self-assertiveness, 1 Corinthians 1:17; 2:1-5; 2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:6. He reveals his mind-set in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5: *And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.*

By addressing them in frailty and humility, Paul ensures that the messenger would not overshadow the message of Christ crucified.

Kennett is right. True leaders are few and far between. Why? Because to be a genuine spiritual leader in God's church is to take on a role that is counter culture. It is to take of the role of a slave. No one applauds that type of leader.