

Fact-Based Versus Intuitive-Based Administration

God has chosen to use men to lead in His church. Any call to administration brings its challenges and blessings. People bring with them a leader's greatest challenges but also his greatest blessings. Church groups vary in their methods of administration. Understanding needs and addressing them is one of the biggest challenges of any church group.

Let's examine two different ways of approaching church administration. First, let's look at what this writer is calling intuitive-based administration. This group of leaders places much in how situations "feel" and what they "sense." From their vantage point, they ponder motives of laity and try to ascertain what a person is thinking and believing that makes them act as they act. They study responses of people to try to learn more about the underlying motives and attitudes. They give hints and suggestions and see how the recipient takes them. They guess at what will come next. Occasionally they ask directly about a situation, but often they rely on what they see and hear from a distance. They reward men, who they sense are following their cues, with responsibilities and positions of leadership. Those who don't seem quite on their page are passed over and at times intimidated or belittled.

When a member comes under discipline, these leaders challenge them to live a Godly life and assure them it will be felt and seen by all. Leaders and laity alike watch every move and response. They try to ascertain the person's sincerity and motives by what is seen and heard from their vantage point. The member under discipline may become very sensitive to the vibes around him. He may wonder where he is on this journey. He may even fear his future, wondering if there is hope for him. Under this suspense, at times he fails and wonders what this does to his future. He won't know, perhaps, for a long time. Maybe some of the laity feel good about where this person is on his journey, but leadership might feel something different. Then can come the clash of thoughts on whether to restore or not and how soon. Suddenly they can discover that all are not on the same page. All are not feeling the same way about this person.

Ordination time can be very challenging; because how can they allow someone in the class who they don't feel is "in tune" with the ministry? But how can they keep him out of the class if he is a member in good standing? And how can they be sure he will sense the same vibes as they do in the ministry?

These leaders tend to connect with other leaders who "feel" the same way about a situation or need. They compare the "vibrations" they sense from each lay person in focus. They use the same intuition-based process on each other as leaders. If a leader "feels" too much in support of or too understanding

of a lay brother in question, they become alarmed. Newly ordained leaders have to learn the system and what they must do to stay “in tune” with the leaders with whom they must work. It is easiest for men who grew up in this type of administration to fit in and understand the cues. Men from other administrations can find it hard to “read” people in this same way.

Another kind of administration focuses mostly on facts. When these leaders perceive a need, they go first and inquire about the details. Face-to-face sharing is at the core of their administration. When they hear a rumor, they go and check out the facts. Open honesty about what they heard and who was involved is an important part of this sharing. In very difficult situations, brothers are called together to share their story in the presence of the others involved. Hearsay is not evidence in this administration. It may serve as a tip to inquire more about what is truly there. Laity and ministry alike can know that if anyone has issues of concern about them, they will hear about it before it affects their status or their usefulness.

When a member comes under church discipline, this administration lays out a plan for restoration. Some specifics are listed as things to be accomplished. A time frame is laid out. If needs come up during this time of proving, he is spoken to about those needs. The member will have a good idea if he is meeting the expectations, and restoration will happen according to the plan laid out. Perhaps someone may fear teaching people “check list” Christianity with this approach. A member can do just what they are asked and no more. But that is fairly easily seen. Some clear facts will point to that reality, and they can be shown those facts.

Ordination time will welcome nominations from among laity in good standing. Qualifications will be important to ministry and laity alike. Examination time will focus on facts. Questions will seek to bring out the beliefs, convictions, and lives of the men in focus. If facts point toward disqualification of any man, any details announced will make sense to sincere, supportive laity.

In this administration, ordained men are committed to revealing who they heard a particular concern from. All the facts are laid on the table in discussions. Leaders commit themselves to trust each other and not talk about each other behind each other’s backs. Facts will be the discussion points when there are concerns and needs, not feelings. Facts take the upper hand over friendships, family relations, background, and views. They operate on the principle that if a concern is big enough to register with the rest of the ministry, it is their duty to share it with the brother involved. A concern shared and cleared is laid down.

Perhaps these descriptions have painted extremes. It is this writer’s intention to draw a mind picture of the distinct differences and contrast them while acknowledging his bias from having grown up in the latter type of administration. Perhaps many groups have some blend of these two concepts. The question becomes, “Which of these concepts is the guiding rule in our group? Which platform represents the majority of our experience?”

Let's consider a few Bible principles on this subject. Matthew 18 teaches us to go directly to individuals who trespassed against us and speak to them, seeking restoration and peace. We make ourselves

vulnerable. We seek to hear and be heard. We lay all the facts out on the table. We must love and care enough to go and do this very painful thing.

Acts records the practice of the Romans. "To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have license to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him" (Acts 25:16). This is not directed to the church as a command how we should operate, but it is a pattern that brings rest to people caught in controversy or under criticism of others. They hear the accusations. They know who their accusers are. They have a chance to answer for themselves about the charges. The accusers must be willing to be identified and to put into words what they have against this person. This challenge often purifies the heart of the accuser. He thinks to himself, "Is this really worth this pain? Am I willing to put my name on this line? Do I have enough of evidence to convince those that will judge this situation?" Often in this open setting of sharing, accusations soften, and truth comes forward, and reconciliation happens. Accusers find that it is hard to hold to an exaggerated point in the face of the accused.

Paul gives us an example in Galatians. "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal 2:11). He spoke directly to Peter about the problem. In this case, he even addressed it before all the brethren there. There was no guessing to know where Paul was on this subject and what Peter and the rest with him should do to be reconciled.

Jesus taught us the fruit test, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt 7:20). Actions and speech will show us the actual person. Evidence will come forward in the life. May we say that facts will reveal the heart, relieving us of the need to be focused on the often-faulty operation of motive judging?

One of the greatest differences between these two administrations is the level of rest that people enjoy. In fact-based administration, laity and leaders alike can rest assured that if someone has a concern with them, they will come and talk to them about it. There is not the restless guessing game of who is "in" and who is "out." Our youth need this kind of rest. This is particularly appreciated by sincere seekers who enter our church groups. Many come with backgrounds so different from us. They may have spiritual and social needs that should be worked on. They need to grow in their Christian walk and their understanding of Truth. When they see and experience our commitment to talk with them if they need help, they generally find tremendous rest. Leaders find rest from the burden of the intense studying of situations and responses that is needed to try to understand the hearts of their people. The emotional load of wondering if they are seeing things right and judging correctly is lessened. When questioned by leadership or laity about disciplines taken, they can simply share the facts they looked at to make their conclusion. While some may still not agree with what was done, these leaders can rest their case with the facts they worked with.

Another blessing of fact-based administration is the trust that is developed. We choose to trust one another until there is evidence otherwise. We trust the testimony of each other. We trust the witnesses to the situation. In turn, people learn to trust our judgments as leaders because they too can look at the same facts we saw. Judgments over facts make more sense to the sincere person. The honest, caring lay brother can know that facts established the verdict, not prejudice, favoritism, family connections, or the "feelings" we developed through the situation.

In fact-based administration, diversity of thoughts and feelings among leaders can be embraced and can complement decisions if we allow the Spirit to direct us. Leaders do not have to all “feel” the same way. No, wrong may never be excused. Sin must be kept out of the church. But diverse backgrounds and the resulting differences are welcomed. Since feelings and “vibrations” are laid aside, and we look at facts, we can all rally around the truth in every situation. In fact, diversity of backgrounds often helps us better understand the truth in any given situation. See 1 Corinthians 12:4-12 for this very thought.

Fact-based leadership is not complicated to figure out. Facts are relatively simple to understand. They actually are not too hard to collect. This leadership is easy to teach to the newly ordained. But this type of leadership feels like we are vulnerable. It forces us to talk and expose ourselves. It brings us up close to our people. They can see right into our hearts. They hear our ideals, our wishes, and our concerns. But this helps accomplish 1Th 5:12 “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you.”

We do well to study the fruit of our administration and ponder these two vastly different administrative concepts. They do not produce the same fruit. We must stem the tide of loss from our churches. We must find the strength of brotherhood that God wants for us. We must be able to minister to more seekers who come to our churches. We cannot do this without God’s blessing and smile of approval on our administration of His churches committed to our trust.

May God help us to prepare His people for the day that Revelation 20:12 speaks of. “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” On that day, the facts of all of our lives will be judged by the Judge of all the earth who will do right.

~Luke Bennetch