

Leaders – A Biblical Requirement

How to Act in Church – Part II

I Timothy 3

Introduction

We will continue today with a series on the qualifications of church leadership as we make the transition in our church to begin the office of elder. I thought it would be best to cover the qualifications and broaden them by way of application, and then, we will take this step.

It is exciting to see our church at this point and moving in this direction. I believe we will have open hearts to what God's word says – which is the foundation for anything we do. Today we will look at I Timothy chapter 3.

Eugene Peterson wrote a book entitled *Run With the Horses*. Let me read a couple of paragraphs from this book.

The puzzle is why so many people live so badly. Not so wickedly, but so inately. . . . There is little to admire and less to imitate in the people who are prominent in our culture. We have celebrities but not saints. . . . Neither the adventure of goodness nor the pursuit of righteousness gets headlines . . .

If, on the other hand, we look around for what it means to be a mature, whole, blessed person, we don't find much. These people are around . . . but they aren't easy to pick out. No journalist interviews them. No talk show features them. They are not admired. They are not looked up to. They do not set trends. There is no cash value in them. No Oscars are given for integrity. At year's end no one compiles a list of the ten best-lived lives. Our society is devoid of models. It is not, "Where are the perfect people?" but, "Where are the progressing people?"

Peterson's words are insightful. As a result of this being so true, people in our generation are not asking whether or not Christianity is true, but whether or not Christianity is something that really makes a difference in the way we live.

As we continue this study today, the idea will be apparent that Paul is basically giving an authentic portrait of spiritual leadership; spiritual maturity. Although it is specifically addressed to those who

would be elders and, in a more limited form, to those who would be deacons, we could apply this to anyone and everyone who pursues the model of godliness.

There is, however, a double standard. I believe there are things that might be tolerated in the church, but are not acceptable in church leadership. I think you will pick up on this after our discussion today.

Why the Concern for Godly Leaders?

There are reasons, I believe, for a double standard as it relates to church leadership. Let me give three of them.

1. Number one, a leader's position is primary in its responsibility.

Hebrews 13:17a, in referring to the elders, says, *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. . . .*

The phrase for "keep watch" literally means, "those who go without sleep on your behalf".

The leader's primary position is one of great responsibility. It is to be taken as if he were a soldier on duty watching out for the protection of those that he cares for.

2. Number two, a leader's life is wider in its influence.

In other words, a leader will influence people because of his position. The men who lead by virtue of that leadership, influence people to imitate and to follow.

We look around at our society and the leaders and the heroes today are, at the top of the list, the athletes. Because our society knows and recognizes this, they make use of the athletes in endorsing certain things – so if they have it, if they do it, if this is good for them, then it must be good for the younger generation.

Are kids taking this seriously? You had better believe it. In fact, when my family was in Chicago recently, we heard the news of a teenager who took

the life of another teenager. When asked the reason why, he said, "So I could have his tennis shoes."

The tennis shoes were 150 dollars a pair and this teenager did not have the money.

I think those who rise to the fore and lead people are those who not only set themselves up for greater criticism, but also set themselves apart for greater influence. I think this is the reason Paul specifies so many of these qualities.

3. Number three, not only is a leader's position primary in his responsibility and his life wider in its influence, but his judgment is greater in its finality.

James 3:1 says,

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

This is an interesting thought.

The original word in this verse for "teacher," or "didaskalos," is used in the rabbinical sense. It is speaking of a rabbi who has studied the law and understands the law and then, presents the application of the law to his hearers. His judgment – the word "krima" – has to do with the fact that he, and such individuals, know what the Bible teaches and therefore, incur stricter evaluation by God Himself as to whether or not they follow it.

This is very serious. Leaders are bound to obey what they know. In fact, God's word says,

. . . to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. (James 4:1)

So those who teach the scriptures are bound in a stricter, deeper way by the Spirit of God.

Therefore, we come to this text in I Timothy 3, knowing that we must take careful note.

In our last discussion, we talked about the quality of blamelessness. This is basically a categorical statement saying that an elder or a leader is to be above reproach or blameless. This is primary.

Now, Paul goes on to express what he means by blamelessness, and that is, in relation to all the other qualities, an elder or leader is to be blameless.

A Church Leader Must Be the Husband of One Wife

Number one on the list of a blameless leader, in I Timothy 3, is the phrase, "he must be the husband of one wife".

Look at I Timothy 3:2a,

An overseer, then, must be above reproach [blameless], the husband of one wife . . .

This is a difficult passage. Let me give the interpretation of this and the way we follow it in our church, recognizing that other churches may follow this in other ways.

Paul is talking about, in relation to a leader's wife, the commitment and devotion that the leader has for his wife. This phrase "the husband of one wife" could literally be translated, "a one-woman man". In other words, his devotion to his wife is such that he is characterized as "a one-woman man".

In order to project the clearest statement of fidelity as leaders, and because leaders receive the strictest evaluation from the community, it is their position to project long-term, life-long monogamy. Our position at this church is that an elder or a deacon is one who has never experienced divorced.

We need to understand that Paul's standards in this are ideals. I do not think that any of us would doubt that God's ideal for marriage is for life – one man and one woman. Paul does not answer all of the questions that come to our minds concerning this. However, Paul begins by saying basically, a leader must be blameless and, number one on the list, he must be without potential grasping; without a handle in the way he has managed the relationship with his wife.

Let me say, by way of application, that while a divorced man cannot hold the office of minister, he can always have a ministry.

Some of my dearest friends in this church have gone through the agony of divorce. While I believe this limits their potential office, it does not limit their ministry. It has been exciting to see all that these individuals have accomplished and are accomplishing for the glory of God. It does not mean that they are no longer useful to God – ministries are taking place even now, led by individuals who have gone through the very difficult situation that we are talking about.

Now, if we look at the typical scenario of marriage and divorce, what is Paul really stressing in this? Let me give three things, and we will broaden the application.

1. First, a spiritually mature person or leader will place a high priority on his or her marital relationship.

The question that men who are leaders ask themselves is, "Do our wives know that we love them? Does the body know that we love them?"

We might go one step further and ask, “Do our children know that we love our wives?”

Children probably know more than anyone else.

I grew up in a missionary home and one time, when I was in junior high school, my mother and I were in the kitchen having a discussion while my father was at a meeting. The topic of our kitchen discussion turned to my father and my mother said one short phrase that I have never forgotten. Her words impacted my mind, as she said, “Stephen, your dad is a great man.”

I remember even then, these words hit me. There was a relationship between my parents that was marked by love and respect.

This needs to be modeled to our children, as men and women pursuing maturity. This needs to be modeled in our church. And if we broaden this application, the individual that you are married to at this very moment is the one this applies to. You are to have such deep commitment that you are recognized as someone devoted to your spouse.

2. Secondly, spiritual leadership of any form can be hindered by a lack of marital unity.

This is the “flip” side of this. Let me read I Peter 3:7.

You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

I like to reinterpret “understanding way” as “become a student of your wife; understand and study her”.

Why did Peter say to do this? Why did he say to live with your wife in an understanding way? Why did he say to treat your wife as a joint heir? Why did he say to treat her, in a sense, with an elevation of respect and honor? There are a lot of reasons, but he specifies this one, “so that your prayers will not be hindered.”

This is a tremendous thought, is it not? The word “hindered” literally refers to the breaking up of a road. An army of that day would break up a road so that the pursuing army could not catch them. Peter is literally saying, “Make sure the path is straight; make sure it is not broken up; make sure it is together because if it isn’t, our ministries are hindered.”

3. Thirdly, as I have mentioned, a spiritual leader must be perceived as one who is committed to his mate.

A lot of this is perception. I think Paul is talking, in this verse, about the qualification of an elder, but obviously, there is the perception in the minds of those who these elders lead, that there is commitment to their wives. It must be observable. This does not mean that there needs to be some type of overt romantic action, but it is observable; it is known that there is commitment to their wives.

I think the problem with the scandals, as we discussed briefly in our last session, in the past among those who, in a sense, wear the cloth, is that people have said, “These men should be forgiven and restored to the pulpit or to leadership.”

You may choose to disagree with me, but I do not believe this has anything to do with forgiveness. The blood of Jesus Christ forgives all sin. It has nothing to do with this. It has nothing to do with reconciliation to God. We sin all the time. In fact, in God’s mind, gossip is as bad as murder – right? However, this is not dealing with reconciliation or forgiveness. If the pastor; if the elder; if the deacon is a fund-raiser, then by all means, we need to get them back – right? If they are motivators, then we need to get them back quickly – right? But if they are men who are supposed to follow these guidelines in leading the church, then they basically have one opportunity as a church leader. If they fail as a leader, they are no longer blameless; they are no longer perceived as a one-woman man. Even if God forgives and there is reconciliation with God, the leader has forfeited the right and the privilege of being a leader.

After saying this, may I ask you to pray for me, as your pastor, and for the deacons and future elders of this church? It is thrilling that I can say and our deacons can say that we have been faithful to our wives.

I was talking to my wife yesterday. She had gone to a conference and the author of several books on prayer, Evelyn Christensen, made a statement that really marked her. She came home and told me and we have both had it kind of flooding our minds ever since.

Evelyn Christensen made the comment that she had come in contact with some Satanists. You may remember that I made a comment in a recent sermon about sitting in an airplane beside a Satanist that was fasting. Evelyn said she has learned that some Satanists have designated Friday as a day for fasting

and prayer that Satan will lead into the life of a pastor, another woman, and lead into the life of a pastor's wife, another man.

I say, "Wow!" to this. What tremendous warfare is going on against us, and I do not think we really recognize it.

I hope what I am saying is not being perceived as the words of someone who thinks he has arrived or is looking down on anyone or any situation. In fact, I say these things and my hands get sweaty because I believe, as a leader, that I have one shot at blamelessness. And with these other men who serve with me, we, as a church, have one shot at credibility. We need to take this very seriously.

When I heard about the Satanists prayer that was going on, something occurred to me, and I will just speak from my heart because I think you should be aware of this. I think with pastors, and I have talked with and heard of many men who are church leaders that have fallen into this sin, one of the main arenas through which this sin has come into their lives is counseling. It seems to be a constant threat to those of us who lead because of the vulnerability of women who are going through personal problems or a deep need.

I do not say this to mean that I am being threatened by anyone in this church – I am not. However, because of learning and hearing of this, I have instituted a personal policy that I do not get involved in counseling a woman. I will see a woman one time, and then refer them to someone. In fact, the thing that really challenged me was that one of our deacons who is a full-time counselor has this policy. I learned of his policy some time ago and thought it was an admirable position and one that would protect those who lead.

I do not mean to be rude or insinuate that there are those in this church who would threaten me, but I keep the words of Paul in mind, as he said,

. . . after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified. (I Corinthians 9:27)

This seems to be a key way, so I have tried to shut the door as graciously as I can in this area.

I hope I am not being too transparent. I want to be open and honest as we go through this study because I want you to know how I operate and how our deacons serve now and how our future elders will serve. I believe the greatest threat to this ministry is marital disunity, so we need to be aware of this.

A Church Leader Must Be Temperate

The next qualification for a leader that I am going to cover is just as difficult. I am covering the two toughest qualifications today, and then the rest of this series should be easier! Look at I Timothy 3:2-3.

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate...

Not addicted to wine . . .

The next qualification is the word "temperate," and I include with this the phrase, "not addicted or given to wine". We are going to cover this in our remaining time today. Some of this may be new to you, so I want to be very clear and also very biblical.

The Greek word translated "temperate" has the literal meaning "without wine". Some translate it, "without unmixed wine". It speaks of sobriety; of the opposite of intoxication. The root word is "nepho," or "nephaliος," which originally meant, "abstinent from any form of intoxicating beverage." We are going back to the original definition, by the way, we are not making up these definitions in our day, but are going back to the way it was defined originally.

If Paul had this literal sense in mind, then he was requiring elders to abstain from any form of intoxication at all.

In the progression of this word, the meaning has moved toward more of a metaphorical sense. The King James Version of the Bible translates this "sober" or "sober minded" or "temperate".

Do you remember the temperance movement? This has a little of the idea.

We do not understand this meaning today, however, when we see the word "temperate". We think of something else.

If we go back, especially to the Old Testament, however, this meaning makes a lot of sense. Let us look briefly at four passages.

- Turn to Leviticus 10:8-9.

The Lord then spoke to Aaron, saying,

"Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die – it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations"

This verse tells us that priests were to abstain from fermented drink while performing their sacred duties.

It is interesting when we consider the fact that today, an elder is never off duty. What does this mean then?

- Look at Proverbs 20:1.

Solomon warns about the fermented drink. He talks about wine when it moves in the cup; when it has a sting like an adder or a serpent. Solomon says this is a mocker and a deceiver.

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.

- Turn to Proverbs 31:4-5.

Look this up in the New International Version if you have friends who do not agree with an abstinence position and you have wondered where you could find a verse to support it.

It is not for kings . . . to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer,

lest they drink and forget what the law decrees, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights.

- Look at Numbers 6:2-4.

These verses tell us about the Nazirite. The Nazirite, or the one who took a Nazirite vow, was one who committed himself to God for a period of separation. There were certain things he did not do. One of these things was that he did not take drink – the fermented drink, or what we would call the alcoholic drink.

The double standard is perhaps, that the spiritual leader, or those who are out front, are not to be under the influence lest they fail to carry out their responsibility with clarity and logic. It is not for kings to drink it or for princes to drink it. Why? Because there is the possibility that if they come under the influence, they might forget something they have decreed.

Let me ask a question that is a practical application of this. Is there any time that you would feel comfortable with me, as your pastor, being under the influence?

No.

In this text, most people try to determine the leader's use of alcoholic beverage by I Timothy 3:3a. Look at that verse again.

not addicted to wine . . .

This may be translated “not given to wine” in your version.

This seems to mean that we can drink a little of the fermented drink, but just not become addicted to it. So is Paul saying that you cannot be an elder if you are an alcoholic; addicted to it?

It would be assumed that if this were the case, you would be disqualified as an elder.

I believe the answer is found in the scripture. It is amazing the way the answers are found in the words of scripture, is it not?

The Greek word for “addicted or given to” is “paroinos”. You may have heard the phrase “para” or “para church”. This means an organization that is alongside the church. It is the word used in this verse. “Oinos” means “wine”. “Paroinos” means “alongside the wine”.

Paul is using, I think and many that I have read agree, a Greek idiom. This was an idiom used by the ancient Greeks to refer to one who did not, in a sense, have his elbow at the wine. It was an idiom referring to the fact that this person was not lazy. In that day, the phrase for lazy was, “he reclines at his wine,” or “he reclines at the wine table”. Paul perhaps, since there is nothing else in this list to indicate his work ethic, is slipping this in at this point.

The leader in a church must be one who is diligent in the way he operates his leadership. His elbow is not at the wine; that is, he is not lazy.

I do not think this has anything to do with whether a person can drink intoxicating beverages or not. I think “temperate” takes care of this. It took care of it for me because of the literal interpretation of this word.

Some have suggested that the idiom in I Timothy 3:3 could also refer to the fact that he is not leaning at the wine table; that is, he is not associating himself with this kind of world. This is not necessarily in his evangelistic enterprises, but, I think, in his own lifestyle.

Let me give some thoughts in terms of the congregation at large. I think you have probably concluded by this that our position in this church, agreed upon by our deacons and myself, is that our leaders are abstinent. So what about the rest of our congregation?

I have heard men teach what they call responsible drinking, if there is such a thing, or moderation. Those that I have heard speak on this view, some of whom I deeply respect, consistently overlook, I believe, two basic principles. Let me give these as

these need to be understood if you are making up your mind on the route you will take.

1. First, the wine of the New Testament is not the wine in our grocery stores today.

I am trying to be as practical as I can on this.

Let me read something by a former professor of mine at Dallas Theological Seminary, published in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, their exegetical journal, on this very subject. We arrived at the same conclusion, but the way he goes about it is interesting. Listen carefully to several paragraphs.

The Bible has stern warnings about "strong drink". Solomon wrote, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler" (Proverbs 20:1). Priests were to avoid such (Leviticus 10:8-9). . . . Strong drink is bitter to those who drink it" (Isaiah 24:9)

God is opposed to someone using strong drink because it brings deception and turbulence, as we looked at in Proverbs 31.

[Isaiah said,] "Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink" (Isaiah 5:11).

So there is delineation, even in the Old Testament, between that which we would consider alcoholic or fermented and that which is not.

This professor then poses the question, "Is wine today like New Testament wine?"

This, for some unknown reason, is so often overlooked in the study of this subject. Many wine-drinking Christians today mistakenly assume that what the New Testament meant by wine is identical to wine used today. This, however, is false. In fact, today's wine, by biblical definitions, is strong drink and hence forbidden. What the Bible frequently meant by wine was basically purified water. Let me read what this professor writes.

[A man by the name of] Stein researched wine-drinking in the Ancient World, in Jewish sources, and in the Bible. He pointed out that wine [and he will go all the way back to some who lived even before the time of Christ] in Homer's day was twenty parts water and one part wine . . . Pliny referred to wine as eight parts water and one part wine... According to Aristophanes, it was stronger: three parts water and two parts wine. Other classical Greek writers spoke of other mixtures: Euenos – three parts water, one part wine; Hesiod – three to one, water to wine; Alexis – four to

one . . . The average was three or four parts water to one part of wine.

Sometimes in the Ancient World, one part water would be mixed with one part wine; this was considered strong wine. And, anyone who drank wine unmixed was looked on as a . . . barbarian.

This means the Greeks would probably say today that Americans are barbarians because Americans are drinking strong drink.

For example, a man from Athens said, "Mix it half and half and get madness; unmixed – bodily collapse."

Furthermore – and note this because it is probably the reason for this type of drink – in ancient times, beverages were not safe, especially water. Stein indicates that in the Ancient World, water could be made safe in one of several ways. I have found other sources that say this as well. Water could be boiled, but this was tedious and costly, or it could be filtered, but this was not a safe method, or some wine could be put in the water to kill the germs as it fermented – one part wine with three or four parts water.

This, by the way – and this is another study, but I will mention it – was probably the problem with Timothy, although we do not know for certain. Timothy, a young elder at the church in Ephesus at the time, was evidently so concerned with his position that he was, it seems, drinking straight water. There are many who believe that it was because of this that he was becoming infected. Paul, in fact, said to Timothy,

. . . use a little wine for the sake of your stomach . . ." (I Timothy 5:23)

The word "stomach" could be translated "digestive system". Timothy was evidently so concerned with his own credibility, living in a drunken world at Ephesus, that he stayed totally away from anything related to drink and was probably drinking straight water.

What is used today is not the wine of the New Testament, therefore, Professor Geisler concludes, Christians ought not to drink wine or beer or other alcoholic beverages, for they are actually strong drink and are forbidden in Scripture. Even ancient pagans did not drink what some Christians drink today.

This is an interesting study. Let me give one other point.

2. Secondly, not only is the wine of the New Testament not the wine found in our stores today, but liberty is a poor excuse for losing your influence and credibility.

Anyone who has ever questioned me on this has found that I do not get exegetical, but real practical. I say for example, “You have a seven year old boy (or a six year old girl or a junior high age son), right? Would you tell me, as a father (or a mother), how you would feel if their Sunday school teacher was seen by them leaving the grocery store with a six pack of beer?”

Be honest in telling me how you would feel if you went to a restaurant and spotted my wife and I at another table clinking our martinis. You would want me to look for another job!

Sometimes in our pursuit of liberty, we strangle common sense. We are so committed to liberty that we lose our credibility – and it is a poor excuse for doing so.

Conclusion

Let me give a couple more points in our remaining time. Let us summarize these thoughts. Turn to Acts chapter 20.

1. Number one, leadership is to be a position of purity.

This purity must be observable or perceivable by the church body, or at least there should not be impurity observable by the body.

Look at Paul’s words in Acts 20. He is either paranoid about or at least, very concerned with his reputation.

Look at Acts 20:26-27.

Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

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

Look at Acts 20:33-35.

I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes.

You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me.

In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Who is Paul speaking to in these verses? He is speaking to elders; those whom he had taught. He now tells them, “As you lead, remember that I led you in all purity.”

In other words, “I didn’t have a handle.”

This is what blameless means – there is no handle to grab the character of the individual. Paul said, “I leave you after three years and I can say before you that there are no handles in my life.”

This is the pursuit of purity.

2. Number two, leadership is to be a position of protection.

Look at Acts 20:28, as Paul speaks the elders.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock...

This is literally, “Watch out for yourselves and for all of the flock . . .”

It is interesting that Paul does not tell them to watch out for the flock first. He tells them, “Watch out for yourselves first because you will lead more by your influence than by what you say. So take a good hard look at yourselves and be on guard.”

Look at Acts 20:31.

Therefore be on the alert . . .

This literally means, “Stay awake!”

Why do they need to stay awake? Because, as an elder, they are protecting the body.

In conclusion, we can say two things.

- The church is to be led by godly men.
- The church is to be protected by vigilant men.

This is the position of our church on these two issues, although these do not cover everything by any means. We will continue to cover biblical requirements for godly leadership in our next discussions.