

Biblical Standards for Leadership in an Age of Scandal

In an age of an Evangelical church culture fraught with scandals, we must continually remind and ground ourselves in the biblical criteria for leadership, otherwise, we will lose our credibility within our churches and before the world. The following are some of the ethical and ministerial standards related to priests, kings, and New Testament elders.

These are qualifications that we can still apply in principle to today's church.

Old Testament Standards for the Priests (Leviticus 21): Initially, all the children of Israel were to serve as priests of the Lord (Exodus 19:6). Among the many laws related to the standards for the priesthood, which relate to all present saints according to 1 Peter 2:8-9, are some ministerial and ethical principles that we can allegorically extrapolate (although the actual ceremonial qualifications are no longer relevant).

Standard: They shall not dwell among dead bodies and make themselves unclean (Leviticus 21:11). This has to do with not participating with people while they are involved in the works of darkness. (Jesus called unconverted people "dead" in John 5:25, Luke 9:60, and Ephesians 2:1-3.)

Principle: I can't tell you how many Christians I know of who think nothing of going out and partying with the world, getting drunk, listening to perverted music, gambling, or other worldly pursuits.

Standard: They shall not marry a prostitute or a divorced woman but only a virgin (Leviticus 21:13-15). The basic idea

of this passage is that marriage is not a free-for-all. Priests are commanded to marry women of God without previous marital issues. This is so that the priestly class is protected from unnecessary distractions and can nurture their children in a godly environment.

Principle: Jesus modified this view for the Kingdom age of the Church when He forbade divorce, except for sexual immorality, and forbade marrying a divorced person for an unbiblical reason (Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:8-9).

Standard: Various laws highlight physical defects (Leviticus 21:17- 24). Physical flaws or blemishes are related to spiritual deficits that hinder a person from ministering for the Lord. For example, lameness represents those whose walk with God doesn't allow them to minister. Blindness represents those who have no discernment and no real revelation of Christ in their lives. Those with crushed testicles represent those who are not winning souls or bearing any fruit in their ministries. Hunchbacks represent those who are not walking uprightly before the Lord (Proverbs 2:21). Dwarfs represent those who have not grown in stature and maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

Standards for Kings (Deuteronomy 17:14-20):

While the principles for priests relate to all believers, the standards for kings pertain specifically to those serving in church leadership.

Standard: A foreigner who is not your brother may not serve as king (Deuteronomy 17:15).

Principle: Those serving in leadership positions in the body of Christ must be "born again." They must be citizens of His kingdom and manifest the fruits of salvation.

Standard: Kings must not acquire many horses for themselves (Deuteronomy 17:16). In the Bible, horses represent strength

and pride. Thus, God is warning His leaders to not acquire possessions that symbolize their elitism, and to not raise themselves higher than the people in their congregations.

Principle: In my opinion, it is wrong for Church leaders to live lavish lifestyles of the rich and famous. This goes against the principles of humility and simplicity that Jesus and His apostles modeled in Scripture.

Standard: Kings shall not acquire many wives. God was teaching against polygamy and telling the leaders to go back to the one-wife standard, as found in the union between Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:19-22).

Principle: Although Church leaders in America today don't practice polygamy, more and more leaders in the church are violating the spirit of this passage because they get married, divorced, and remarried numerous times. This is causing embarrassment to the whole body of Christ.

Standard: Kings shall not acquire for themselves excessive silver or gold (Deuteronomy 17:17).

Principle: Some contemporary Christian leaders live lavishly and receive an inordinate amount of compensation from their churches. I have no problem with a pastor receiving a decent salary, commensurate with their hard work and the size of their church, so they can devote their time to ministering to the church and not be distracted by working another job. However, some go overboard and live like narcissistic celebrities! This has become a stench in the nostrils of the world and is something that must be adjusted, or we will see the judgment of God visit the church like never before!

Standard: Kings shall both write and read the Word of God all the days of their lives (Deuteronomy 17:18-19).

Principle: Christian leaders are required by God to be "People of the Book." We are to focus on the Scriptures, understand

all the important doctrines of the Church and the Bible, and apply all of this to our personal lives, families, churches, and the surrounding culture. Unfortunately, many know the sports pages, current events, or the musings of Wall Street more than they know and understand the Scriptures.

Standard: The hearts of kings shall not be lifted up above their brothers.

Principle: When I was consecrated as a bishop in 2006, many congratulated me for being “elevated.” I would cringe when hearing this because I could not picture the Lord Jesus telling His apostles that they were elevated! He told them they were servants, called to wash the people’s feet (John 13). Thus, when we view leadership as a position, title, or status above others, we are acting like oligarchs who lord their authority over their subjects. This is the opposite of what Jesus taught (Mark 10:42-45). {eoa}

Joseph Mattera’s teachings reach thousands of leaders and believers in more than 175 nations. His call is to influence leaders who lead nations.

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