

Leaders – A Biblical Requirement

How to Act in Church – Part I

I Timothy 3; Titus 1

Introduction

For several sessions, I am going to be mixing thoughts from the scriptures and thoughts from my own heart as we move through a transition period in our church. It is an exciting time in our church life as we become a little more established and organized and fill the office of elder. However, I will tell that we are where we are right now because of my somewhat short-sightedness.

When the church was begun four and a half years ago, I wrote a brief appendix in the back of the constitution that sort of came to town in my hip pocket. I wrote that we would create the office of elder after a man had served for two consecutive terms as a deacon.

I thought that sounded good, but I thought then that we might have, after five years of hard work, a hundred people worshipping on Sunday morning. I thought that would be the time to delineate the roles of deacon and elder. My wife can vouch for the fact that I anticipated having about a hundred or a hundred and twenty-five people worshipping in this church at this point.

It is typical in church planting work, to gain twenty-five people per year. I had been involved in church planting once before, as a staff member, and the attendance increased twenty-five per year. I fully expected the same thing to happen in this church. In fact, one church leader wrote that the largest independent Baptist church in the country that he has seen meeting in a school, has five hundred people.

I am not saying this so that we can gloat together; I am saying this because it lets you in on the fact that God is doing something very unusual in this church. And, as Luke 12:48 tells us,

. . . From everyone who has been given much, much will be required . . .

I think God is preparing a foundation for future ministry that I trust, will be worldwide. It will be exciting to see what happens.

Part of this process, ladies and gentlemen, is in establishing church government and the roles of leadership in the church. We are at this point. The

exciting thing about this is that we are pursuing, not something that this church has had for a decade or two, since this church is only four and a half years old, but a biblical model for a New Testament church. That is exciting because we really do not have much of a past to turn to, so when we have questions, we go to the scriptures and search them to see what is true and right.

Today we are going to introduce something that may be a new concept, and that is the position or office of elder, or a plurality of the pastorate. “Pastor” is probably more common in our terminology.

Together we will, by God’s grace, arrive at conclusions that we agree with. We will see God operate to ultimately, create this office and delineate the role of serving and administrating. Then, by this, create a more effective church, as we move toward getting in a larger facility and, I think, seeing ministries multiply much more rapidly.

Let us go to the Lord first, and I will admit that this, in many ways, is uncharted territory for me. It is exciting for me and at the same time, my hands are shaking a little because we are pursuing things in which I have never been involved.

I believe this is biblical, however. I have never had the privilege of working in a plurality where there are godly men who lead, instead of one man who “calls all of the shots”. It is exciting and yet, new. Please pray for me and the deacons as we go through this together and give this church family what we believe to be biblical results.

Please turn in your Bible to I Timothy to look at a theme verse. We are going to camp out in I Timothy and Titus over our next few sessions.

A theme verse, I believe, as we pursue this, is found in I Timothy 3:15. Let us look at I Timothy 3:14-15, as Paul writes,

I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long;

but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the

church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

Why was I Timothy written? So the body would know how to act in church.

Let us pray together.

Father, we come to You now, asking for Your insight and wisdom, and for clarity of thought. We also ask for Your leadership and direction. We do believe, Lord, with all of our hearts that You are the Shepherd of this church, not only universally and invisibly, but locally. You are the head of Colonial Baptist Church, so we look to You for leadership and direction. We praise You that You have given such clear, explicit teaching on how we are to act in church. We thank You, in Jesus name. Amen.

Today, I am going to ask and answer two questions concerning biblical instruction for church leadership.

Why the Biblical Instruction for Church Leadership?

The first question is, “Why is there biblical instruction on how to act in church in I Timothy and Titus?”

Let me give several points on this as we pursue the scriptural model of a biblical church.

1. First, Paul is writing biblical instruction to reinforce effectiveness in the church.

In Acts chapter 20, we discover the church planting days of the church in Ephesus. This is the church to which Paul is basically writing in I Timothy, as Timothy pastors it. Paul is writing this instruction to maintain, as best he can, the effectiveness of this early, young church.

Look at Acts 20:27-32. Paul is writing to the elders.

For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

These are the final words of Paul to the elders of the Ephesus church. Acts 20:17 tells us,

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

I think Paul is trying to reinforce that the church is to remain effective in society as it develops and grows.

This Ephesus church is an early, very young church. It is only three years old, as Paul writes these words to them.

I think this church, from what we read in I Timothy, was pastored by Timothy. So what we read in I Timothy is an expansion of what Paul talks about in these verses.

2. Secondly, Paul is writing these instructions, not only to reinforce effectiveness in the church, but to help them recognize dangers in the church.

Let me give three dangers.

- There is the danger of leaders with impure motives.

Look again at Acts 20:29-30. Did you catch this? Note the words in verse 30.

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse thing, to draw away the disciples after them.

Paul is saying that in this early, three-year-old church, from among the body, would come the potential for men to lead with impure motives.

I Peter 5:2-3 expands this even further. Peter is writing to the elders.

shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

What is Peter writing in these verses? There is the implication that an early church, or an established church, can have within itself, leadership by impure motives. There can be leadership by greed, leadership by ambition, and, as Acts 20 tells us, leadership by men who seek a following of themselves.

- A second danger is of impure teaching by those who lead.

Look at I Timothy 1:3-4. Evidently, by the way, myths and genealogies were the fad of this day.

As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines,

nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.

Skip to I Timothy 1:6-7.

For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion,

wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.

Look at I Timothy 6:3-4a, where Paul writes more.

If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness,

he is conceited and understands nothing...

Paul was never one to mince words, was he? It really is an amazing thing to think that in church, we will find men who desire to lead but have a different doctrine; who do not believe that Jesus Christ is God.

It always amazes me that people who do not know God personally would even take time to go to church. They might as well play golf or sleep in or plant a garden.

However, every man is religious by nature. This is the reason there are men with impure doctrine who spend time in church.

I will never forget slipping into the back of a Unitarian Church, while I was a student at a Christian college. It was Easter Sunday and I will admit that I

decided to sneak out to that church to find out what was going on. I wanted to find out what other people were doing. Confession is good for the soul! I will never forget slipping into the foyer and into a beautiful pew and looking at the stone floor and the beautiful auditorium. It was Easter Sunday morning and a man stood up behind that pulpit and gave four or five reasons why Jesus Christ was still dead. I thought to myself, "Why bother with church if you teach another doctrine?"

Evidently, even during the time of the early church, when the tomb was still fresh and the stone had hardly been rolled away, there were men with another doctrine wanting to lead in the church. So Paul says there must be an absolute standard in the church that we do not run the risk of impure teaching.

There are the dangers of leaders with impure motives and impure teaching in the church.

- A third danger in the church is improper leadership.

Turn to I Timothy 2:11-12. Evidently this problem was taking place in the early church, so Paul instructs Timothy.

A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.

But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.

Now, I did not read this because I am a legalist or a chauvinist. This is God's creative design.

In the church, everyone has equal standing. In fact, the text says that there is neither male nor female. However, everyone in the church does not have equal authority.

A church is an extension of the home. In fact, Paul continues in the next few verses and takes this all the way back to the creation; all the way back to the example that we find in the home; that is, the man is the head and the woman is submissive to the man.

We could preach a sermon on this, but I do not want you to think, by that suggestion, that a man is to brow beat. A man is to co-lead with his wife, in a sense, and she is to submit to him. There are other passages that support this.

Ultimately, the resting place of authority in the home is the man. Ultimately, the resting place of authority in the church is the man.

This is, as we might guess, a very unpopular teaching in our day. As we pursue a biblical model, we will become even more out of sync with our

society. They will look at us and think, “How strange. What do their women do? Do they feed the menfolk and eat afterward?”

Why is this so difficult for our society to swallow? Let me give two reasons.

- First, this is difficult for women to swallow because men are ignoring their God-given role as leaders.

I think women, for the most part, are frustrated today, because they are looking for leadership, whether in the home or the church. What do they find? Nothing.

I think in every church, there are two or three times more women who desire to serve and lead different ministries than there are men. The independent mission boards that are pursuing missionaries and sending them across the oceans are flooded with two or three times more women than men. I think, as a result, a woman looks around and does not see a leader and says, “Okay, I’ll take it.”

It makes sense to some degree as I think men are ignoring their role as leaders.

- Secondly, this is difficult for our society to accept because women are abandoning their role as mothers.

Look at I Timothy 2:13-14. This is Paul’s justification, by the way, for saying a woman cannot lead a man in church.

For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.

And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

Now note I Timothy 2:15. This really sounds strange today, does it not?

But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.

What is Paul saying in this verse? Is he saying that women are unfulfilled if they do not have children? No.

Paul is saying that the highest role of a woman in a society led by godly men – godly fathers and husbands – is to bear, raise, and nurture children that honor God, and change society from the home out.

This is no longer seen in our society as a privilege, by the way, so they would look at the attitude of the ladies in church and wonder why they

have the attitude that they love to be mothers in the home.

We are touching on a lot of issues on which we could spend a lot of time, but let us keep going. Let me give another reason for the instruction in I Timothy.

3. Thirdly, Paul is writing instructions in I Timothy to reestablish accountability in the church.

Look at I Timothy 5:19-20.

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witness.

Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.

Paul is writing this with the implication that elders in the church were unaccountable and were in sin. Basically, Paul is telling the church how to straighten out a church leader.

Paul says to get two witnesses and approach the individual. In other words, do not go by yourself. Why not? Because a church leader is not an island; he is not unaccountable; he is not untouchable. This is the implicit teaching of this passage.

This answers the first question of why there is biblical instruction for how to act in church. Let us look at a second question concerning biblical leadership in the church. We will spend more time on this second question in the coming sessions.

Why the Biblical Qualifications for Church Leadership?

The second question is, “Why is there an extensive list of qualifications for church leadership in I Timothy and Titus?”

Let me give three suggestions.

1. First, the biblical qualities create a profile for leadership.

In other words, the twenty qualities in I Timothy and Titus combined create a picture of what every leader in the church must be pursuing. This pursuit must be without question in the minds of the body because ultimately, the body is to imitate their leaders.

2. Secondly, these qualities emphasize character over personality.

Let me give three wrong reasons for selecting leaders. Perhaps you have been in a church in which

this has happened. I trust, by the Lord's grace, it will not happen in our church. However, as we look at these reasons, it will be clear how easy it would be to select leaders based on these.

- Number one, the personality of the person is a wrong reason to select a leader.

When we see the gregarious, outgoing individual with the winsome personality, we are seeing the external – that is, what we see – we are not seeing the internal – that is, what is behind closed doors. What we see is not necessarily character – it could be put on.

- Number two, a leader should not be selected on the basis of popularity.

There is a real danger with this, especially as the church grows, to select those that most people know. This also may have nothing to do with that which is internal in an individual; it has to do with the external.

- Number three, a leader should not be chosen on the basis of their prestige; that is, their wealth, or their power, or their position.

A man who is a CEO of a corporation might come to the church and everyone might think he is a leader. However, he may not be a leader in the spiritual sense.

This again has to do with the external. God is much more interested in what a leader is than what a leader owns and has. God is interested in the internal; the inside.

Biblical qualifications for church leaders are given because they create a profile for leadership and emphasize character over personality. Let us look at a third reason.

3. Thirdly, biblical qualities encourage maturity for the rest of the body.

A leader says, as Paul did, "Follow me as I follow Christ."

A church member, or someone involved in the church, has every right to model his or her life after the life of a leader.

Let me tell what this does to me as a church leader. It strikes fear into my life.

Leaders are the ones who are being viewed. They create, by their own lives, a model for the rest to follow.

Hebrews 13:7 tells us,

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

Now, what are the biblical qualifications on the list for a church leader? We will list them and briefly cover them. Leaders are to be:

- above reproach;
- the husband of one wife;
- temperate;
- prudent;
- respectable;
- hospitable;
- able to teach;
- not given to wine;
- not self-willed;
- not quick-tempered;
- not pugnacious (that is, not a fighter);
- patient;
- peaceful;
- free from the love of money;
- one who manages his own household well;
- one who has a good reputation with outsiders;
- one who loves what is good;
- just;
- devout;
- not a new believer.

Now all of us who are leaders want to resign!

In the early church, as today, we are to look for the individual who, as far as we can see and know, pursues this list.

A Biblical Leader Is Above Reproach

I want to take the remainder of our time to talk about the first biblical qualification of a church leader. The first qualification is really an overall, categorical statement – above reproach or blamelessness.

A leader must be above reproach or blameless. The other nineteen qualifications are really an explanation of what blamelessness is all about.

Blamelessness comes from an original word that literally means, "without a handle". This means there

is no overt, obvious way this leader is out of bounds or in sin.

If the body can point a finger at a leader and say, “You are in sin,” then that leader has lost credibility. So Paul says that a leader cannot have this “handle,” such that someone could grasp their character.

Why is blamelessness so important? Let me give six reasons. There could be sixteen, but I will only give six.

1. Number one, which I have already alluded to, a leader is to provide a true standard for spiritual maturity.

This used to be a given in society. One of the most respected positions in society was what? That of the minister.

This is no longer true in our day. In fact, the occupation of minister has very little respect in society.

My wife and I were recently watching one of our favorite television diversions – *Family Feud*. I will never forget the question being asked, “When in a time of crises, who will you go to?” I kind of pulled my chair up close because I wanted to see the answers that made the survey, thinking perhaps someone said something related to church, a church leader, a pastor, or a Christian counselor. However, no one said anything of that nature. I think doctor was number one, and then lawyer, and then close friend or spouse.

This is tragic, but, ladies and gentlemen, we have no one to blame but ourselves. We live in a day when spiritual leaders fall into sin.

As Warren Wiersbe wrote, “The church used to tell the world to repent. Now the world is telling the church to repent.”

The secret sins of those in leadership are being exposed by the media. It is only after this exposure that there is repentance. Then, nothing much is done.

Leaders are to provide a true standard.

How do we know what a true standard is? It is in these verses written by Paul and it is the reason he wrote it.

I remember hearing about a church in Dallas that Marsha and I attended several times, in which unfortunately, the pastor had fallen into sin. The newspapers had published copies of police reports of his shoplifting, which was one of the things that he had done. I had a dear friend in leadership in this church and one of the tragedies of the situation was that the church congregation sent the pastor on a brief

vacation and while he was gone, they unanimously voted him back. This was a man who had been involved immorally, had been caught stealing, and other things.

I think the 1980s could be rendered the decade of scandalous leadership. There have been men and women who scandalized their bodies, men and women who scandalized money, and worst of all, men and women who scandalized God’s word.

There has been created in our society a theology that tolerates immorality; that tolerates looseness. It is a theology without any demands.

This is unlike the passages that we read. In fact, in the book of Romans, there are eleven chapters of doctrine, and then it says, in Romans 12:1, “Therefore, on the basis of this doctrine; on the basis of this unchangeable truth, this is the way to live.”

We live in a day when everyone cries, “Let’s set aside doctrine and get together in unity.”

Do you know what this creates? It creates a weak theology that ultimately produces weak leadership.

We live in a day when doctrine must be expounded more clearly than ever.

2. Number two, blamelessness is important because spiritual credibility is a fragile thing.

Of recent Gallop Polls, Mr. Gallop Jr., himself said, on a documentary that I was watching, “Never before in the history of America has the gospel made such inroads, while at the same time making so little difference.”

Why is this? The gospel in the evangelical world has not changed much, but those who bear it have changed a lot. We have lost much credibility.

Our church has one good shot at credibility. As your pastor, I have one shot at credibility.

I recently heard of a church that had a business meeting and the members actually broke into a fist fight. Fighting in church! The media covered it, and there they were – sleeves rolled up, dukes going. This church has lost its credibility. This church will never regain it.

3. Number three, blamelessness is important because hypocrisy can be made acceptable by leadership.

In other words, an impure standard can be bought by those who follow. If there is someone with an impure standard of what holiness is, there is all the

possibility in the world that the congregation will buy it – and live it.

Jesus' harshest words were leveled at the religious leaders, as we read in the gospels. He called them "lying snakes". He called them "whitewashed tombs".

Do you know what "whitewashed tombs" were? This was a custom going back to the festival time. When it was the festival season, the Jews would cover the tombstones with a whitewash, so that no one would inadvertently get too close to them and touch them. If someone touched them, they were considered unclean and would not be able to participate in the festival. Therefore, the Jews would paint the tombstones white to make sure everyone knew where they were.

Jesus called the religious leaders "whitewashed tombstones". In other words, "You look good; you look white and pure, but you are death."

Who was Jesus saying this to? He was saying it to the men everyone looked up to – the religious leaders of that day.

I Timothy 4 refers to the Judaizers as hypocritical liars. They were unaccountable; they were obnoxious; they were intimidating; they were untouchable.

This gets back to the principle that if someone is going to lead, it is more important who they are than what they say.

4. Number four, blamelessness is important because leaders are subject to the power of self-deception.

I think this is true in a special, exaggerated way. It is possible to preach against sin; it is possible to be a deacon or an elder and stand for purity, while at the same time, to be living in sin.

Imagine a pastor preaching on self-control and then going out and yelling at his kids in the church parking lot.

Imagine a preacher speaking on devotion to his wife and then, she shows up in church with a big "shiner" that she tries to pass off as something she got when she bumped into the refrigerator door, or whatever.

There is a double standard and with it comes a double privilege and a double danger. It is possible, and this may be something the majority has never experienced, but it is possible to get up and say something that is right, while not living what is right.

When Jimmy Swaggart's sin was exposed by the media, he was right in the middle of a series on adultery. His study, in fact, was in particular on Rahab the harlot.

How can men be so self-deceived? I think it is because leadership creates an arena; an aura of unaccountability. It just comes with the territory. People tend to leave the leader alone. As a result of not having the friction of people who disagree; the accountability to those with whom they work there is the potential of living a lie and never confronting themselves with it.

5. Number five, this qualification is so necessary because the results of public leaders' secret sins are disastrous.

The results of the sins of leaders are at least three things. You have perhaps watched these happen or heard of or been involved in churches where these happened. I certainly have.

- First, it negatively impacts the work of God.

It just becomes a black cloud and slows everything down. There is an intangible pall over everyone's spirits.

It is the opposite of what we may feel when we come through our church doors with prepared hearts and knowing there is pure leadership.

Have you ever been to been to a service where this is gone? I have been on staff where this has occurred. There was unfortunately, immorality. Until it was exposed, there seemed to be a pall over everything.

This is a disaster to the church. In fact, the qualification right after blamelessness has to do with moral purity. The leader must be devoted to his wife.

- Secondly, when secret sins of public leaders are made public, it discourages those who pursue purity.

I heard recently of one pastor in our area that divorced his wife and never missed a sermon. He married a lady in the church, and then divorced her, and never missed a sermon. They finally took his second divorced wife, who was still in the parsonage, and put her out in the street, and sent him to another church to be the pastor.

What does this say to people who are striving for intimacy in marriage? What does this have to say to those who are in the rough times maritally? What does this say to the young teenage gal or guy who is being tempted?

This is damaging.

- Thirdly, it ultimately destroys the credibility of the church in the world.

I really believe, ladies and gentlemen, at the risk of you thinking this is a gloom-and-doom sermon, although it is not intended to be, the church in America is for the most part, crippled permanently. For us as a church to be credible; for us to be effective is an uphill climb. It is possible by the grace of God, but our society will not give us even one benefit of a doubt.

Our church will be known as a pure church when we live pure lives. It will be known as effective and credible when we live effective, credible lives.

The society around us; our city; our county catches on that there is something different in this church. Perhaps that is the blessing because the darker our society, the brighter a light can shine – so let us shine.

6. Number six, blamelessness and these absolute standards, Paul wants us to know, please God rather than man.

There is a temptation in leadership to be popular; to speak attractively. In fact, we know from one writer of scripture that the last days will be filled with men who tickle the ears of their audience.

There is a danger; there is a lure in wanting to please those we lead. However, being even one of these qualities may not please men. Being respectable may offend some men. Being devout may convict rather than attract.

This, however, is the list of qualities. It is unchangeable through the centuries and it is given to us as we pursue those who will lead in this fellowship. It will be our joy to go through these in our next sessions and look into the offices of deacon and elder.