

Why Christian Leaders Must Cling to These Biblical Standards Now More Than Ever

In an age of an evangelical church culture that is fraught with scandals, we must continually ground ourselves in the biblical criteria for leadership. Otherwise, we will lose our credibility within our churches and before the world.

In addition, every church's board of trustees should insist their pastor be accountable to a higher body of leadership or presbytery. This can aid in steering clear of unnecessary challenges related to ministerial integrity.

There is an urgent need in contemporary Christianity to overhaul our assessment and criteria for leadership. This has been made abundantly clear by all the scandals that continue to take place in the church. Those who attempt to bring correction (like I am doing here) are often accused of being legalists or judgmental. I am not advocating that ministers caught in sexual or ethical sin should step down permanently. But there needs to be a body of leaders to which fallen ministers are accountable so they may be restored to their ministries after demonstrating true repentance and inner healing.

The following are some of the ethical and ministerial standards as 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 (Lev. 21)

Originally, all the children of Israel were to serve as

priests of the Lord (Ex. 19:6). But this privilege was evidently taken away and given to the tribe of Levi after the people turned away from the Lord. Among the many laws related to the standards for the priesthood (which relate to all present saints, according to 1 Pet. 2:8-9) are some ministerial and ethical principles that we can allegorically extrapolate (though the actual ceremonial qualifications are no longer relevant).

Standard: They shall not dwell among dead bodies and make themselves unclean (Lev. 21:11). This has to do with not fellowshiping with folks 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 ungodly music, gambling or other worldly pursuits.

Standard: They shall not marry a prostitute or a divorced woman but only a virgin (Lev. 21:13-15). The basic idea of this passage is this: Marriage is not a free-for-all. Priests are commanded to marry women of God without previous marital issues. This is so the priestly class is protected from unnecessary distractions and so they nurture their children in a godly environment.

Principle: Jesus modified this view in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:8-9 for the kingdom age of the church when He forbade divorce (except for sexual immorality) and forbade marrying a person divorced for an unbiblical reason. (It is now common in the body of Christ for people to divorce just because they don’t get along with their spouse. Jesus strictly forbids this.)

Various laws highlight physical defects (Lev. 21:17- 24). Physical defects 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; hunchbacks represent those who are not walking uprightly before the Lord (Prov. 2:21) and dwarfs represent those who have not grown in stature and maturity in Christ (Eph. 4:13).

Standards for Kings (Deut. 17:14-20)

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

Standard: A foreigner who is not your brother may not serve as king (Deut. 17:15). Those serving in leadership positions in the body of Christ must be “born again” and demonstrate clear fruits of salvation.

Principle: Often, churches place people in leadership positions without any assurance of their salvation! This dilutes the church of its effectiveness and power to witness to the world!

Standard: Kings must not acquire many horses for themselves (Deut. 17:16). In the Bible, horses represent strength and pride. Thus, God is warning His leaders not to acquire possessions that symbolize their elitism and raise themselves higher than the people in their congregations. For example, there are church leaders who drive very expensive cars or wear \$5,000 suits (even though their congregation is very poor) to show people that God is blessing them above everyone else.

Principle: This goes against the principles of humility and simplicity that Jesus and His apostles modeled in Scripture. God forbids kings from acquiring too many horses because it would cause people to turn back to Egypt, which is a symbol of returning to previous ungodly lifestyles they had before

experiencing salvation in Christ. Leaders who need material excess in order to be satisfied in this life will produce people who will also get caught up in materialism. This will turn their hearts away from the Lord and back to the things the world values.

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 (Gen. 2:19-22). Although church leaders in America today don't practice polygamy (having more than one legal wife at the same time), 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 unrest, disgust and alarm among many leaders (including myself) in the body of Christ.

Principle: Ever since the 1980s, when certain national ministers began divorcing and remarrying without adultery or infidelity being cited as the reason (and then on television telling the world that they are blessed), the standards of church leadership regarding marriage and divorce have been sliding down into an abyss.

Several years ago, two high-profile church pastors/leaders divorced. The reasons they gave had nothing to do with adultery but everything to do with simply not getting along or having different visions for ministry. If this is so, they have set an awful example for younger leaders and their congregations by putting their ministry aspirations (or career aspirations) ahead of their marriage vows, which are emblematic of Christ and the church and should never be broken (Eph. 5:25).

This is different from some of the cases in which a spouse does not want to serve the Lord anymore or wants their spouse to choose between them and the ministry. This is a difficult situation, especially if a person thinks that by resigning

they are putting the fleshly desires of their spouse before God.

Standard: Kings shall not acquire for themselves excessive silver or gold (Deut. 17:17). There are some contemporary Christian leaders who 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 having to work another job. But 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.

(I have several income streams related to various aspects of my ministry outside of our local church, so I don't put an excessive burden on the finances of our congregation. Also, I have no issue with someone making a lot of money from book sales, audio sales and royalties. This is different from making millions in salary from a local church.)

Standard: Kings shall both write and read the Word of God all the days of their lives (Deut. 17:18-19). 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 be able to apply all of this to our personal lives, families, churches and the surrounding culture.

Principle: There are many leaders who know the sports pages, current events or the musings of Wall Street more than they know and understand the Scriptures. If we are going to get back to correct standards of holiness, ethics and ministerial protocol, we need to recapture the simplicity of the gospel (the *kerygma*) and the teachings that apply it (the *didache*).

Standard: The hearts of kings shall not be lifted up above their brothers. 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 feet of the people (John 13).

Principle: When we view leadership as a position, title or status above others in our faith communities, we are missing the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus and are acting like the world. The world has leaders who lord their authority over their subjects. This is the opposite of what Jesus taught His apostles (Mark 10:42-45).

New Testament Church Elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7)

Elders in local churches are those who have the greatest responsibility for leading their congregations. Elder is the highest governmental office in the church—something even the apostle Peter claimed for himself (1 Pet. 5:1). (The fivefold ministry, as found in Ephesians 4:11, describes a function, not an office, of the church.)

Because of the great responsibility, there are some general guidelines that all pastors, fivefold ministers, trustees, deacons and elders must meet before they are installed. The following is a brief summary:

They must be above reproach. This regards not having hidden “skeletons in the closet” or a lifestyle that others could seize on and use as an accusation to discredit them.

They must be the husband of one wife. This has to do with barring a person from serving as an elder who is married to more than one woman at a time. We can also extrapolate from this standard that one should not serve as an elder if they divorced their wife and remarried for anything but the biblical reason of adultery. (However, a case can be made that

divorce is acceptable if one's spouse is a violent abuser who threatens their life. But, some would say you could divorce but not remarry in a case like this. There is too much to say regarding this subject to fit in this chapter.)

They must be sober-minded. This means elders should be serious about the primary things in life related to God, the church, family and eternity. Their values and priorities should be on things above (Col. 3:1-3).

They must be self-controlled. This means a leader needs to live a prudent, discreet life of self-control in which they are not giving in to their fleshly desires or the whims of their physical and sensual passions regarding lust of the flesh, food and sexual appetite.

They must be respectable: a person who is not disorderly, but lives a quiet life as a respectable citizen.

They must be hospitable. Elders should have their marriages, families and finances in order, to the point where they are able to put up people in their homes as the Lord leads. They should also have people over for dinner.

I know some leaders who never allow anyone near their homes or personal lives. This makes me wonder what they are trying to hide. Hospitality is an important requirement because it enables the discipleship or mentoring process, so those being disciplined can go to the next level beyond what is available in larger congregational meetings.

They must be able to teach. Elders have to be capable of communicating the gospel to the unsaved and applying it practically in a teaching setting for a congregation. Having a Word ministry is an important requirement of all elders.

They cannot be drunkards. It is not a sin to drink alcoholic beverages, but it is a sin if it becomes a habit and causes drunkenness. This can also be applied to any mind-altering

substance.

Some leaders have become addicted to painkillers, drinking and other activities that dim the brain to avoid dealing with the pain and pressures of life.

They must not be violent. Unfortunately, there are many leaders with a violent temper. A violent temper disqualifies a person in God's eyes for eldership in the body of Christ.

They must not be quarrelsome. There are some leaders who are very argumentative because they have issues in their own hearts that have not been dealt with. While we don't want "yes men" to serve as elders (people who just rubber-stamp everything the senior pastor says without honest dialogue and feedback), we also don't want people serving as elders who must debate everything.

They must not be lovers of money. Leaders whose hearts are fixated on money are not qualified to be elders because they will always view their ministries and associations with people with a "What's in it for me?" mentality.

Those with serious financial challenges should not serve as elders or trustees because they will be tempted by a conflicting interest when they have business meetings and discuss how to dispense or spend church finances.

They must manage their households and have their children subject to them. If a person cannot lead their own family, the Bible teaches they cannot manage or lead the household of God. This also means that young children of elders who are still living in their homes should be submissive, attend church and not be a disruption to the family goal of serving the Lord.

They must not be a recent convert. In New Testament times, a person had to be at least 30 years old and a believer for several years before they were appointed as elders. This is to protect new converts who could be puffed up with pride if they

are put in a position of influence.

They must have a good reputation with those outside the church. We are not called only to be an example within the church, but also outside the church. This is why an elder should not have bad credit, have a bad record on their job or have a bad reputation among their neighbors.

These are all simple guidelines. Unfortunately, we need to be continually reminded of the first principles and foundational things of leadership so our standards will glorify God and enable us to serve as salt and light in our communities. {eoa}

This article is chapter 10 from Poisonous Power, Bishop Mattera's latest book. For more like this, you can purchase your copy on Amazon here.

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