

Taking Our Lead From God

by Staff

Forerunner, December 2005

A number of years ago at a business conference, my eyes caught a rather humorous poster in one of the breakout rooms, featuring a group of single-file, Alaskan sled dogs tugging vigorously at the harness lines connecting them together. The caption read: "If you aren't the lead dog, the view is pretty much always the same."

Obviously, the poster was directed toward a room full of salesmen, all there to take their companies to the next level or to bury their nearest competitors in the dirt. And from the dog-eat-dog perspective of this world (pun intended), that was the real focus of the conference. It is also the focus of the super-competitive of this world who work to annihilate and dominate rather than to cooperate and produce a quality product or service.

Most of us never expected to see this type of worldliness become so blatant in God's church—aside from a few prominent exceptions who, using worldly ways, sought a coveted office—before the major organization housing the members of the church began to break up. Sadly, the physical church is continuing to splinter, and many Korah-like individuals have sprung up, striving for lead-dog status (see Numbers 16:1-50). In fact, the church's experience has paralleled what happened in the Wilderness: Those who were chosen to serve most prominently within Israel were those who were most culpable for this uprising, the tribe of Levi (verse 7; see also James 3:1).

What is probably the most compelling factor in this side-by-side comparison of present activities within the church and the world is how many have forgotten that God determines right leadership qualities versus wrong ones. Even though the ministry obviously plays a major role in this (as did Korah and the "leaders of the congregation"), this worldly mindset has influenced every single member of God's church. God is not blind to this.

How does God view all that is transpiring as group after group breaks even further apart? So many modern-day Korahs are professing their willingness to "stand in the gap" (Ezekiel 22:30), while forgetting the real implication of that verse as a prophetic warning and indictment of wicked leadership!

Perhaps it is better to ask: How many of us take our lead from God in what we do, who we follow, and what we believe, instead of following a man's version of Christian teaching and the work of the church? We see it all the time in this world, as thousands follow this or that evangelist, despite what God's Word says—and now we see it happening within the churches of God.

Korah's Example

The example of Korah has often been used to indict people of certain attitudes and actions like rebelliousness, contentiousness, disrespect of authority, and similar evils. It is indeed a viable example of all of these. What happened to cause God to take such drastic measures?

The issue was mostly about power and wrongly desired roles. In accordance with God's original purposes, Moses and Aaron were in charge, and it eventually became a smoldering issue. Initially, it

only affected a few, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, but quickly involved others (Numbers 16:1-2). The charge first presented to Moses and Aaron dealt with unwarranted self-exaltation: "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" (verse 3).

At first glance, this would seem to be a reasonable argument, since God called all of Israel holy (Deuteronomy 7:6). Of course, the same could be argued today from a New Testament perspective using scriptures like I Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people. . . ."

But the most glaring sin here is the same sin that plagues today's church: presumptuousness, or as *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines it, "being too bold or forward; taking too much for granted; showing overconfidence, arrogance, or effrontery."

Sadly, the presumption did not stop with just these three men. It quickly built into a "cause" or a "movement," with the addition of 250 "men of renown" within the congregation. Eventually, this sin ensnared almost 15,000 people (Numbers 16:49), all of whom died as a result of their involvement in the fray. Every single person among them made the conscious decision to blame Moses and Aaron, without realizing that they were actually blaming God.

One might imagine that seeing 250 leaders of Israel consumed by "fire . . . from the Lord" (verse 35) would have been a major wake-up call for the rest of Israel. Instead, the blame-game continued toward Moses and Aaron, as the people accused them of killing "the people of the Lord" (verse 41), as if this further act of disobedience would succeed any more than their dead leaders' presumption had.

Can we see how this attitude has become a prevailing approach today? Instead of allowing God to place whomever He wants in whatever place or position He wants, we often see a more secular tactic used, often clouded with religious or biblical rhetoric, but one with the same undertone of rebelliousness and self-righteousness exhibited by Korah and company.

And the saddest part of all is that, instead of learning from this as an example of what not to do, dozens of self-proclaimed "leaders," beating their own drums of godliness and truth, attract many misguided "sheep," who follow them right to the slaughterhouse of self-determination, self-righteousness, and self-centeredness. What happened to following God's lead?

Perhaps like the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32), this Korah-like rebelliousness begins as something almost invisible yet quickly grows into a huge tree, making some suppose there is great depth to a leader's ideas or goals. Maybe even some of his arguments have some truth or relevance. However, when the tree begins to draw others to it in ways unsupported by God's Word—the Bible may speak of this in terms of "factions" (I Corinthians 11:19), "contentions" (I Corinthians 1:11), or "preach[ing] Christ . . . from envy and strife" (Philippians 1:15)—it does not matter how many truths or rights are taught or believed. Following God's lead is always the right way.

Humility, Meekness, and Contriteness

Paul writes in I Corinthians 1:26, "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." Yet, often left out of this passage are the various reasons why this is so. What was Paul trying to teach the people of Corinth about himself, themselves, and ourselves—all who would one day be called?

We need to see this in context. Paul makes it clear what his role and purpose was: He was to preach the gospel (verse 17). He also makes it plain that it was not his job to employ "wisdom of words"—perhaps he means too worldly, intellectual, or self-exalting speech. That seems somewhat humorous, considering how Paul's letters are frequently misunderstood due to their complexity (II Peter 3:15-16)! Nevertheless, his statement has as much to do with what he could not or should not do than anything else. Paul knew his limitations and what his past behaviors had caused, so he knew not to take on more than God wanted from him.

He then breaks down various philosophies of the time (I Corinthians 1:18-25). Some people, like the Greeks, were constantly looking for arguments that made them or their beliefs look better, while the Jews were always seeking a sign of their perceived preeminent position over others. Yet, Christ, virtually unknown and humanly unremarkable—a man who had been condemned to crucifixion!—was the role model Paul preached and strove to imitate.

Because of this, God would choose His called-out ones from similarly unremarkable circumstances. He wants His chosen people to strive after and embrace humble ways (Titus 3:1-7), meekness of heart (Colossians 3:12) and contriteness (Psalm 51:17), unlike the arrogance of this world (see Isaiah 66:2). Any real wisdom and righteousness are to be based on Christ, His teachings, and His example, not on even the "wisdom" of this world.

This is most certainly not what we see in Korah's circumstance, and unfortunately, this principle seems to have been lost in the shuffle even among many leaders and members of God's church today. How many self-proclaimed leaders have taken on so-called biblical roles and titles? This seems more destructive than edifying, making Christianity more about them than about God and His truth!

Has the church become more about the leaders' messages, ideas, beliefs, and interpretations than glorifying God and proclaiming His Word? Paul concludes by warning, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (I Corinthians 1:31).

The same is true for individual members. We must identify whom we follow by God's standards and not some human methodology or some proclamation of "new truth" that is more grounded in man's way than God's.

It is instructive to study how many of God's chosen leaders landed in their roles. Think about Moses' almost desperate unwillingness to take God's message to Pharaoh. Consider that David was the youngest boy in his family, yet he ascended to become the king of Israel. Jesus called His apostles from jobs like fisherman and tax collector, and Paul from a life of persecuting the church! God saw in these people a potential for humility, meekness, and contriteness, even though they occasionally stepped on these virtues along the way. In the end, God determined their roles, not themselves.

It can be very hard to know the heart and intent of each leader among the smorgasbord of church organizations. Yet, it is true that God is placing the members where He wants them. If we still have a Berean way of thinking—which is not confrontational or nitpicking, but also is not easily fooled by

misplaced loyalties, nepotism, cronyism, false humility, human reason, etc.—we can make godly determinations regarding church leaders.

One Body, One Calling

Many things have been written about the broken body of the church and why it happened. Some blame Satan, others involve God at various levels, many point the finger at ambitious men, and still others offer nothing but excuses. Yet, so many seem to miss the fact that what has happened to the church replicates past situations like the example of Korah or the punishment of Israel for sin.

As Paul writes in Ephesians 4:1-7, we all have responsibilities from God:

- » to walk worthy of our calling with all lowliness and gentleness with longsuffering;
- » to bear with one another in love;
- » to strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Elsewhere we are instructed:

- » to live by God's commandments (James 1:25; I John 2:2-5; 5:3), and
- » to mirror our lives to the sinless Christ's life because ours have gone astray (I Peter 2:21-25; I John 2:6).

Paul reminds us that there is only one body and one Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:4), which should be reinforced by all of us having the same hope in our calling and the same faith. This is where it gets confusing for so many in God's church, as they proclaim, defend, and excuse their own or their group's definitions of God's truths and purposes versus what the Bible says they really are.

Regardless of whom we follow, what we might believe is truth or heresy, what we feel should be the direction and responsibility of God's church during the end time, etc., we must take our lead from God. Or, have we abrogated our responsibility to make such critical judgments to someone else? Are we just blindly following a lead dog? How many of God's people truly believe they are following God's lead but instead are allowing Korah-types to steer them off in a completely different direction? How much rationalization and human reasoning are the various groups and leaders using in determining doctrine, organizational structures, and the direction of their works? Or, more positively, are they based on what God reveals in the Bible as His way?

Being of one body and one mind requires repentance, overcoming, and hard work. We are on a very difficult road to perfection, learning to do as God designs and not just whatever happens to make us happier, more visible, or more relevant. Real unity is allowing the same Spirit, given as a gift from God, to be the prevailing factor in all our lives.

It is constantly surrendering and yielding, as James 3:13-18 states:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking

in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

No one truly knows how, when, where, or even if God will bring His church to the place where "one body and one Spirit" will once again equate to "one organization" in our lifetimes. A mindset of repentance, a spirit of cooperation, a willingness to edify God's people, and a humble desire to obey God will surely be integral parts of the equation. All the modern-day Korahs—perhaps all of us on some level—must regain a humble, meek, and contrite heart that produces a godly way of life, one that is lived daily and not just professed.

As with most things in a Christian's life, it comes down to this: Whose lead are we really following: God's perfect, proven path or man's shortsighted, selfish course? As we grow in this way over time, it should increasingly become second nature to follow God obediently in everything, as He leads His saints to glory in His Kingdom.