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This article by Dr. J. Robert Clinton comes from the *Philippian, Philemon and 2 Timothy Commentaries* in the Clinton Biblical Leadership Commentary CD copyrighted 1999.

This article reveals a major reason why Paul finished well. This CD is available at the resources page at <http://www.bobbyclinton.com/>.

Sovereign Mindset

Mindset burst upon our English language scene in the mid-eighties. So it is a relative newcomer to English speakers. Not all English speakers even know it. But its definition is as old as the Bible itself. What is a mindset? A mindset is a fixed mental attitude or disposition—formed by experience, education, prejudice, or the like—that predetermines a person's responses to and interpretations of situations. One of the great Bible leaders, Paul the Apostle, demonstrated a special kind of mindset. I call it a sovereign mindset. A sovereign mindset represents one leadership value¹ that can make the difference for a Christian leader.² And I want to suggest that if you do not have this mindset you probably won't make it in ministry—at least not as an effective leader who will finish well.

A leadership value is an underlying assumption a leader holds which affects how the leader acts or perceives in leadership situations. It is a mindset, an underlying controlling force, which gives meaning to ourselves and explains why we do things or think things. It can relate to a belief. It can relate to personal ethical conduct. It can relate to personal feelings desired about situations. It can relate to ideas of what brings success or failure in ministry. It can be rooted in personality shaping. It can be rooted in heritage. It can be rooted in the critical shaping activities that describes our personal history of leadership development.

Paul models this leadership value, a sovereign mindset, more than any other New Testament Church leader.³ Quickly glance through the two passages below to catch the flavor of this important leadership insight. Pay special attention to the boldfaced words.

3 Blessed [be] God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; 4 Who comforts us in all our tribulation, **that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble**, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also

¹ See also the **Article**, *Pauline Leadership Values*, which touches on 19 important leadership values derived from the book of 2Co. Values are desperately needed today in our world of tolerance for anything except absolutes. This article describes one important Christian leadership value.

² It can for a secular leader too. A Christian leader believes that God is involved in the events of life and therefore looks to learn what God has for him/her in the happenings of life. A secular leader who does not believe that God is or is involved in life's events can still also profit greatly from the happenings in life if that leader has a learning posture and believes that life's experiences can be used to teach lessons. The learning posture needed is simply, All of life is preparing us for all of the rest of life. We can be better leaders if we learn from life's experiences and let that learning inform our leadership. See also the **Article**, *Leadership Lessons, Seven Major Identified*, one of which deals with learning posture, "Effective leaders maintain a learning posture all of their lives."

³ Paul is a major model for a Christian leader in the N.T. Leadership Era. We have more biographical information on Paul than any other Church leader. He himself recognizes the importance of modeling. See Php 4:9 and other cross-references.

abounds by Christ. 6 And whether we **be afflicted, [it is] for your consolation and salvation**, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, [it is] for your consolation and salvation. 7 ¶ And our hope of you [is] steadfast, knowing, that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so [shall you be] also of the consolation. 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

8 For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, inasmuch that we despaired even of life: 9 But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, **that we should not rely on ourselves, but in God which raises the dead: 10 Who delivered us from so great a death**, and does deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver [us]; 11 You also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift [bestowed] upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf. 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

Once you know what a sovereign mindset is, you can easily see it in the these two previous quotes. But this sovereign mindset just leaps out from the pages in the following quotes.

For this cause I Paul, the **prisoner of Jesus Christ** for you Gentiles, Eph 3:1

I therefore, the **prisoner of the Lord**, implore you to walk worthy of your Christian calling. Eph 4:1

So that my **bonds in Christ** are manifest in all the palace, and in all other [places]. Php1:13

Don't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me **his prisoner**: but share also in the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; 2Ti 1:8

Paul, a **prisoner of Jesus Christ**, and Timothy [our] brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow laborer, Phm 1:1

Yet for love's sake I rather implore you, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a **prisoner of Jesus Christ**. Phm 1:9

Paul don't you have that wrong? Aren't you a prisoner of the Roman empire? Why do you say a prisoner of Jesus Christ. What a strange way to make your point! Its all in how you see it. Yes, Paul was a prisoner of the Roman Empire. But no matter what they intended, Paul knew God would use it for God's purposes. For you see, You Paul operated under a sovereign mindset?

Definition A sovereign mindset is a way of viewing life's activities so as to see and respond to God's purposes in them.

Remember, a mindset is a 1. A fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines a person's responses to and interpretations of situations. Paul had a fixed mental attitude toward the things that happened to him. He saw God in them. Or as he says in 2Ti 3:11, "...out of them all God worked."

God was sovereignly and providentially working through all of life's circumstances to shape Paul, guide him, and make him the great leader he became. Four keys to Paul's sovereign mindset include:

1. Paul recognized God's hand in life happenings—no matter who or what the immediate cause.
2. Paul submitted to God's deeper purposes in life happenings.
3. Paul learned and used the lessons derived from these life happenings.
4. Paul shared those lessons (and God's provision in them) with others.

His deep experiences with God were at the heart of the spiritual authority⁴ he had with followers.

Let me come back to the two passages I first cited as indicating a sovereign mindset. I want to draw out some leadership observations that directly apply to Christian leaders.

From 2Co 1:3-7:

1. God will meet us in deep processing.
2. We are helped in order to help.
3. Deep processing tests our own value in the sufficiency of Christ.
4. Our own development through processing gives us hope that our followers can also know the sufficiency of Christ in their deep processing.

From 2Co 1:8-11

1. We really trust in God when we come to the end of our own resources.
2. Deep processing is meant to be shared.
3. Deep processing shared brings partnership in prayer.
4. God receives much more praise when our situation is solved.

A leader with a sovereign mindset recognizes that at the heart of all God's shaping activities is the idea that processing is never just for himself/herself alone. Leaders are shaped by critical incidents and shaping activities for our development, yes! But our processing is also for our followers. It is this confidence in God's meeting us in deep processing that gives us confidence in His sufficiency. And a by-product of that confidence is spiritual authority, the dominant power base of a Christian leader.

Stated as a leadership value, the sovereign mindset strikingly challenges us.

⁴ See also the **Article**, *Spiritual Authority*, which describes a major power base for a Christian leader.

**Value Leaders Ought To See God's Hand In Their Circumstances As Part
Of His Plan For Developing Them As Leaders.**

Paul had a sovereign mindset. He kept it till the end. It was one of the secrets of his finishing well. This leadership value is fundamental to a Christian view of the development of a leader.

See **Articles**, *Pauline Leadership Values; Leadership Lessons—Seven Major Identified; Value Driven Leadership*.

