

Leaders – A Biblical Requirement

How to Act in Church – Part VI

I Timothy 3; Titus 1

Introduction

Turn to I Timothy chapter 3, as we conclude a series on the biblical qualifications for leadership. We are going to finish looking at these qualifications today.

God's method for leadership has always involved the man. It is the miracle of the ministry that He would use men who are fallible. However, in His choice, He has designed that the church would be like the home in that those who lead in the church would be the men.

It is also interesting to see God's choice of material in the men. I think if we had our choice, we would do things a little differently, would we not? If we could choose leaders, we would do it by our own criteria, and that is in three ways.

- Number one, we would choose someone for leadership because we like them.

This is not so bad. We might like this person because we are made out of the same kind of cloth and our personalities seem to fit and we like them.

- Number two, we would choose someone for leadership because they like us.

They would get the spot because we get along great and they appreciate us – besides, they have great taste!

- Number three, we would choose someone for leadership because they are like us.

When we ourselves choose leaders, it is easy to choose on the basis of the wrong criteria. I think this is finding its way into the church today. As a result, the church is, in many ways, crippled because we are choosing on this basis when it comes to leadership. God and His word are left out of the picture. God is now only making suggestions that the nominating committees can take or leave.

Now we have specifically, in our last couple of discussions, been focusing in God's word on the qualities that develop a godly reputation. We are broadening the application to include not only leaders, but anyone and everyone in the church. What does it mean to be godly? What is godliness all about?

We have covered a number of things in our previous discussions, but we are going to cover, as we wrap this up today, the negative commands. In other words, what it takes to destroy a godly reputation. There are at least six things, although there are probably more negative commands when it comes to choosing men for leadership. We will cover, however, six things that these men must *not* be known for; must *not* be accused of; must *not* be associated with. These are the disqualifiers that are placed in the negative sense.

I have categorized these into two different categories and we will look at both.

- First, there is the inability to handle emotions. This includes: pugnacious, quick-tempered, and contentious.
- Secondly, there is the inability to handle prominence. This includes: the new convert, the greedy, and the self-willed.

Let us pray before we go any further.

Father, as we open Your word and take a look, we pray that You will help us to not nudge our neighbor, but to allow Your Spirit to deal with us. We all desire that which Solomon said is to be honored more than silver and gold, and that is a good name; a good reputation. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Inability to Handle Emotions

In the first category – the inability to handle emotions – let us begin by looking at the first negative word.

Let us first read I Timothy 3:1-2.

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.

An overseer [pastor; elder], then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

Now we will look at the negative things.

1. The first thing that a leader cannot be is pugnacious.

Look at I Timothy 3:3a.

not addicted to wine or pugnacious, . . .

I like the way the word “pugnacious” sounds – it just rings, does it not. It is the Greek word “plektes,” which refers, literally, to a violent man. This is a man who is a striker or given to blows. This is a leader who resorts to physical violence to have his way.

I recently read, believe it or not, of a church in which their business meeting turned into a brawl. The men were fist-fighting in the aisles and the women were pulling hair. I never found out what the issue was, but it was probably something essential like the color of the carpet. These people were fighting and the newspapers picked up the story.

In my own life I have seen grown men fight; throw fists. I will never forget, as a young boy in elementary school, seeing my two Christian school coaches get into a fight. It marked me. As a result, I lost respect for these men and became a little afraid of them. I was not really sure I wanted to be all that close to them.

This is the point – a leader who is a striker; who settles problems with his fists, will cause the people he leads to be afraid of him and lose trust in him. A leader cannot be pugnacious.

2. The second thing that a leader cannot be is quick-tempered.

We read this in Titus 1:7.

For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, . . . not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious . . .

The Greek word for “quick-tempered” is “orgilos,” which means, “inclined to anger”. This Greek word indicates that this is a habit; a custom; it is interwoven into the personality. This man comes to an unfavorable circumstance and everyone knows he is going to lose his cool – he is quick-tempered.

Why are these two things explicitly taught in Scripture – that man cannot be given to anger; to a quick temper, or to blows? I will tell the reason I think this is taught.

The ministry of serving people provides a wonderful opportunity to lose our cool. You will find this to be true when you begin a leading a ministry or teaching a class – there is, sooner or later, going to be some kind of friction. The ministry

provides excellent opportunities to lose our cool. This is a great way of wording it, is it not?

Hudson Taylor, a man of God who was an English missionary to China, is a man whose biography I have read and re-read. He wrote some interesting words on this and if you are prone to be quick-tempered, I think his words may encourage you. He wrote, “My greatest temptation is to lose my temper over the slackness and inefficiency so disappointing in those on whom I depended. It is no use to lose my temper – only kindness. But oh, it is such a trial.”

Think of all the opportunities that Jesus Christ had of losing it. Imagine living for three years with Simon Peter; with Thomas; with Judas. How would we have fared?

The ability to develop a spiritual, godly reputation means that God chips away at the rough edges in relation to these two issues.

Now, quick-tempered and pugnacious can be implied to not only relate to physical abuse, but verbal abuse. In other words, a leader may not sock with his fists, but he will sock with his words; he will punch with what he says.

I know it is tragically true that many pastors have used pulpits as clubs to beat their congregations into submission. This should not be done.

3. The third thing that a leader cannot be is contentious.

Look at the last part of I Timothy 3:3.

not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable [noncontentious] . . .

This is a similar word to the word translated pugnacious, but there is a difference. A pugnacious person is one who is physically violent. A contentious person is someone who is quarrelsome; someone who is always arguing for their point of view. This is very important, obviously, when there is a plurality of leadership.

Our church is now headed in the direction of choosing elders. Our deacons have been acting as elders during this time of transition – managing the affairs and administrating the funds of the church. The qualifications of leadership are very important to us because when a matter comes before us, we prayerfully consider it and refuse to move forward unless there is a unanimous vote.

Can this happen? Of course it can. It has been a joy to work in unity with these men. We are all

following the same Leader, are we not? And this Leader is never wrong.

We may make mistakes and unanimously vote on it, but if God is leading some of us in one direction and the rest of us in another, we stop and table the issue, pray over it, talk it through, and sleep on it before deciding. It has been great, over the last years, to see unity in leadership.

Let me say, however, this qualification does not rule out opinionated people. Contentiousness does not necessarily mean opinionated. It does not rule out the possibility of disagreeing. It refers to the man who enjoys quarreling more than he does agreeing. There are people like this. You may work with one. This person will allow disagreement in their ministry to handicap the movement in the church.

I hesitated before doing this, but I am going to repeat about fifteen seconds of a tape. It is going to hurt to hear this, but I want to give a vivid illustration of a man who is disqualified from ministry, although he has not realized it. This is an individual who sent a tape to pastors all around the Southeast because he was upset. To discover why he is upset, you have to listen to the whole tape, but his reasons do not at all justify his way of approaching the problem. He is contentious and bad-tempered. Listen to this from someone I do not think you know as he is from the North.

In the Second World War there was a United States Army General by the name of "Howlin' Mad" Smith. My name is not Smith, but I am howling mad. You might say I am bent, ticked-off, out of sorts – call it what you want. If it is sin, I will confess it later. My name is Chuck . . . and I am the pastor of [a church] in . . . Ohio. To top all of this off, you ecclesiastical moron, I don't even like you. I don't know you and I still don't like you. I might qualify that only in this respect – there are a few exceptions, and by the end of the tape you may find that you are one of the exceptions, and if that is the case, then would you do me a favor and please mail this tape on to an ecclesiastical, fundamental idiot that you happen to know in your town – I am sure that there are many – with my non-compliments.

This is edifying, is it not? What a blessing, right? This is an illustration of what we are talking about. The tape does not get any better as you listen to it either, by the way.

Now, look at I Timothy 3:3 again and notice, sandwiched in between the negatives is one little word that is deep.

Not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable . . .

This word is translated "patient" in my translation or it may be "gentle" in yours. The word means to be, "considerate; forbearing; gracious".

Aristotle wrote that this Greek word spoke of a person who easily pardoned human failure.

We can see why this word needs to be in the qualifications of a man who will lead people.

The difference between a pugnacious, bad-tempered, contentious person and a gentle person is the ability to forgive people when they are disappointing. This is a must for someone who is to lead in a church.

The Inability to Handle Prominence

The second category that creates problems in leadership is the inability to handle prominence. This is in addition to the inability to handle emotions.

The inability to handle prominence is especially a problem in a church that is exploding. An infant church would have hundreds, if not thousands, before they could turn around – and there are men who could not handle this. Certain kinds of men are specifically pointed out in this passage of scripture as being not yet qualified.

- 1. The first individual who may not be able to handle prominence that comes from an effective ministry is a new convert.**

Look at I Timothy 3:6.

and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.

The word for "new convert" means literally, "newly planted". This is the only time it appears in the New Testament and it is a literal reference to a newly planted tree.

This is exciting, is it not? We see a newly planted individual and we see immediate growth and we see greenery. We see growth much more rapidly in the small tree than in the large tree that has been around for a while.

The problem is that in the newly planted tree, the root system is not deep enough to handle adversity like that which is incurred in the ministry of leading people. So, even though it is exciting to see them

grow, we must give them time to deepen their root system.

Now, while there are a lot of problems implied in the new convert, Paul, as you may have noticed, specifies only one. He gives this in I Timothy 3:6,

and not a new convert, so that he will not become . . .

What?

. . . conceited . . .

The word “conceited” literally means, “to wrap in smoke or to puff up”. In its figurative sense, it refers to someone who is surrounded by the cloud of pride. All this person can see is the reflection of himself in the white smoke.

Why? This new believer has just been granted in the church, the highest position of authority. The body has recognized in him the necessary qualifications for leadership. He has been a believer for two months, yet he looks at the other men with whom he leads, and they have been believers for ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty years. We can see the danger of this individual becoming conceited and thinking, “Wow, I must be something really spiritual.”

Look at the rest of this verse, which says he will,

. . . fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.

These are strong words. Satan’s sin was pride. Let us read the passage of the prophets as they wrote of Satan’s fall. Look at Isaiah 14:12-14.

How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning [Lucifer], son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you have weakened the nations!

But you said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; . . .”

(In other words, he would have equal recognition with God.)

“ . . . I will raise my throne above the stars of God, . . .”

(He would become the chief administrator over the angelic beings.)

“ . . . and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north.”

(He would sit at the center of God’s kingdom rule.)

“I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; . . .”

(He would rise above God’s own glory.)

“ . . . I will make myself like the Most High.”

(He would replace God’s sovereign control.)

What was the problem with Satan? He had great authority, but he had forgotten Who made him.

One of the problems in the new believer’s life, in the excitement of what is happening at first, is recognizing that the growth they see is from God. It is a gift of His pleasure to those who follow Him.

Samuel Brengle, a well known theologian, preacher, and author of yesteryear, some of whose writings I have, was once introduced as, “the great Dr. Brengle”. He was so troubled by this introduction that he went home that evening and wrote these words in his diary,

If I appear great in their eyes, the Lord is most graciously helping me to see how absolutely nothing I am without Him, and helping me to keep little in my own eyes. He does use me. But . . . the axe cannot boast of the tree it has cut down. It could do nothing but for the woodsman. He made it, he sharpened it, and he used it. The moment he throws it aside, it becomes only old iron. O that I may never lose sight of this.

Paul is not referring, in this verse, to spiritual age, by the way, but to spiritual maturity. It is a reference to a man who is doing more than growing old in the Lord; he is growing up in the Lord.

2. The next individual who may not be able to handle prominence that comes from an effective ministry is someone who is in love with money.

This is found in I Timothy 3:3c. Paul says the man must be,

. . . free from the love of money.

This may also be translated, “not greedy”.

Many times a prominent leader may be faced with financial temptation. People will give money and do things financially to aid. If he is after this, there could be ruin.

This phrase is actually one Greek word “aphilarguros” that can be broken into its three parts. It contains “a” for “not,” “phil” from “phileo” for “to love,” and “arguros” for “silver”. So, the literal translation is, “no love silver”. A leader is not in love with this.

This would mean then, that a leader must not be viewed as a man who can be bought. Many a ministry has been destroyed by leaders who had price tags.

I do not believe there is anything touchier in any ministry than the subject of money. A leader must not be perceived as being in ministry to make money off of the flock.

Billy Sunday was an evangelist whose ministry I have a great admiration for, but he had a sad ending to his ministry and life. At the height of his ministry, he gained celebrity status. In fact, he is the first that we know of in the evangelical world who was viewed as a celebrity because of his fame. He would hobnob with men like John Rockefeller; he rubbed shoulders with the Hollywood stars – the only evangelist to ever do this, up to this point; he dined with Presidents Roosevelt and Wilson; he commissioned biographies of himself and even sold postcards printed with his photograph.

The sad tale is that between 1908 and 1920 – not that this is in of itself bad – it is in the records that Billy Sunday deposited in his personal accounts over a million dollars in twelve years. He began buying expensive cars; he dressed himself in furs, if you can imagine coming to an evangelistic meeting in furs; he began buying very expensive jewelry for his wife; he, in general, began living a very ostentatious lifestyle.

From 1920 on, his record shows, according to his biography, that his meetings began to fall off. A lot of other things happened as well. He began to be sent to far off places where he would not be an embarrassment to the cause of Christ because of the way he had begun to live. Billy Sunday was perceived as a man who was in it for money.

Peter wrote, in I Peter 5:2,

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;

3. The third individual who may not be able to handle prominence that comes from an effective ministry is a self-willed individual.

Look at Titus 1:7.

For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed . . .

An individual who becomes prominent faces the temptation to become self-willed. He experiences prominence and becomes a promoter of his own cause; his own agenda; his own will.

“Self-willed” in the Greek mind, by the way, means “self-centered”.

This man becomes his own authority and no one can tell him any differently. Obviously it will destroy the church if its leaders do not follow the will of the Savior who has His agenda, His will, His program, and His kingdom.

We are not to be self-willed, but Spirit-led.

Conclusion – The Results of Man-made Choices

Now, I mentioned at the beginning of our discussion today, the problem with choosing on the basis of our criteria. The problem is much deeper than I implied.

The results of man-oriented choices have flooded the church today. This begins a progression downward. There are steps that lead downward to the destruction of a ministry if men are placed in leadership apart from the unchanging qualifications of God's word.

When a church begins to say, “Well, we'll choose him for a prominent position on the basis of whether or not we like him and he likes us and he is like us.”

This begins a procession downward.

I am not saying this because I think our church is headed in this direction; I am saying this so that we will not be.

Let me give the three steps downward.

1. The first step downward in the ministry that was once effective is for the standards of leadership to become fluid instead of fixed.

I can think of three current issues that the church is confronted with now, in which the standards may become fluid instead of fixed.

- One issue is an individual who is unfaithful to his wife.

A culture may not necessarily think this is so bad because the culture is predominantly involved in this. They say, “He is like us – and besides, he confessed.”

The problem is not forgiveness; the problem is blamelessness. But this becomes a fluid thing and no one is willing to say, “God's word says, ‘he is to be a one woman man – an individual committed to his wife.’”

- Another issue is that some say Paul talked culturally and men were chauvinistic back then.

This is the reason women cannot lead in the church and cannot hold the offices of elder and deacon. It is a cultural thing. If Paul lived in America today, this problem would not exist.

The standard becomes a very fluid thing. If a man desires the office, it is a good thing. But this is not to be taken literally anymore.

- Another issue is, “So a man spends all of his time at work – his house can manage itself on its own; his wife is doing a pretty good job. Who is to say this is wrong? He is on the fast track.”

The standard becomes fluid in that everyone defines their own definition of what a leader is.

There is another downward step as a result of this first step.

2. The second step downward in the ministry that was once effective is for the standards of leadership to become optional instead of essential.

“You know Mr. Smith is married to the company and never sees his children during the daylight hours, but he is successful and he never misses church. It is not necessary that he manages his household well. We’ll just leave that one out.”

I do not know how many churches have defeated their ministry by bringing in a pastor who could do everything but teach. This becomes an option, not an essential – “Well, he’s good at a lot of other things.”

First the standard becomes fluid and then it becomes an option.

This particular issue of teaching is not a new problem, by the way. In Hosea 4:6a, God condemned this when He said,

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. . . .

(“Lack of biblical knowledge is destroying My people,” God is saying. Then He talks to the priests and the prophets, saying,)

Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. . . .

These are strong words.

3. The final step downward in the ministry that was once effective is for the standards of leadership to become ignored instead of upheld.

The standards are first fluid, then become optional, and finally, “Let’s just ignore them. They don’t really fit our culture anyway.”

Today, men in the pulpit have left their wives. There are women in the pulpit exercising authority over men. There are men who have been indicted for tax evasion and fraud and embezzlement and adultery and homosexuality and on and on, holding the sacred offices of elder and deacon.

Why?

It began in the first downward step when the standards become fluid. “Let’s sit down and re-think these things in the light of America today. Let’s get a ruling on this that is up to this century.”

The standards then become optional and, ultimately, are ignored.

I have taught this series on biblical requirements for leadership, not on my behalf or to set our leaders up, but to, in fact, give you everything you need to evaluate the leadership of a church. I pray I have given you enough to protect our church body in knowing what it takes so that an erosion of leadership does not take place. This is an erosion of leadership that does not pursue God’s word, does not pursue the face of God, does not lead the flock with the sheep in the heart. By God’s grace this will not happen in our church – and it will take His grace.

Paul wrote to Timothy, in I Timothy 3:14-15,

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.

May it be this way in our church.