You Need No Man to Teach You

Mike Davies 7 June 2018



Walking a tightrope is a difficult task. It requires an incredible degree of balance and control. In fact, a tightrope could be described as the ultimate narrow path. In order to maintain his stability and centre of balance over the thin rope, a tightrope walker will often use a pole, weighted at each end, to assist him in successfully making it to the other side. The pole also adds more weight below the centre of gravity of the walker, which is another bonus for staying balanced.

> Scripture acts like that balancing pole: preventing the walker from leaning too far to one side or too far to the other.

Our approach to Scripture often needs to apply a similar principle. As I shared in a previous article, the Bible contains a number of paradoxical statements. Some paradoxes are difficult to fully reconcile this side of eternity, but others can easily be reconciled if we correctly interpret Scripture by reading it within context and using the whole of Scripture rather than proof texts.

The Leadership Paradox

A good example of this is when we look at how Scripture approaches the issue of leadership in the church. 1 John 2:27 states, 'But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and **you have no need that anyone should teach you**. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie — just as it has taught you, abide in him'.

At the same time, we read in Ephesians 4:11-12, 'And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and **teachers**, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ'.

Elsewhere we read in Matthew 23:8-10, 'But **you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher**, and you are all brothers. And **call no man your father on earth**, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ'.

Yet Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:15-17, 'For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. **For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.** I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, **my beloved and faithful child in the Lord**.'

Paul himself argues that he is subject to no man's judgement (1 Corinthians 2:15), but then goes on to say that he has judged another man (1 Corinthians 5:3).

What do we make of all this? Does Scripture contradict itself? Is Paul a hypocrite? Not at all! When we begin to examine the intended audience for each statement and the attitude or behaviour that was being addressed, we see that Scripture acts like that balancing pole: preventing the walker from leaning too far to one side or too far to the other.

Two Leadership Leanings

Mankind has a tendency to fall into one of two errors when it comes to leadership.

1. Relying on Leaders

On the one hand, like ancient Israel, man asks for a king to 'go out before us and fight our battles' (1 Samuel 8:20). A modern-day manifestation of this is the priest or pastor in many models of church. People often want this, as it is actually easier to absolve ourselves of our personal responsibility of seeking and hearing God for ourselves. What accentuates the problem is that there are some men, like many of the Pharisees of Jesus' day, who are seduced by power and control over others, and will allow themselves to be put on such a pedestal in an

attempt to take up a role in people's lives that rightfully belongs only to Jesus.

2. Rejecting Leaders

It was necessary for Scripture to destroy such a paradigm. Which it does. But without a counter-balance, this could easily lead to problems of an opposite nature, which we have also seen throughout history: men who refuse to submit to any authority in the name of egalitarianism (all people are equal). We have also seen many leaders who abrogate their authority by refusing to lead those for whom God has asked them to take responsibility. Without healthy, godly leadership, there will be chaos in any family, community or church. Therefore Scripture needs to also destroy this kind of thinking.

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We can now see that there is an absolute necessity for us to allow Scripture to correct us, in order to prevent us from leaning too far one way or the other. In doing so, the Bible is not contradicting itself but ensuring our theology and practice are in line with God's heart – keeping us walking the tightrope without falling. Unfortunately, we have a tendency to give more credence to those Scriptures that support our existing worldview, personality, theology or preferences rather than those which challenge our attitudes and our thinking (something psychologists refer to as 'confirmation bias'). This can be disastrous! It is like adding extra weight to one side of our balance pole, making it ever more likely that we will lose our balance.

In order to avoid this, we should be aware of our (sometimes unconscious) bias, allow for that bias, and then let ourselves to be challenged, convicted and led by the Holy Spirit into all truth – a truth we will only discover when we embrace the whole counsel of God.