

Leadership And The Covenants (Part Four)

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This series is built upon what I believe is a clear premise, and this premise is not difficult to grasp. Ezekiel 34 clearly establishes the charge by God, that the Israelites were led by self-centered shepherds, as He calls them there. A shepherd is a term for those who lead others, so it would include within the breadth of the understanding of the word shepherd not just those who lead a flock, but also those who lead corporations, educational institutions, unions, and on and on it goes. The leadership was so poor that the people did not grow in the way that God wanted them to grow.

Those shepherds were more concerned about themselves than they were about the responsibility that was given to them. When we add to that all of the memories we have in our minds of scriptures that say that such and such a king “did evil in the sight of the Lord,” a king, of course, being an evil person as a leader, he led those under his rulership to follow what he was doing rather than what God wanted them to do.

Verses like that are confirmation that Israel's leadership was not good. Leadership in the context that I am thinking of is not leadership of other people, that is directly leadership of other people, but leadership of ourselves consistently and deliberately along the righteous path all the while following Christ. That has to be taken together—the following Christ is important to my thoughts here.

All of this by itself is difficult to do. The apostle Paul says in I Corinthians 9 that he beat his body lest he found himself a cast away. This requires discipline. That is where much of the difficulty comes from, keeping our mind fixed on a vision that contains our hope and knowing that what we are doing is leading to the achievement of that hope.

This requires discipline but the fruit of that will be that we will be a guide for others to follow.

Leadership is a composite quality consisting of many lesser traits. The leadership God desires in His children must be built, it is creation and He creates it as we yield to Him. This is why we must follow and why I am saying in each one of these sermons that leadership is built upon following, following that which is right, God's way of life.

Isaiah 3:12-14 As for My people, children are their oppressors [children are not only youths but adults that are childish in the way that they lives their

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

lives. They do not have maturity to lead righteously.], and women rule over them, O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths. The Lord stands up to plead [plead is used in the sense of a prosecuting attorney presenting the case the state has against the person who is accused, in this case the leaders], and stands to judge the people. The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders of His people and His princes: "For they have eaten up the vineyard; the plunder of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing My people and grinding the faces of the poor?"

We will define the word lead. To lead is a verb thus indicating the position and the activity of the subject of the sentence dealing with it. According to my *Reader's Digest Encyclopedia Dictionary*, 'lead' means to go ahead (as to show the way), to guide (as in giving directions), to conduct (as with an orchestra), to cause to progress by pulling or holding (thus to draw along, in the sense of a horse pulling a wagon), to be in command (as in controlling the actions or the affairs), to direct, to serve, to influence or determine the ideas, conduct, actions of, induced, motivate.

A leader is one that goes ahead of or in advance of, acting as an influence upon others. You will notice, forcing others is not implied in the term, you are not leading them you are pushing them, but at the same time being a guiding influence and being an example is implied.

If it is done right, the leading that we are thinking about here creates followers who deliberately allow the other person to lead. That can be either good or bad, so we want to be on the good side.

This subject is important to us because, first, because God clearly shows that Israel's and Judah's failures as nations representing Him was largely caused by a failure of good shepherding. The shepherding term points directly to the quality of leadership. I want us to understand why the subject of a leadership is important to our understanding of what we are involved in because of our calling.

My aim is that I want us to be well prepared for His Kingdom. I want us to understand clearly why this issue is of importance, so I want you to turn to the book of Revelation, chapter 5.

Revelation 5:1-3 And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.

Revelation 5:8-9 Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying; “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.”

The issue in the vision that is given in this chapter is finding one who is qualified to open a certain scroll, the scroll contains a listing of visions of events that will occur beyond the present time, that is the present time in the context, both before and after Christ's return. The opening of the scroll issue is resolved because Christ, the Lamb in the context, is qualified to open it because of what He has already accomplished in the past. Thus He was prepared to open it.

His being qualified is important to us because it sets us an example. Verse 10 is what most concerns us. Christ has appointed those mentioned in verses 8-9, as a kingdom of priests to serve our God and also bear some measure of rulership. They are appointed to a responsibility because they, like Christ, have been prepared in the past to render these services in God's behalf.

The King James and the New King James translate verse 10 as, “made us kings and priests.” That is not quite right. It really says in the Greek, “He has made them a kingdom of priests.” The kings and priests is not entirely wrong, because the mention of the words “We shall reign” is helpful because that is what kings do.

Rulership is definitely in view in addition to priestly responsibilities. Both reigning and priestly positions carry shepherding responsibilities. You can begin to see why leadership is so important. We should be training now to become kings and priests, or a kingdom of priests. Priest is defined, as used in the Bible, as one especially consecrated to the service of a divinity, as a mediator between the divinity and His worshippers.

Can you image God assigning somebody who has no training, no background, nothing at all? God prepares people to serve Him. It becomes important to you and me because we have to respond to God on our own. We have to give ourselves to Him, we have to

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

voluntarily, deliberately, and consistently submit to His way of life in order to be prepared to lead in the way that God wants us to lead. Leadership is something that is built, it does not just magically happen, so we are being prepared to bear rule. We are also being prepared to serve between people and the God that they are worshipping. It is the same God that we worship. He is preparing, He is doing the creating as we respond to Him in submission to His way of life. This is where following fits in.

We either follow what He has patterned out for us to do, because if we do not we will not be prepared in the way that He wants us to be prepared. This is why this subject is important. We are being prepared for responsibilities that lie ahead of us. Sometimes the responsibilities are given to us here and now; it is not absolutely necessary that they be given to us but the leadership still has to be created within us.

I Peter 2:5 You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

That is part of our responsibilities now as we learn to be ready, then when the fullness of the responsibilities is given to us as in Revelation 5, we are prepared to work under Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. [We have terms there, priesthood, holy nation, that we may carry out a responsibility.]

Revelation 14:3-4 And they sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

I hope I have made my case here about why leadership is so important that we should learn. The kind of leadership that we are talking about is the kind of leadership that God wants, that He creates within us as we follow the Lamb. We should be doing that now, and getting ready for what is coming.

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

The world's approach to salvation focuses almost exclusively on merely being saved. As important as that is it pays little attention to any other purpose and responsibility attached to being saved. However, this period prior to our transformation into the Kingdom of God has a major purpose. That major purpose is to be prepared to continue serving God in an exceedingly higher level of responsibility after Jesus Christ returns. We are being created into the image of Jesus Christ, and leadership is what God is looking for us in us.

If we are not prepared to lead, we will not be there, so now is our time to learn. We will not learn it perfectly, we will not do the following perfectly, but we have to give ourselves, our lives to this program that God is working out so that He can create the kind of leadership in us that He desires to be in His Kingdom.

How does this take place? I mentioned earlier in this sermon that it is by deliberately and consistently choosing to allow ourselves to be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ through following His way of life.

If we are leading others in this life it is primarily by example. This is important. You are not forcing anybody, but you are nonetheless setting an example and that is good. Developing leadership in this way of life through the use of God's covenants is a must for every Christian.

Covenants are exceedingly important, because without a broad understanding of what is required of us in our relationship with God, one cannot possibly be a leader. The covenants show us where things fit in God's purpose.

As I mentioned in a previous sermon, it is clear from God's Word that leadership is developed through following. Jesus said clearly that His doctrine was not His own, but that which He received from the Father. Jesus Christ was a follower first. Did He develop into a leader? Absolutely. Was He a good one? Absolutely.

Luke 4:32 [This took place at the very beginning of Christ ministry He was preaching in Capernaum, right near where He grew up. The people who were listening to Him made this statement,] And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority.

John 7:14-17 [this takes place at a Feast of Tabernacles] Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. And the Jews marveled, saying, "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?" Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine but His who sent

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Me. [Jesus was a follower, He followed first and became a leader.] If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.”

That is instruction to you and me that we are to follow in our following of Him. Doing what He says there will give us understanding. There has never ever been a better leader that ever walked on the face of this earth in all of earth's history, and He began by following what was given to Him. He did not argue with it. He consistently never once failed to follow what His Father said. This sets the course for us if we want to be a follower of Jesus Christ. We have to do what we can to come close to imitating what He did in our life.

Paul said imitate me as I imitate Christ. It is a simple piece of direction but it has the potential with the help of God's Spirit to produce individuals who are really and truly leaders. They know what produces that which is good because they have experienced it.

I Corinthians 1:26-29 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

This series of verses are given to be a reminder that God does not call people who are already leaders in His way of life. There are people who develop good and bad traits of leadership throughout their life, but when a person is called, God wants to create *His* leadership in them regardless of what they have accomplished in the world. It has to have God's stamp of approval and He wants leadership of the quality that He designed to be produced.

This begins to become very important when we get into the first covenant. God does not call people with already-developed leadership possessing the qualities He desires in His family. Instead He calls those with the potential to lead, gifts them with the raw material that they need for it to be built, and then He goes about creating what He desires within those people. It is a complete remaking.

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

If you want a very interesting word study go into II Corinthians 5:17 and look at the words that Paul used there regarding you being a new creation. It is a God-made creation. In order for this to take place within us we have to throw off the things that we bring to Him from this world. They might be of some use but then again they may not be of any use at all.

How much help did God have creating Adam and Eve? He does not need what the raw materials that is given to Him possesses. He remakes it, reshapes it for what He wants that person to be in His family. That is why He gives the gifts. Not everybody in the body of Jesus Christ has the same gifts. Sometimes it is very difficult for us to accept or find what it is that God wants us to do. He puts the body together, He is the workman who is going to produce what He wants to be produced. It is our job to follow.

This principle of building and providing the kind of leadership that God desires in His children, leads us toward the covenants so that we will make the effort to have a good understanding of the covenants. It is because the covenants are foundational to His purpose by providing us with overall direction.

Those of you who are at the Feast there in Nashville with us might recall my sermons on Deuteronomy. I stated several times that Deuteronomy is organized and written in the form of an ancient covenant. I also told you that Deuteronomy, though it touches on every subject that is necessary for salvation, does not go into details. It mentions it, it is important, but the details are elsewhere in the Bible.

The book of Deuteronomy is a guide in the sense that, if we ever get off track, that is the book you need to get back on track and then start working on the details. This is the same general form that all of the covenants in Bible are approached, that will give you the most information. They are broad, they do not have details, so they lay a foundation upon which other things can be gotten from other parts of the Bible to fill in the small parts of it that are important, but not in the covenant itself. The details are elsewhere in God's Word. They do supply a great deal of positive direction to God's way of life from start to finish.

I mentioned again in Deuteronomy that Jesus quoted Deuteronomy more than any other book in the Bible. Jesus's teaching to the people in the area of Jerusalem, Galilee, was basic. It is good basic material for us to understand and then we can go to other places for the details.

You have to look at each covenant as a teaching vehicle revealing God's purposes for us in broad strokes so that we are prepared with understanding as to what is expected

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

of us by Him. In them we not only see His purposes but also His judgment. Some of the covenants have tragic judgments that we are suffering to this day from and having to deal with it.

Covenants are unifying agents. They are devices but they unify only if they are faithfully adhered to by the parties who enter into them. You enter into a covenant with a bank and everything is fine but do not miss a string of payments! Then the penalties that are there begin to come down on us. So covenants are unifying agents as long as we pay attention to what He says and continue to follow through with them.

God is faithful in carrying out His promises within them. They will be done! He is faithful always. As I read you those things regarding I Corinthians 1:26-29, ours needs to be gifted. Will we follow through is the issue. It is not that the covenants are hard to understand, they are not complex, but they are teaching elements that are there and whether we will follow it through remains to be seen.

I want to go into the Adamic covenant once again. I want to give a cautionary warning, do not ever forget Luke 12:48—to him much is given the much more is required. Chances are you can go down the street and you might not ever run into another person that God has gifted like He has gifted you, and we are responsible for making use of the gifts that He supplies. There is a reason for that. That is, He gifts everybody that He is requiring something of.

We will see as we go into the Adamic covenant that it is required to be kept by everybody in the world whether they are converted or not. This is why it says in Romans 1:20, the people are without excuse, it is in the Book. Is that enough of cautionary tale there for you and me? This is the way we have to understand it. It is not that God is being hard on us. He is very patient and kind, but He still nonetheless lays down levels for us to understand that it is required of us that we do this. And among all of the people who are on the earth, we have received the calling, and therefore He has gifted us with the ability to understand the covenants and to keep them.

Genesis 1:1-2 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Genesis 1:22 And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”

Genesis 1:27-28 So God created man in His own image; in the image of

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Genesis 2:15-17 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

I believe the key phrase for this covenant is (it occurs in verse 28), “God blessed them.” To me this is the overall thought at the forefront of this first and universal covenant—it is that the entire creation, including us and the life given to us, but most especially planet earth in this context, is a gift from God.

That is where it starts, it is in our attitude towards what God has done. He created the earth for us, this is our home. We live, we have our being, we think, we plan, we build, and we look to the future all because of what God *did*. It did not just come out of nothing.

This is the key to everything: from beginning to end God does it. There was no earth until He created it, there were no stars until He created them, there was no sun until God created it, the moon, the air, every bit of it is a gift. That is the way He wants us to begin to think about our relationship with Him.

He did not call you to spiritual salvation because you were something great. He gave us a gift, He gave us His Holy Spirit, He gives us understanding, He builds character within us, He approves, He disapproves, He corrects. This is *His* creation not ours. He is going to do with it as He wants. We have to accept that and be humble before Him.

Try to think of anything that God did not give man to complete the Creator’s purpose. It is His world, it is His ideas, it is His hopes and dreams that are going to be realized. They will be realized in you if you will allow it, if you will pay attention to what He wants of us. We do not have a leg to stand on yet there are so many people who are so proud on this earth, they think somehow they mean something.

We understand that they are as blind as can be to spiritual reality, but do not forget Luke 12:48. We have no excuse. It is serious business. It can be fun, it can be enjoyable, but creation is serious business because God has a purpose that He is working out.

Please understand this because it is the first covenant that God is presenting to mankind. He is setting things right, right from the beginning so we have no excuse. That is why He says in Romans 1:20 that they are without excuse. All they have to do is use their minds and humble themselves to accept it. That is the hard part.

All of those commentaries I gave on 'mightier than the sword,' were about men of great intellect but without contact with God they allow Satan to really mess things up through them. They gave him permission.

You will not find this stated here in Genesis 1-3, but this truth that I am going to give you is a conclusion that is gathered from its entire context, combined with understanding appearing elsewhere in God's Word. All of God's gifts are aspects of His grace, right from the beginning. You understand of course that the word grace actually means gift. God's gifts are given to aid us in succeeding within His purpose.

My emphasis here is on His purpose. For example, creation itself is a major teaching device whether one is converted or unconverted, receiving it bears responsibilities. The critical aspect of this is, how are we going to use what we learned from the creation? Look at what man has done with this creation. The mind of man is magnificent in its ability to do things, but he has no control over whether he should do them. It is not, "*can* we do it?" We can, but *should* we do it? In the movie Jurassic Park, that was the issue. They could reproduce these dinosaurs but should they? There is much that we can do, but in a way it is what Solomon meant in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 7:29 "Truly, this only have I found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes."

We do not use much in the way of wisdom as to whether we should do what we have the ability to do. God has given us these gifts in order to have success within His creative efforts. We are to use them toward that end so that we will succeed in God's creative purposes.

I Corinthians 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Look back 6,000 years to the original creation, not the spiritual creation, taking the same principle out of I Corinthians 12, turn to verse 4.

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

I Corinthians 12:4-7 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.

The gifts that God gives ought to be shared, not to be competed over, not to go to war over, but to be shared with one another within the creation that God has made.

Genesis 1:27-28 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

This was spoken directly to Adam and Eve, but since all humans are counted as from them, this covenant is addressed broadly to include everyone. There are several major overviews that can be discerned. What I will give you are factors that are not stated right here but they become apparent to those who study them thoroughly when the entire Bible is used as a back drop. Do not forget the law of first mention.

First and perhaps the most important is that this covenant introduces the sovereign Creator God Himself. So in the first five verses of Genesis 1, He stands alone, thus focusing on what He wants us first to learn about Him. The first thing He reveals about Himself is that He is the Creator, He—nobody else—and therefore He is the most important person, being, in our life. He comes first in everything! That is the lesson as we begin this first covenant. Without Him there would be nothing, He gave us everything.

He is therefore revealed by this first covenant as the beginner of all things, He precedes everything. There are other covenants that follow this one, but always, in every case, you have to begin each one of those covenants knowing it is with the Creator God. No lesser being at all. He is giving these things to mankind. That pattern follows through on all covenants. You will see this as we go on. There is no dealing with God over a covenant, He sets the tone for *everything*, He dictates *everything* in these covenants.

The second thing, for our thinking about Him, is that this covenant reveals that He is orderly. Everything in chapter 1 is done in one, two, three, four, logical order which shows that right from the get-go He began with a plan. He knew what He was doing, He

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Four) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

knew what He needed to do at this particular time. We are dealing with somebody whose mind is of such logic and truth, that everything will be done in the right order, at the right time, in the right way.

Every step in the creation as it is revealed in Genesis 1 is taken in a scientifically logical progression. The very first thing He had to do is create light, He had to have light in order to continue. What does light symbolize? Truth. Spiritually we need truth above all things if we are going to succeed in God's purpose, and be willing to live up to it.

What this does now is it establishes the creation and His purpose as most assuredly not haphazard. Randomness is not part of His nature. His orderliness begins establishing the principle that this God is purposeful and that He already has a plan and He is already following it step by step.

Thirdly, it shows in the beginning that everything is morally perfect even as He is, there is no sin present at all, nothing disorderly has occurred, not until man gets on the job.

Fourthly, the creation is *not* to be worshipped. What God made is not to be worshipped. It is interesting that of all the commandments, the second commandment in Exodus 20 may have the second-most words.

Exodus 20:3-6 “You shall have no other gods before Me [First Commandment]. You shall not make for yourself any carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

God's creation is to be studied, it is to be learned from, but we never, ever want to allow any part of what is created to occupy a higher, more important place in our mind than the One who made it in the first place.

The fifth point, mankind beginning with Adam and Eve, is charged with populating the earth, and to subdue the earth. Subdued does not indicate mankind is to have an adversarial relationship with earth. Subdue means to put down, but that is not what that word means here. The Hebrew term translated ‘subdue’ can have that sense, it is not really a mistranslated from the Hebrew to the English.

When it is used in a gentle context as it is here, it is to be understood differently. It is illogical to conclude that after giving all of these beautiful gifts, life and breath, this beautiful earth, we are then suppose to proceed to beat it into submission. God does not operate like that. Therefore, in this case subdue indicates that God is giving us the leeway, the gift to be able to harness the potential that He built within the earth and use its resources for our benefit.

Mankind is being cautioned that he is not permitted to allow planet earth to go wild. I believe He created it utterly beautiful. He created it beautiful and we start beating it with a baseball bat? No, that is totally illogical.

We then can understand the word subdue to include such things as cultivating its fields, you may plow in order to produce food. He also includes mining for its riches, getting precious stones out of the earth, even things like coal, oil that we can make good use of. The trees—He gives us permission to harvest its trees, but to do it in a constructive manner for building homes, and furniture, making use of the beautiful woods He created for us to reshape and form into furniture. It includes such things as domesticating its animals and exercising dominion over animals without abusing them.

We can get some parameters here. Man is to neither rape the earth or just let it go wild. Man is to be a working being properly managing what he has been given. That is what the word subdue means.

One of the major concepts here is that mankind is created in God's image. He is to rule it in God's behalf, as His servant, as the Creator would do. That is the level of our responsibility to taking care of what God gives. The word subdue can also mean in this sense, to manage, to govern, as established by the Creator.