

Leaders – A Biblical Requirement

How to Act in Church – Part IV

I Timothy 3; Titus 1

Introduction

We will continue our series on biblical requirements of leadership today. We are going to talk about the critical nature of God's word in the church fellowship and the relationship of a leader to the word.

Qualifications of a Godly Leader

1. **First, look at Titus 1:9, which gives us a qualification for those who would lead, *[The leader must be] holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.***

The word "faithful," in this verse, could be rendered "reliable". The word "holding" means, "to steadfastly cling". So, a leader should steadfastly cling to God's word because the word is reliable; the word is, in effect, unchanging.

In a society that is constantly changing, God's word never does. Those who lead the fellowship of the church are men who hold to the word in a steadfast way.

It is interesting that the original context implies holding firmly to something against hostile forces. The idea the writer has in selecting the word "holding" in this context is to talk about a man who holds on to the word in spite of hostility. There is the assumption that there will be opposition to those who hold to the word. It will not necessarily be an easy task to do so.

Right away we get the idea that this is not some passive qualification. This is not asking, "Do you believe in the word of God?"

Everyone and anyone could say, "Yes," to this question.

Paul goes on to make sure we understand the context; the opposition. He is basically saying that those who hold fast to the word will have to do two things – one is positive and the other is negative; one is to the believer in the church and the other is to the unbeliever in the church.

Look back at Titus 1:9 again. It says, "... that he will be able to ...". In other words, a leader holds on to the reliable word in order to do two things.

- Number one is the positive aspect – a leader holds on to the word in order to exhort in sound doctrine. This is an act of work among believers.

I like this word "exhort" because it is the same word used in relation to the Holy Spirit. The word in the original is "paraclete" or "paracleti" and means, "to call out; to come alongside".

This means that the leader will call; he will literally urge; he will beg those whom he leads to follow sound, healthy doctrine.

So, there is no pathetic, boring posture when it comes to doctrine or to the word. A leader holds fast to the word and that does not necessarily put people to sleep. A leader holds fast to it and in that holding, exhorts; urges; begs people to live by it.

This is one of the unique ministries of a leader.

This word is also used in a couple of other passages. Paul uses the word "exhort" in I Thessalonians 4:1. Let us look at this verse.

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort ["parakaleo"; beg] you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God . . . that you excel still more.

In other words, the leadership is saying to those who follow, "Keep on living according to the word."

There is a "pathos," there is a passion in that exhortation. There is an urging in this and it is deadly serious. This is a ministry among the believers.

Look at Romans 12:1, which is a very familiar passage of scripture.

Therefore I urge [exhort; beg] you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

In other words, "I beg you, believers, to live according to the word of God."

This is the positive ministry and it is what we would probably enjoy doing because it receives itself so well, does it not. There has not been a more delightful experience in my life, and that of others who have led, to find a body of people who are so desirous of living according to the word.

Now, we would like the writer to put a period at this point in the verse, but Paul goes on. Look at the last phrase of Titus 1:9 again.

... to refute those who contradict.

- Number two is the negative aspect – a leader is to refute those who contradict. The context is that this is to be done to the unbeliever in the church, which we will see in a moment.

“To refute” could be rendered, “to speak against; to oppose; to object”.

Perhaps you have noticed that in our day, if you say anything against anyone for any reason – whether it is about doctrine or scripture or whatever – you are considered a raving, foaming-at-the-mouth fundamentalist. If you say “No” to anything, you are immediately labeled “legalist”.

However, there are many things God’s word tells us to do and there are many things His word tells us *not* to do. We are to express both the positive exhortation to do some things, as well as give the negative refute to not do certain things.

Why is this necessary? Look at Titus 1:10-11.

For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision

who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.

Skip to Titus 1:13-14.

This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith,

not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.

Paul is talking about religious heresy, perhaps. Those who would teach things that are unbiblical, we are to oppose; speak out against.

Now, there are lines that every church has to draw. We tend to try not to call names, but there are

errors that are refuted as we teach through God’s word. This is a very important ministry.

Someone gave me a news article this past week, on the national committee of Presbyterians, the USA section, that have just met. By the way, even though this article is negative, I am not telling this to throw stones at the Presbyterians – I would say the same things if it were about Baptists or anyone else. Also remember that typically these counsels do not represent the grass roots.

This article says that a national committee of Presbyterians has shaken the church of John Calvin to its core by recommending that the denomination rid itself of sexual taboos and view sexual relations as a God-given gift to be enjoyed by everyone – including single men, single women, gays, lesbians, and [note this] responsible adolescents. The report will be voted on by the full assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA in a couple of months.

In the report, the Presbyterians question the importance that United States citizens place on marriage. They affirm petting among teenagers and say that maturity, not marriage, should determine when teens engage in intimacy. They say the church should endorse new family structures, including same sex couples with adopted children. Homosexuals should be able to be ordained into the ministry and gay and lesbian couples should be able to enjoy the same rights as heterosexual couples.

The report has become a Presbyterian best seller. Published two months ago, it has sold 20,000 copies and requests continue at a rate of 1,000 a week.

The findings of this council are wrong. Why? Because they are unbiblical; they do not adhere to teaching of scripture.

We do not become legalistic to stand and teach what God’s word says and in that exposure, warn people.

Verse 10, and following, of Titus 1 are not new because there are people who teach something other than what God’s word teaches. Part of the ministry of leadership is to not only exhort those who are committed to Christ, but to refute those who are not following a path that will lead them to denying biblical truth. There is an exhortation that is positive and there is a refutation that is negative, but necessary.

2. **Secondly, look at I Timothy 3:9, which Paul is relating specifically to leaders who are deacons, saying leaders are to be, . . . holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.**

Let us take this verse apart. A mystery in the Greek mind was not like a mystery novel today that keeps us in suspense. A mystery in their mind was something that was revealed, but is now known by everyone. In other words, everyone knows what this mystery is – it is open; it is revealed. Jesus Christ, for example, was at one time a mystery, but He is now revealed.

We are told in this verse what the mystery is. We could render this, “. . . holding to the revealed truth of the faith with a clear conscience.”

“The faith” is an idiom or a phrase in the New Testament that refers to the whole counsel of God. It is a reference to the truth of scripture that is hinged upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ – this is the foundation.

We would not think that in the first century this would be such a big issue, since the empty tomb was down the street and they could go take a look at any time. However, it evidently was and those who would lead in the church had to hold to this truth with a clear conscience. In other words, they could not be fudging. They could not say, “Yes, I believe this,” but in their heart sort of work their way around it.

Have you ever talked to someone like this? They say, “Oh, I believe that,” but when you get into a conversation with them, they somehow work their way around the entire issue.

Unfortunately, the clergy are great at this. I came across a survey and have had in my files for some time in which ministers were asked questions. Are you ready for the results?

- “Do you believe that the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ is a myth?” Those who said, “It is a myth,” include:
 - 51% of the Methodist ministers;
 - 35% of the Episcopalian leaders;
 - 33% of the Baptist pastors.

The last one rattles me. It lets me know that of those surveyed, one out of three Baptists pastors who stand in the pulpit believe Jesus Christ did not literally rise from the dead.

- “Do you believe the virgin birth is a myth?” Those who said, “It is a myth,” include:

- 60% of the Methodists;
- 44% of the Episcopalians;
- 49% of the United Presbyterians;
- 34% of the Baptists.

This percentage of the Baptist pastors is even a little worse.

- “Do you believe Satan is a myth?” Those who said, “It is a myth,” include:
 - 62% of the Methodists ministers;
 - 37% of the Episcopalian leaders;
 - 47% of the United Presbyterian ministers;
 - 33% of the Baptist pastors.

I wonder where they got this idea.

The Baptist percentage is pretty consistent – one out of three.

- “Do you believe the Bible is inerrant?” In other words, in the original when Jesus Christ gave His stamp of approval on the writings of scripture, how many of the preachers being surveyed believed the Bible is inerrant or how many believed that is a myth? Those who said, “It is a myth,” include:
 - 87% of the Methodists;
 - 95% of the Episcopalians;
 - 82% of the United Presbyterians;
 - 67% of the Baptists.

What does this mean? We will pick on the Baptists, which I feel comfortable doing. Sixty-seven percent of those surveyed are disqualified from pastoring. Why? Because they do not hold to the mystery of the faith; the overcoming doctrine; the counsel of God that says,

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be . . . equipped for every good work.

(II Timothy 3:16-17)

Do you believe the Bible is a myth? Then go sell insurance or do something else. Sell me a used car – I need one badly!

When I drive down my street to go home, I see a small “church” that is bustling with movement – it is the Mormon ward. It is one of the fastest growing

groups in our town. It may have more people than most of the other churches put together. I just drove by there and the parking lot is jammed. Why not? What do we have to tell them?

Those who lead in the church fellowship must, with a clear conscience, be able to look at those who follow them and without reservation, say, “Yes, I hold to the faith; to the counsel of God.”

Paul goes on to say something else, and we will wrap up our discussion today with this.

3. Thirdly, look at I Timothy 3:13, in which Paul gives a divine commendation for leaders that is absolutely precious,

. . . those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

The word “obtain” means literally, “to achieve”. Those who have served well; those who have held to the truth of scripture; those who have exhorted those they lead to follow in godly living; those who have refuted those who would lead others into error – they obtain; achieve by their effective and faithful service a good standing.

The word “standing” is interesting. It is the word “bathmos,” which means, “step or foundation”. It was used by the Greek writers to refer to a pedestal.

More than likely, Paul is saying that a deacon who serves well would receive a prominent position of recognition and influence. In fact, the body does set these men apart because they recognize in them this standing.

By the way, we are in desperate need of models. Howard Hendricks often said in class at Dallas Theological Seminary, “The pedestals are empty.”

Conclusion

The three qualifications that we have just discussed could basically be summarized with this thought: A spiritual leader is a man who is deeply, unreservedly, obediently committed to the words of scripture. He is a man of the word. He has a relationship with the word. He is a student of the word. If this qualification is removed, we could be following anyone and anything.