

LESSON ESSENTIALS

PASTORAL BASICS

LESSON 4: BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Not many are called to be in positions of church authority with proper titles assigned to them. Does this absolve everyone else in the church from pursuing the traits that make a leader great? Does the Lord expect leaders to live to a different standard than lay people?

What makes a leader a good leader? If you had to make a list of qualifications, how would you decide which were desirable traits?

The standards of the world for leadership are quite different from those that the Bible offers as ideal. The world pursues youth, beauty, charisma, power, and intellect. The Bible values humility, self-control, loyalty, and goodness.

Not every person in your church who is characterized by these traits must become a leader, but every leader must be characterized by these traits!

Above reproach; faithful; a good spouse; a good parent; not rebellious; not self-willed, not quick-tempered; not addicted to wine; hospitable; self-controlled: do you know someone like this? Do these descriptions, and more as laid out in the books of Timothy and Titus, remind you of someone in your church? If so, are they in leadership? Maybe they should be.

The standards of the world for leadership are quite different from those that the Bible offers as ideal. The world pursues youth, beauty, charisma, power, and intellect. The Bible values humility, self-control, loyalty, and goodness. The world admires self-made men and women. The Bible affirms Spirit-led, Christ-centered men and women.

When choosing elders, deacons, pastors, or leaders for church ministries, selection committees ought to look at the Biblical qualifications laid out in scripture. These are not arbitrary, man-made preferences about who should be a leader: these are traits that godly men and women ought to possess before taking on leadership positions in the church body.

Clearly, no human will ever fully, constantly exude all of these, as we are still given to our sinful nature from time to time. However, you know, by looking at the people in your church circles, that there are some people who are more consistently characterized by these traits than others.

Are these traits 'natural' in that some people are simply born with them? Or, can we pursue and practice them? Obviously, these are God-given qualities that reflect His Spirit at work in our hearts, but where we are weak in hospitality, faithfulness, and stewardship (for example) can we work harder to become stronger in those areas or must we simply live with the particular qualities that the Lord has put into us? And if we can pursue those traits, should we only do so if we want a position of leadership? Is growing in these godly characteristics only necessary for those who want to develop their 'spiritual resume' or should every believer aim to grow in these traits?

Perhaps those are rhetorical questions as the Word of God makes it quite clear that we ought to all be pursuing godliness in the ways that are laid out as qualifications for church leadership. Not every person in your church who is characterized by these traits must become a leader, but every leader must be characterized by these traits! Colossians 3 is just one example of a list of godly traits that all believers must work to assume. We are to be compassionate, kind, loving, forgiving, humble, and teachable. This is true of every believer, not just those in leadership or those interested in leadership. Even if it is not your desire to ever have a title or a position, the church needs men and women who are known for their integrity and godly character.

You see, even if you never receive an official title or position of authority, you are always leading someone. In God's kingdom we are all like

members of a parade. There are people – leaders -- ahead of us who we watch and emulate. We see their godliness modelled for us and we follow their example. But there are also people behind us, too – children, new believers, struggling believers – who are watching our example and following our lead. This is awe-inspiring, and humbling, and we ought to not take the honour lightly. As we grow in grace others will notice and will be inspired by our example that the Holy Spirit is enabling us to live.

For those who are already in leadership positions, these passages listing the qualifications for leaders can be quite intimidating. No doubt you see your shortcomings, you know your weaknesses and failures, and you wonder if someone has made a mistake in putting you in a position of authority over anyone. Do not be discouraged! The Lord knows. He has knit you together and has poured out His Spirit upon you in ways that glorify Him and serve His purpose. Continue to humbly strive towards greater godliness, but never forget that it is the Lord that is at work within you, completing the work of godliness that He began (Philippians 1:6).

The Lord knew that we would struggle to know how to please Him and how to be men and women who serve and lead well. The world offers its opinion, and too often the church is tempted to follow its standard. But the Bible lays out a beautiful description of what greatness looks like in the kingdom of God and it is to be pursued by all who claim the name of Christ over their lives. He is the only one who ever masterfully displayed each of these traits. It is our great privilege to reflect even a portion of His character, and to have the promise that we will grow in His likeness.

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IN REVIEW

- The world's standards for leadership are very different from the Bible's and we ought to be careful to not value and affirm the wrong kinds of traits in our church leaders.
- Whether or not you receive a title or position in your church, you are always a leader to someone, and, as such, you ought to pursue growth in these godly traits as well.
- Leaders who feel like failures need to be encouraged that it is the Lord who is at work in them making them more and more like Him. Sometimes the seed of those godly traits and a teachable spirit is enough to qualify you to be used by the Lord.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Which of these qualifications do you most admire? Is this a trait that you possess? Pray and ask the Lord to develop your strengths so that you can reflect Him more accurately and lead His people well.

- Which of these traits do you not admire? Do some of these traits seem like weaknesses compared to the world's standards? Pray and ask the Lord to align your perspective with His, shaking off the mindset and values of the world.

- Take time now to write a note of encouragement to the leaders in your church, highlighting the traits listed in scripture that you see most evident in their lives. Praise God for His work in and through them, and encourage them to keep serving Him.

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