

The Kind of Leader God Requires

1 Timothy 3:1-13 & 1 Timothy 5:17-21

These verses give some very personal and private criteria for leading in the church. Imagine any other job interview where you were asked about your faithfulness to your spouse, the behaviour of your children, your drinking habits or your attitude to money! As followers of Christ, God always wants us to have integrity in any position of responsibility we hold. He's about the great business of making us Christ-like so that in every environment people see His character in us.

In this passage we see the requirements of God for leaders in His church, but many of these apply in any sphere of leadership. Before reading the passage, it's helpful to understand three things:

1. Overseers and Elders are the same people. Paul uses a familiar Jewish term (elders) to denote seniority in the church congregation. He also used the greek word *episkopos* meaning overseer, a familiar term in the workplace for those carrying leadership responsibility. In *Acts 20:28-29* Paul gathers the elders and calls them overseers. The letter to the Philippians was addressed to the "overseers and deacons".

Elders/overseers/shepherds/pastors/bishops in scripture all describe the same role: primary carers and leaders for God's people in a local church congregation.

2. Deacons are best described as fully authorised agents or messengers, who are invested with the full authority of the elders to lead within the church.

3. Gender roles: We will deal with this more fully in a subsequent message, but there seems to be an assumption in Paul's writing that elders will be carefully chosen men who lead in the church (as they do in their home) and deacons will be carefully chosen men and/or women to lead in the church with full but delegated authority.

1. *Character* matters more than *Competence*

Character matters. Christian leadership is servant leadership. Leadership isn't the top of the tree, it's the bottom! A worldly view of leadership (top-down) finds it's origins in Satan (**Isaiah 14**: "I will raise my throne above the stars of God", "I will make myself like the most high"). Satan thought that serving another devalued him, so sought to overthrow God. But Christian leadership follows the example of Jesus, who didn't consider equality with God as something to be held onto, but humbled himself as a servant, even paying for our sins through his death on a cross. Leadership is a messy and frustrating but noble task. Therefore it requires character or you won't last!

"Now the overseer is to be above reproach ... temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable ... not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome ... He must also have a good reputation with outsiders"

Clearly, only Jesus could perfectly fulfil all of these criteria! But a leader must be a work in progress, generally showing Christ-like qualities in these areas.

2. *Caring* not just *Charismatic*

We are naturally drawn to big personalities, but Paul asks us to look for a deep sense of care in those who lead.

"...faithful to his wife, hospitable, must manage his own family well, seeing that his children obey him..."

These verses don't forbid single people or those without children from becoming elders or deacons. However, this is normally how the caring criteria is to be observed in a primary sphere outside the church. Singleness and marriage are both blessed gifts from God (*1 Cor 7:7*) each with unique challenges. Leading a family (which in Paul's

culture may have consisted of grandparents/ widows/ servants) was a complex and stretching task, which was good preparation for eldership tasks of caring, decision-making and discipline.

God is a caring God. Jesus said, *"I am the Good Shepherd"*. He wants that same care to be demonstrated through leaders.

"Faithful to his wife" (ESV: 'husband of one wife or man of one woman')

Leaders must not be polygamous, but a devoted husband to one woman! He must have unquestionable morality, holding true and faithful to his own wife, honouring his marriage vows.

"Hospitable"

They must be willing to open up their home. The phrase literally means *"love for strangers"*. Bringing those on the outside in, looking out for those who are isolated and in need, is a key part of Christian leadership.

3. *Mature*, not necessarily with a *Masters* in theology!

Character matters, but that's not enough. Elders need to know what they're talking about, especially when it comes to God. Elders must be *"able to teach"*. Loving the Bible and being able to explain it to people is key! This does not necessarily mean that this teaching must be done publicly, but so that good counsel can always be given to those who ask. Elders should have a love of learning.

4. Loving God not loving money

False teachers in Timothy's day abused their position to profiteer for financial gain! Paul warns that if a leader loves money they are ineffective Christian leaders. Jesus said you can't serve God and money. Therefore, money-loving leaders will lead people away from Christ.

But, far from suggesting that churches shouldn't pay leaders so as to avoid that danger, Paul writes:

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages.'"

Churches should responsibly provide for:

- a) Those who do a good job
- b) Those whose leadership function requires them to forgo other employment to focus on leading in the church.

Rather than be stingy ("*muzzling an ox*" would have been seen as a cruelty to an animal that was working hard, not allowing it to eat while working), Paul suggests generous and loving care ("*double honour*").

Questions

- What qualities are you most attracted to in a Christian leader?
- What dangers are there in our age of technology of following gifted preachers online?
- Do you agree that **character** matters more than **competence**? What would it look like for a leader to have one without the other?
- Remember the stick of rock. Do you feel you have personal consistency of character in your different spheres of life? (Home, family, extended family, job, church etc.)
- What would/does servant leadership look like in your job/marriage/family?
- How does "caring leadership" get demonstrated differently depending if you're single or married?



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