APPLYING BOTH FAITH AND ETHICS FOR SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Faith paired with ethics is a solid foundation for leaders to build their practice of leadership. Faith is first defined and discussed using social and cultural texture analysis of Matthew 25:14-30. Faith is shown to increase courage and a willingness to act and at the same time decrease fear. Ethics is then defined and discussed using an inner texture analysis of Proverbs 20:21-23. Ethical decision making is directly related to character and a willingness to put others above oneself – to make the right decision every time. Leaders that deploy both faith and solid ethical behavior at the same time tap into a powerful combination that will make them a better leader and position their organizations to thrive.

Keywords: Overcoming Fear, Character, Decision Making, Organizational Success

INTRODUCTION

Faith and ethics applied together is a strong foundation for leaders to justify themselves, their actions, and behavior. However, having knowledge of each without application is pointless for any aspiring leader. The successful application of active faith with sound ethical behavior is foundational for a leader and their organizations to be successful. The practice of faith paired with ethics provides a means for leaders to successfully lead others and their organizations. When fear is replaced with faith and inconsistent behavior is replaced with solid ethical decisions, leaders and their organizations will thrive. The following defines and discusses separately faith and then ethics to provide a working understanding of each, the power of pairing them together and their successful application for both leaders and their organizations.

FAITH

Defining Faith

"Faith is a central component of many religions and is a common concept outside of religious discourse as well" (Rettler, 2018, p. 1). Faith is commonly defined as a belief in someone or something. For Christians, faith is central to developing a relationship with God. Christianity apart from active faith is dead (James 2:14). It is that important for Christians. For non-Christians, or those that do not believe in God, faith comes from other sources such as oneself, leaders, organizations, rules or even the government. For this reason, faith is often defined as a "virtue" or character trait (Rettler, p 4). One can either have faith or not. Enough faith can compel a person to act and overcome fear. Faith to act is foundational to a leader's ability to successfully lead.

Hebrews 11:1-2 states that "now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation." Faith is foundational to every leader's story throughout the Old Testament. As Hebrews 11, reveals that faith was central and key to the success of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, "and the prophets."

Faith for Christians is taken up a notch in the New Testament with the coming of Jesus, His crucifixion and His overcoming death for salvation to all who believe. Christians are shown the path to salvation and must have faith to believe. The disciples exhibited faith by accepting the call to follow Jesus. In Luke 5:10, Jesus states "do not be afraid" and replaces the disciples fear with faith. Faith is an empowering virtue as it tends to displace fear and other inhibitions in leaders who chose to live and act by faith.

For Christians, "faith is understood as trust." (Fedler, 2006, p. 46). It is this trust "in the faithfulness and promises of God" that emboldens leaders to act (Fedler, p. 46). Simply put, to have faith means to have trust.

Social and Cultural Texture Analysis of Matthew 25-14-30 in Relation to Faith

As shown, faith is clearly defined throughout the Bible. However, some of the best ways to study faith is when evidence of failure occurs due primarily to a lack of faith in those entrusted to carry out a duty. The following is a social and culture texture analysis of Matthew 25: 14-30 to glean insight and perspective of acting with and without faith and the successes or consequences each brings.

Social and cultural texture analysis examines the text to discover the type of person(s) referred to and the world around them from a social and cultural perspective (Robbins, 1996, p. 71). The implicit worldview of the subject, author, and audience is sought to be identified (Robbins, p. 71). There are three topics that are closely examined in social and cultural texture analysis: specific, common, and final. Specific topics deal with how the author or audience view the world and how they could change it while living in it (Robbins, p. 71). Common topics deal with relationships between individuals and groups to gain understanding "about systems of exchange and benefit" (Robbins, p. 71). Final topics seek to identify one's "cultural location" and the "manner in which people present their propositions, reasons, and arguments both to themselves and to other people" (Robbins, p. 86).

Matthew 25:14 begins by identifying a man (master) who was preparing to go on a "journey" who had servants. Being able to travel on a long journey and having servants meant that the master had substantial means as both of these required extensive resources in ancient Israel. Israeli society, as justified by the Torah, allowed "bondage" or servitude of another (Bakon, 2014, p.89). The Torah required "basic rights" which commanded "decent treatment" of servants bound to a master (Bakon, p.93). Therefore, it was common for wealthy individuals to have servants that were bound to do their master's bidding. In exchange, the master would look out for the welfare of the servant. In this example, the master "entrusted to them [his servants] his property" (Matthew 25:14). "To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his ability" (Matthew 25:15).

Order and social rank, even amongst servants, were extremely important in ancient Israel. The order in which the servants were addressed and then received by the master was based on "a set of social understandings or obligations" (Matthews, 2012, p. 21). Therefore, the servant entrusted with the most talents by the master is viewed as the more esteemed and able servant by the master. Similarly, the one entrusted with the least is assumed to be the lesser of the three and the least capable. When the master returned, it was the higher ranking and most capable servant who approached his master first with what he had done with the five talents entrusted to him.

The culture of ancient Israel also deemed that the master most likely served as the patriarch of the family and was singularly in charge of the household which meant that the servants would need to serve the master throughout their life whether he was present or not (Meyers, 2014, p. 26). Rebellion by not doing the master's bidding was not an option for these entrusted servants. The culture demanded their commitment solely to their master no matter how long his journey kept him away. Thus, each servant was bound and responsible to increase the master's wealth while the master was on his journey.

The faith of the one entrusted with the most confirmed the master's choice when he successfully delivered five talents more or double the original five talents that were entrusted to him (Matthew 25:20). His master upon learning this praised his faith by stating "Well done, good and faithful

servant. You have been faithful in a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of the master" (Matthew 25:21). The servant was faithful enough to be fully committed and all in to doing his master's bidding. He had confidence in his abilities, but also faith that his master would treat him well if he acted according to his master's wishes. He did not let fear of failure squash his resolve to perform. He trusted his master and had faith. In a similar manner, the second servant also passed the faith test and was justly rewarded for his faithfulness by his master (Matthew 25:22-23).

The fear of failure is both economic and psychological (Cacciotti, Hayton, Mitchell, & Giazitzoglu, 2016, p. 305). Each servant faced the very real possibility that they would invest their master's wealth foolishly and potentially economically lose everything. Their faith had to overcome the possibility that they could become destitute or worse. Their faith also had to overcome the psychological battle of the fear of failure and the negative "socio-cultural" effects that would result from shame and potential negative feelings related to their own self-esteem (Cacciotti, Hayton, Mitchell, & Giazitzoglu, p. 305).

The servant that failed the faith test set-up by the master was the third one – the one entrusted with the least. The one who had the least to lose. Instead of growing his master's wealth, he hid it to protect it (Matthew 25:18). When his master returned and asked him what he did with his master's wealth he replied: "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and I hid your talent in the ground" (Matthew 25:24-25). He disobeyed his master's instructions because of his lack of faith and was consumed by fear. The result was that he rebelled against his master and the culture of the day. His master would show him no mercy, and neither would the society and culture where they lived (Matthew 25:30). His lack of faith doomed him. He took no responsibility for his actions and even blamed the character traits of his master as the reason he feared acting through faith for the master's benefit.

The Foundation of Faith

Those that exhibit and employ the virtue of faith in their life tap into a power greater than themselves. This provides a foundation for individuals to step up and lead when then would not normally or act when they may have refrained. Deuteronomy 31:6 states "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you." The foundation of faith is a powerful virtue for leaders to deploy. Faith constrains and even replaces fear preparing one for great success.

ETHICS

Defining Ethics

Ethics is commonly defined as principles or values that govern or define a person's behavior. Being known as a person who practices in an ethical manner is deemed both good and behaviorally predictable. They will ethically do the right thing the majority of the time. Ciulla (2014) states "ethics is one of those subjects that people rightfully feel they know a lot about from experience" (p. 5). Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011) discuss the gap that exists between intended and actual behavior where we think of ourselves as more ethical than we actually are (pp. 6-7). These gaps become readily evident when an ethical dilemma shows itself in a straight forward right versus wrong decision. However, being ethical in right versus right decisions forces good and ethical people to "make very hard choices" in very complicated situations (Badaracco, 1997, p. 5). Ethics speaks to our character, values, how we make decisions, behavior and our morality.

Inner Texture Analysis of Proverbs 20:21-23 in Relation to Ethical Failures

Robbins (1996) defines inner texture analysis of socio-rhetorical criticism as a focus on the text itself (p. 3). It analyzes the ways words are presented, "repetition," "the creation of beginnings and endings" and the "particular feel or aesthetic of a text" (Robbins, 1996, p. 3). An inner

texture analysis of Proverbs 20:21-23 provides a defining perspective on what is important in relation to ethics.

There are three primary ethical themes that are outlined in this pericope of scripture. First, unjustified gain will eventually falter (Proverbs 20:21). Second, revenge or payback is not ours to take (Proverbs 20:22). Third, God hates cheating and causing harm to others (Proverbs 20:23). The unethical action followed by the damage is clearly defined in each verse.

Proverbs 20:21 speaks to how we gain something: "An inheritance gained hastily in the beginning will not be blessed in the end." The ethical failure is on the how the inheritance is gained and not necessarily on the inheritance itself. Expediency at the expense of others is an ethical fail. Moving to the front of the line, seeking aide for a non-emergency, and putting one's near term gain above another are all examples of ethical failures related to haste where the gratification occurs at the beginning. The inheritance can also be gained through outright stealing. "To take the possessions of another person is recognized as immoral in practically all cultures" (Fedler, 2006, p. 102). But what about when the stealing or unethical gain is not as obvious? For example, as Fedler asks: "When giant corporations set up headquarters on tiny islands to avoid paying U.S. taxes, is this stealing?" (p.102). When this occurs, organizations gain an "inheritance" hastily, it may even be legal, but the motivation was to avoid paying taxes that would otherwise need to be paid if they were honest about where their real headquarters was located.

Proverbs 20:22 states: "Do not say, 'I will repay evil'; wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you." The ethical dilemma here is when we are wronged or experience an evil that we have the faith to trust in the Lord enough for Him to deal with the situation rather than ourselves. Christians are taught to refrain through this verse and that God will deal with the evil. Their faith and resulting patience are a virtue that Christians value. "All moral choices, even the most obvious cases of right vs wrong, test a person's values" and they test a person's resolve to that "particular value" (Badaracco, 1997, p.59). Is our faith stronger than our pride? Can we truly wait for justice and salvation? Notice the repetition here with verse 21 on avoiding expediency or haste when acting.

Proverbs 20:23 addresses gain through deception at the expense of others: "Unequal weights are an abomination to the Lord, and false scales are not good." Again, how we gain something as in verse 21 is an important ethical challenge. By cheating others, we go against the Lord. The purpose of "unequal weights" is to wrongly balance a transaction deceptively. It is obviously wrong to perform a one-time transaction to cheat someone. However, what about using the "unequal weights" to right a previous wrong and to make things equal at least from your perspective? The answer to this question sends us back to verse 22 where it says to "wait on the Lord." Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011) describe what happens when "the want self rears its head" (p. 66). When this occurs, we desire to take matters into our own hands and game the system to make things right in our own eyes. All things are equal, right? Where is the harm? In this example, we actually ethically violate all three principles outlined in this pericope: gain through haste, acting in the place of God, and cheating to prosper or right a wrong from our perspective.

The balance of these three verses to themselves and with each other reinforce how we should not handle ourselves in many common ethical dilemmas. Getting rich quick through improper means will only cause ruin. Taking matters into own hands and acting like God to fix a wrong or counter an evil is not ours to do. Using deception to balance out an injustice or to improperly prosper is at a minimum unethical and may be criminal. Ethics is simple and clear from the Lord's perspective; there is a right and a wrong way to handle things and motive plays a key role.

The Merit of Ethics

Acting in an ethical manner is not only morally in line with God's instructions, but it is also defensible. The financial industry is notorious for ethical violations and outright fails throughout history. "Aristotle despised the financial community and, more generally, all of what we would call profit-seeking" (Solomon, 2004, p. 1022). He argued that anything above a "fair wage" would be a "crime" (Solomon, p. 1022). Rocchi and Thunder (2017) in discussing the financial industry contend that "in spite of their moral deficiencies, are likely to be 'tolerable', or minimally permissive of virtue" (p. 13). Having standards and making decisions based on ethics is good for

business. Ethics may require transparency in how profits are earned, but serve to provide credibility and confidence to both a leader and the organization they serve. The merit of ethical practices cannot be underestimated.

THE POWER OF PAIRING FAITH AND ETHICS

Faith has been shown to replace fear. It taps the power in a belief in something greater than oneself. For Christians, this provides a comfort in the knowledge that God is well aware of their situation and seeks to prosper those who are seeking Him first. As fear is replaced by faith, the virtues of courage, boldness, and positive behavior become evident and take over a leader's behavior. In a similar, manner Satan is looking for someone with little faith to devour (1 Peter 5:8). Having a strong faith empowers a leader to act and to be compelled to act ethically. For the believer, Jesus himself is "the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Ethical decision making is a complex behavioral science that involves studying different modeling theories to ascertain how a leader and an organization arrives at particular decision (Schwartz, 2016, pp. 755-757). When faith comes into play, it simplifies the ethical decision-making process. In a way, it provides a roadmap for an ethical decision to be made. God spends so much time discussing faith because it truly defines who we are and sets us up well to make the right ethical decision depending on the situation. Faith paired with ethics is a powerful combination for a leader and their organization.

APPLICATION TO LEADERSHIP

For the leader, the ability to have faith overcome fear is huge. The ability to lead without fear is a trait desirable of many. In 1 Samuel, King Saul was jealous over David not because he was of noble birth or that he was better trained, but because he had the freedom to live and lead boldly because of his faith. God could use him to accomplish great things because of his faith.

Colson (2011, March 30) asks an intriguing question: "Can freedom survive without virtue flourishing?" Being able to practice sound ethical decision-making is a virtue that empowers a leader to remain free and thrive. They can rest their head at night knowing that they are making decisions that are right and defensible. With a clear conscience, a leader is empowered to

showcase their character in action. Character "is the pattern of thinking and acting which runs right through someone, so that wherever you cut into them (as it were), you see the same person through and through" (Wright, 2012, p. 17). It is who they truly are and is the opposite of "superficiality" (Wright, p. 17).

Successful leaders are often free because of their strong faith and empowered to daily make ethical based decisions in their workplace and at home. Leaders with this solid foundation are well equipped to truly lead and encourage followers. Faith and the commitment to practice in an ethical manner behaviorally equips a leader to succeed in business, ministry, and at home. Leaders can improve both their faith and ethical behavior by committing to taking individual responsibility and being open to accountability by others. Colson (2011, March 30) discusses the importance of both accountability and responsibility in making sustained improvements to a leader's character. As a leader character improves, both their individual capacity for faith and ethical behavior increases. As Schwartz (2012, March 13) states "incentives are not substitute for character." A leader's character development can be tracked by the decreasing need to provide incentives for a leader to invest in either their faith or ethical behavior development.

APPLICATION TO ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations are created for a purpose and are filled with both leaders and followers. To survive, they must learn to be both effective and efficient whether they are a business, institution, or a charitable organization. "Efficiency is the extent to which an organization minimizes the cost of people and resources needed to carry out essential operations" (Yukl, 2008, p. 709). In seeking to minimize cost by optimizing human capital (the workforce), leaders are faced with many ethical dilemmas. Reducing workforces to make a business profitable may be the right decision, but it is the ethical one? – possibly, as it would depend on motivation of the leaders making the decisions. Are they truly seeking to be able to grow a long-term organization that is effective and one that seeks to serve or are they looking only to profit themselves over the near term? Ciulla (2014) states "like it or not, business serves as the moral metronome for society…business and business leaders help to set the tone, develop, the vision, and shape the patterns of behavior for all of us" (p.32). Leaders and their organizations desiring

to "engage in a fair-trade business model" have been found to be motivated by either faith, ethics or business values (Carter, Collins, & Bael, 2017, p. 198). The values that the business achieves is completely dependent on its leader's and follower's actions as guided by their faith and ethics.

Ciulla (2014) asks an interesting question: "What is the relationship between ethics and effectiveness?" (p. 17). Like efficiency, effectiveness is critical to an organization's success. Organizational culture based on faith and solid ethical decision making has been linked to strong organizational effectiveness (Zheng, Yang, & McLean, 2010, p. 765). "There are four dimensions of organizational culture that are conducive to organizational effectiveness: adaptability, consistency, involvement and mission" (Zheng, Yang, & McLean, p. 765). Two of these are directly tied to faith and ethics: consistency and mission. "Consistency refers to the extent to which beliefs, values and expectations are held consistently by members" and "mission refers to the existence of a shared definition of an organization's purpose" Zheng, Yang, & McLean, p. 765). The relationship between ethics and effectiveness is a direct connection.

Faith and ethics are directly applicable to an organization's potential for success. When organizations are filled with individuals of faith and committed to making ethical decisions, they are set-up to be both efficient and effective. Therefore, organizations should actively look for ways to increase their team members faith and ethical grounding.

CONCLUSION

Faith simplifies the process we undertake to make ethical decisions and practice in an ethical manner. Leaders should aspire to replace fear and over confidence with themselves with faith in God and a true desire to live boldly for His Glory and desires. Similarly, leaders should seek ways to make better ethical decisions and be willing to hold themselves responsible and accountable for their behavior. Studying both faith and ethical decision successes and failures will prepare leaders to improve in each of these areas. The Bible is rich in its explanation of faith and in ethics. The successful leader realizes that having a solid foundation in faith and ethical

decision making will enable them to more effectively lead others and their organizations to success.

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