

## **“The Character of Church Leadership”**

(a sermon for the installation of church leaders)

1 Timothy 3:1-7 (The Message)

There was a man who wanted to join the church, but told the pastor that he “didn’t want to get involved.” The minister jotted down something on a piece of paper and handed it to him. “Here’s the address of another church,” he said, “one that I think would be just right for you.” It turned out to be an abandoned church building!

Living churches are churches where members “get involved” and make things happen. One of the wonderful things about our church here in Sebastian is that so many of our members are more than willing to get involved. This morning, the highlight of our worship service will be the installation of our 2020 church leaders and committee members – those who are eager to be involved in the life of this church.

On the table in the back of the sanctuary, you can find a sheet listing all those who have been elected to serve in various capacities during the coming year. In just a few minutes, we will be commissioning them. A good number of our most active church members are on that list. On behalf of our congregation, I would like to offer you our heartfelt gratitude for your willingness to serve. This morning, we pledge to you our prayers and cooperation as you strive to fulfill your calling.

You know, it is an awesome and wonderful thing to be selected from among your peers to lead God’s people. When you think about it, there is no higher calling than to be entrusted with the mission of the church of Jesus Christ – there is nothing more important in this life than being about God’s business.

Therefore, I thought it would be highly appropriate this morning for us to take a look at what the Bible has to say about the character of those who would aspire to be leaders in the church.

As you can see from our scripture for this morning, being a church leader involves every facet of your life. Your responsibility isn’t limited to church work, but impacts all spheres in which you live: the church – the home – the workplace – and the community. Christian leaders should LIVE their faith, day-in and day-out. So, with that in mind, let’s take a few moments to summarize the description of the ideal church leader as we find it in our scripture lesson this morning, and measure ourselves by this Biblical ideal.

**First of all, Paul writes that a church leader should be a person who is RESPECTED WITHIN THE CHURCH, RESPECTED WITHIN THE HOME, AND RESPECTED WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.**

Paul says that he or she must be “without fault (or as The Message translation puts it, “a leader must be well-thought-of.” She or he must be above reproach in the church, deserving of honor

in the family, and a person of the highest integrity in the community. In other words, church leaders must “witness to their faith” for all the world to see.

In the time of the Roman Empire, the son of the revered general, Scipio Africanus, wore a signet ring with his father’s picture on it. However, the son’s life bore no resemblance to his noble father – he was a scoundrel. Finally, the Roman Senate forbade him to wear the ring because it was a disgrace to his father.

As Christian leaders, we are to bear the image of our heavenly Father with pride, making certain that our lives reveal – to the church, our families, and our world – that we are God’s children. May our lives never be a disgrace to our Father.

**The second thing our text tells us about church leaders is that they must be SELF-CONTROLLED AND DISCIPLINED.**

He or she must not allow any self-indulgence which would detract from her or his Christian walk. The scripture passage refers to drunkenness, but any self-indulgence could be substituted. The Christian leader is to be sober in lifestyle, and be in full-control of his or her life.

Many years ago, a man, who was battered, bruised, and suffering from a broken leg, was taken to the little town clinic for treatment. The doctor asked, “What happened?” It seems that the man had lost control of a team of horses; they ran away and he was thrown from the wagon.

He found out the hard way that horses that are out of control are dangerous – so is fire – so is a car or a train or a plane. But the greatest danger of all is a person whose life is out of control. That is what Paul is saying here.

In order for us to be useful to God as leaders in his church, we must hold a “tight grip” on the reigns of our lives. Otherwise, we will be, at best – unproductive servants, at worst – dangerous loose-cans in the church. Either way, we will have failed in our calling from God.

So, church leaders must be both respected and self-controlled.

**It also goes without saying that those who would be leaders in the congregation ought to be STRONG IN THEIR FAITH.**

To be a church leader, you must be so self-assured in your faith that you are able to share your faith with others.

Some years ago, a business man, on returning from a business trip to Europe, brought his wife some souvenirs. Among them was a matchbox which was supposed to glow in the dark. After he gave it to his wife, he turned off the light – but was disappointed to discover that the matchbox wasn’t visible. “I’ve been cheated,” he complained to his wife.

Later, his wife noticed that the writing on the box was in French, so she took it to a friend of hers who spoke French. The writing on the box said, "If you want me to shine all night, keep me in the sun all day." So, she put the box in a south window. That evening, when she turned out the light, the matchbox had a brilliant glow.

The surprised husband asked, "What did you do?" "Oh, I found the secret," she said. "Before it can shine in the dark, it must be exposed to the light."

Before church leaders (or any Christian, for that matter) can shine in the darkness of this world, they have to be exposed to the "Light" of Christ. That means, as leaders, we must immerse ourselves in prayer, be diligent in the study of the Word of God, generous in our giving, and faithful in our worship attendance. Then, we will have a faith that is strong enough to share with others. In other words, a church leader must be mature in the faith.

**The fourth criteria for church leadership is that you must be of a GENTLE DISPOSITION.**

Leaders in the church should not be subject to violent out-bursts and anger. He or she must not be argumentative. Instead, they should strive to be peace-makers in the congregation, to bring harmony out of discord.

Paul expounds on this point in his Second Letter to Timothy (2:22-26), where he is also giving advice to church leaders:

*"Run away from infantile indulgence. Run after mature righteousness - faith, love, peace - joining those who are in honest and serious prayer before God. Refuse to get involved in inane discussions; they always end up in fights. God's servant must not be argumentative, but a gentle listener and a teacher who keeps cool, working firmly but patiently with those who refuse to obey. You never know how or when God might sober them up with a change of heart and a turning to the truth, enabling them to escape the Devil's trap, where they are caught and held captive, forced to run his errands."*

Or as Jesus said much more succinctly in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God."

So, one who aspires to leadership in the congregation must be gentle.

**Finally, Paul tells us that leaders in the church must be FREE FROM THE LOVE OF MONEY (or as our translation this morning says, "money-hungry").**

While its true that in many ways, the church is a business and we deal with large sums of money, we must never become obsessed with matters of money. Instead, we must always remember that ministry is what we are about – and ministry is "people."

There is a true story about a Turkish professional wrestler who always carried his fortune with him on a massive belt decorated with gold coins that went all the way around his waist. When, on a voyage, the ship he was sailing on began to sink, the wrestler refused to let go of his belt. It weighed him down so much that he drowned.

As individuals and as a church, it is easy to become so “weighed down” with financial concerns, that we can lose our spiritual lives. (And, our congregation does face some financial concern – which you’ll be hearing more about in February during our stewardship campaign.)

In the church, we must always remember that money is just a tool that makes ministry to and with people possible. As leaders in the church, we must be on guard against the love of money.

So, there you have it . . . the description of the ideal church leader: Our scripture tells us that a church leader is a person: who is respected, self-controlled, strong in faith, of a gentle disposition, and does not allow money to become an obsession in his or her life.

Now – this is a description of what a leader OUGHT to be. This morning, as many of us “take on the mantle of leadership” in our church, let us pray that these words from the Bible describe the kind of leaders we might all strive to become.

Let us pray:

Be with all our leaders, O Lord, as they take upon themselves the mantle of leadership in your church. You have entrusted them with your message and your mission. Help each of us live up to your expectations of us as leaders of your church. Amen.