

Pilgrim Leadership

1 Timothy 3:1 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop¹, he desires a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money¹, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1Ti 3:1-7)

The "Law of the Lid" is a principle that John Maxwell espouses, which is generally true: the lid on how effective a country, a business, a church or even a family will be, comes down to leadership.

"The history of Israel and Judah points up a truth taught clearly enough by *all* history, viz., that the masses are or soon will be what their leaders are. The kings set the moral pace for the people. The public is never capable of acting en masse. Without a leader it is headless and a headless body is powerless. Always someone must lead. Even the mob engaged in pillage and murder is not the disorganized thing it appears to be. Somewhere behind the violence is a leader whose ideas it is simply putting into effect... Whatever sort of man the king turned out to be, the people were soon following his leadership. They followed David in the worship of Jehovah, Solomon in the building of the Temple, Jeroboam in the making of a calf and Hezekiah in the restoration of the temple worship... The truth is that for better or for worse religious people follow leaders. A good man may change the moral complexion of a whole nation; or a corrupt and worldly clergy may lead a nation into bondage... Today Christianity in the Western world is becoming what its present leaders are. The local church soon becomes like its pastor, and this is true even of those groups who do not believe in pastors... The poor condition of the churches today may be traced straight to their leaders." - A.W. Tozer

As we conclude this series on the pilgrim church, there is one more crucial area in which we are to be different from the world, and that is leadership. If the church is to be different from the world, its leaders must be different. They must be different in how they are appointed, in how they are qualified, and in how they lead.

When the leaders of the church are worldly, there is little to no chance that the church will be a pilgrim church. When the church selects leaders in a worldly way, when the church even desires worldly kinds of leaders, God may discipline that church by giving it what it wants.

For us to be a pilgrim church, we must understand how Christian, spiritual leadership is different to that of the world system. Our focus today will be leaders in the church, but it has applications for other kinds of leaders: husbands, parents, managers. What we want to understand today is what a Christian leader is, how he is recognised and appointed, and how he leads.

I. Pilgrim Leadership is God-Called, Not Self-Appointed

Leadership in God's church is distinct from leadership in the world in that the leaders in God's church do not appoint themselves. The Bible teaches the idea that genuine biblical leadership in the church does not begin with a human initiative, but with God. Leaders in God's church are called by God, equipped by His Spirit, recognised by God's church, but ultimately pilgrim leadership is God-appointed.

Even before the church began, in the Old Testament we see kings chosen by God, and prophets are told to find them and anoint them. The priests were chosen by God, even through God's sovereign

control of who was born to whom. A priest had to be from the tribe of Levi, so no matter how much you wanted to be a priest, if in God's sovereignty, you weren't born in Levi, you could not be.

4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. (Heb 5:4)

Prophets, priests, kings were chosen and selected by God. We certainly meet false prophets, and usurpers of the throne in Scripture, but it becomes clear who took the honour to himself, and who was appointed. And when we come into the New Testament, the pattern is the same: Jesus appoints twelve apostles, they do not appoint themselves.

Gal 1:1 Paul, an apostle(not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead),

2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Act 13:2)

27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. (Joh 3:27)

And when Paul describes how New Testament leaders are appointed, he describes it as God's work.

11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, (Eph 4:11-12)

28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God¹ which He purchased with His own blood. (Act 20:28)

This stands in contrast to the world, where a man can decide for himself to be a leader. He may wish to become a political leader, a religious leader, a business leader. And he may want to do so for any number of reasons: perhaps charitable, benevolent reasons, perhaps selfish, greedy reasons. But a leader in the world system can get the necessary qualifications, make the necessary connections, and climb his way up. Certainly, in the end it is God who is sovereign over it all, but the point is that in the world, leaders can appoint themselves. In the church, genuine leaders must be put there and appointed by God.

Now this is a very dangerous concept. The idea that God calls leaders is very open to abuse. There have always been, and there always will be, those who will use this idea, without any qualification, to assert themselves, to silence opposition, to cause people to back away in fear. "Touch not the Lord's anointed!" "Remember what happened to Korah!"

In fact, such has been the abuse, that the pendulum has swung in the other direction, where today any leader in the church is assumed guilty of lust for power until proven innocent. He must act the part of reluctant, demure, and almost apologetic leader in order for skeptics to give him some probationary trust.

But we need not accept either extremes of the pendulum. God's Word describes for us how His appointments are fleshed out in His church. It follows this simple pattern: calling, qualification, and affirmation. Calling is where someone senses the desire to serve God's church as a pastor or deacon. It may come through a growing love of the truth, and a desire to communicate it. It may come through a love for God's people, and a desire to see them grow. It may come through proven effectiveness in the church: serving in some capacity which brings notable blessing to God's people, and God's people comment on it. But what it amounts to is a growing desire, an inward pressure to be more used by God in His church. "The call" is not God speaking to you in a dream, or an inward

voice, or a sudden intuition, or because some self-appointed prophet told you that you were called. Let me read you the Scripture which describes the call of God:

1 Timothy 3:1 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop¹, he desires a good work.

Desire. If any man has a good and lawful desire to serve God in the capacity of a pastor-teacher, an elder, an overseer (three titles, same office), that is a good desire. It is not automatically ugly ambition, dirty greed for money, lust for attention. Now it can be those things, and you'll see how God safeguards against it. But if someone has a growing longing to teach God's Word and lead God's people in the love and worship of God, this is the beginning. This could be the call of God on your life. Likewise with deacons. Paul writes, *13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. (1Ti 3:13)*

That desire doesn't come to everyone. But to some, there is a growing desire for more regular usefulness, a growing desire to be devoted to the Word of God, a growing sense that their Monday to Friday nine to fives are not their ultimate callings, their true vocations.

So what does the man do who experiences this? This leads to the second stage which is qualification. After verse 1 of 1 Timothy 3, Paul goes on to list sixteen character qualifications. He does the same for deacons, and repeats a similar list in Titus 1. What Paul is doing here is saying that if a man has the call, then the next thing he should have is the qualification. And the qualification is nearly entirely character-based. There is one requirement that has to do with skill – being able to teach – but apart from that the qualifications are that a man is above reasonable question, he is a one-woman man to his wife, a father who has children who voluntarily submit to him, he is self-controlled, his mind is clear and not reactive or unstable, he is respectable in behaviour, hospitable to people, gentle, not violent or quarrelsome, not controlled by substances, not greedy for money or covetous for things, not a new believer, and not in bad standing with the general community.

Now here is the interesting thing about these qualifications. First, they are fairly unremarkable. What is required is not extraordinary piety, but consistent, mature Christianity. Second, they are publicly verifiable. The church can with a fair amount of ease test if he is devoted to his wife, a good father, a new believer. They can watch to see if he makes sober judgements, if he is an angry, defensive contentious man or not, if he is good or bad with finances, if he has lusts for goods or money or alcohol.

So what is supposed to happen is that within the church, God's people observe to see if his calling is verified by his qualifications. And you cannot have the one without the other. If a man is called, then the Holy Spirit will make sure he grows to where he is qualified. If a man is disqualified in character, then he is not called.

The mistake the church makes is to be enamoured with a man's gifting and ability, that they overlook or ignore the life. A man who says he is called by God does not prove that only by being able to teach. He proves it by these other sixteen publicly verifiable character qualities. This why Paul warns Timothy:

22 Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.

24 Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later.

25 Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden. (1Ti 5:22, 24-25)

This leads to the third stage: affirmation. When a man desires the office, displays the qualifications, it then becomes the church' decision. First, those who are already leaders should scrutinise if this

person is called, equipped and qualified. And upon their recommendation to the whole church, the church should watch and scrutinise the man to see if he is qualified. Only after enough time for the leaders and members to do this examination, will the church affirm, through the laying on of hands, through a vote, that they believe God has called a man to lead.

Now can they get it wrong? Sure. But when Jesus speaks about agreement in church discipline, He says that two or three Spirit-controlled believers are enacting something that began in Heaven.

18 "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. (Mat 18:18-19)

And even if they do get it wrong, can we trust in the sovereignty of God? Can we trust that the same one who sets up kings in the world can take care of His church?

Can this be abused? Yes. Men can manipulate this process, and get themselves selected. But what a fearful thing, for a man to claim that God has called him, when God has not. This is why someone who feels the call of God on his life will submit himself to God's people, to other leaders, to the standards of God's Word, to the scrutiny of the church to evaluate not only his gifting, but his life and qualification. And only when there is the affirmation of mature believers would a man put himself forward to lead. I agree with Tozer here:

"The true minister is one not by his own choice but by the sovereign commission of God. From a study of the Scriptures one might conclude that the man God calls seldom or never surrenders to the call without considerable reluctance. The young man who rushes too eagerly into the pulpit at first glance seems to be unusually spiritual, but he may in fact only be revealing his lack of understanding of the sacred nature of the ministry. The old rule, "Don't preach if you can get out of it," if correctly understood, is still a good one. The call of God comes with an insistence that will not be denied and can scarcely be resisted. Moses fought his call strenuously and lost to the compulsion of the Spirit within him; and the same may be said of many others in the Bible and since Bible times. Christian biography shows that many who later became great Christian leaders at first tried earnestly to avoid the burden of the ministry; but I cannot offhand recall one single instance of a prophet's having applied for the job. The true minister simply surrenders to the inward pressure and cries, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" "

When this process of calling, qualification and affirmation is followed, we are following the New Testament pattern for seeing those that God calls being appointed in the church.

Flowing out of this idea is a very similar idea:

II. Pilgrim Leadership is Exemplary, Not Merely Successful

1Ti 4:12 *Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

Paul tells Timothy that he is to be an example to others in his speech, in his actions, in his love, in his attitudes, in his faith, in his purity. People were to listen to how Timothy spoke, and be led by that. They were to see how he acted towards family, and work, and finances and exercise, and dress, and habits and be led. They were to watch how he loved family, and brethren, and neighbours and enemies. They were to watch his moods, and his attitudes toward God, the world, and self and be led. They were to watch his trust in God through hard times and good times and be led. They were to watch his purity in what he watched and read and indulged in. This is what the first requirement of a leader means when it says he must be blameless. It does not mean he must be perfect. It means he must be above reasonable question. His life must not have obvious and outstanding failures and

flaws in his sexual morality, his family life, his personal conduct.

All through the New Testament, leaders are told to be examples.

Tis 2:7 in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility,

3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; (1Pe 5:3)

3 We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. (2Co 6:3)

In the church, leaders are not leaders first because they have the ability to lead. Leaders in God's church are leaders first because they have the ability to follow. Leaders in God's church are followers first.

Leadership in the church finds its authority by being under authority. In God's church, those who have themselves submitted to Christ's authority, and are becoming more and more like Him, are the ones who then lead, and lead by example. As they live under Christ's authority, their lives become more and more of a model and a pattern for others to follow.

We are now in an age where the character and example of a leader does not matter. When political leaders have criminal records, multiple wives and divorces, scandalous behaviour, blatant abuse of public funds, it does not matter, because we only care about the job being done. Character has been divorced from function. CEOs are expected to just bring greater profits, no one cares if they are good men. Sportsmen are expected to score points and win games, no one cares if they are morally debauched. So the world has this handy distinction of public life and private life, and what a man does in his private life has nothing to do with his work or function as a public figure.

But God has a different standard for His leaders. Why does God care about His leaders being examples? Why can't the church just be run by brilliant communicators, sharp administrators, managers with charm and charisma, people with a sharp sense of marketing and entrepreneurial skills? For the same reason that God chose David over his brothers. God looks at the heart. The answer is that genuine Christianity involves a genuine interior work of the Spirit that works its way out into the exterior. Christianity is not business seeking profits, it is not entertainment seeking fans, it is not a party seeking supporters. Christianity is a life of worship. And those that lead the church must first of all be worshippers. Christianity is a life of the Spirit changing us from the inside out. And those that lead must themselves be being changed from the inside out. They must have the real deal on the inside, and then model it so that it is a life worth following.

Now God may choose to use a man who is not blameless, but what God uses, and what God approves of with His blessing and enablement are two different things. God used a donkey to speak to Balaam, God used Balaam to speak to Balak, God used Judas to fulfill prophecy, but none of these were favoured by God. The leaders God uses as channels of grace are yielded to Him, seeking to practice what they preach. Power and usefulness and the diffusion of God's blessing on others comes through a life where the inward obedience to Christ is there when no one is looking, and so the outward example is present for others to see. That's integrity – wholeness, consistency of holiness inside and out.

I have quoted before John MacArthur's words that when a Christian leader is suddenly exposed in a sin, he didn't fall far. He had been falling for some time. Or as Charles Spurgeon put it, "When we hear of a man who has ruined his character by a surprising act of folly, we may surmise, as a rule, that this mischief was but one sulphurous jet from a soil charged with volcanic fire; or, to change the figure, one roaring lion from a den of wild beasts."

The Pilgrim Church does not merely want effectiveness or skill in its leaders. Pilgrim leadership wants integrity. Those that lead it must be leading in their following. They must be ahead when it comes to submitting.

III. Pilgrim Leadership is Sacrificial, Not Domineering

42 But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

43 "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.

44 "And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. (Mar 10:42-44)

Jesus here directly contrasts His people and their leadership with the world's leadership. He says the unbelievers lord it over others. They exercise authority over them. These words in the original carry the idea of dominating, subduing, using force and fear to force people against their will to submit. Leadership in the world requires force. In some cases, that force becomes tyrannical and evil. But even the best governments have to use force. People must be threatened and punished. That extends into other realms, where people are given incentives and threatened with punishment.

Jesus says, in the church, it will be different. The leaders will not dominate and use their position or their personality to force people to do things. They will not use their office in the church to terrorise and intimidate. Their leadership is not to be characterised by coercion, bullying, manipulating, forcing, intimidating.

nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; (1Pe 5:3)

2Co 1:24 *Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.*

In the book of 3 John, we have a real life example of the opposite of Christian leadership.

9 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. 10 Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. (3Jo 1:9-10)

Here was a man who did not want to serve and be last, he wanted to be first. And the sign of wanting to be first was that he rejected apostolic authority because it interfered with his own. And he then set up a sick situation where he excluded and kicked out those who opposed him, refused to admit others, and basically surrounded himself with people who supported him and him alone.

If you want to know what true spiritual abuse looks like, what a true abuse of spiritual leadership looks like, here it is. It is not simply someone who leads in a way you disagree with. It is not merely someone whose leadership style is dominant and assertive. It is not merely someone who at some point reminds people of the need for submission and trust. By themselves, none of these are sinful.

There will never be 100% perfect agreement by everyone in a church simultaneously. Leaders are different in their personalities, like everyone else. And biblical submission is required, and when rebellion is present, it is the painful but necessary task of a leader to remind people of what the Bible teaches in this area too.

True spiritual abuse is seen here, where Diotrephes wanted people to unquestioningly submit to his authority, but would not himself submit to authority. He rejected apostolic authority, which is as much as rejecting the New Testament. He used bully tactics, sidelining some, refusing admission to

others, casting others out. We don't know this for sure, but it is likely he used things such as shaming people from the pulpit, threatening and manipulating, making demands that were not biblical, ruling through a system of emotional manipulation, fear and guilt. When any spiritual leader allows himself to grow bigger in the eyes of the church he serves than God, he needs to change something.

Instead, pilgrim leadership is rooted in service of others. It does not begin with the question, "What do I want God's people to do?" It begins with the question "What do God's people need?" A servant sacrificially meets needs. A servant leader asks, what is the need in the church? What does God say it needs? What does God desire? Where does God want His people to be? How can I persuade them, and assist them to get there?

Pilgrim leaders are to take the lion's share of sacrifice, of suffering, of endurance, of hard work. In the world system, too often the leader is the fat queen ant, who has reached the top of the heap and can now feast and sleep. But Jesus says that leadership in the church is the opposite. It requires the greatest toil, the biggest sacrifices, the biggest costs. Its greatest strength is its meekness, its greatest honour is its humility.

And we know the ultimate picture of this was when the night before His crucifixion, Jesus got down on his knees and methodically washed the feet of each of the apostles, including Judas. Jesus showed the first will be last principle. And in fact, the next day, He would be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, wherefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name above every name. The first became last, and is forever first.

Leaders in God's church lead through service. Now that can cause some misconceptions in people, thinking that a leader is only a leader if he acts like an invisible assistant in the background, and passively accepts whatever comes his way.

Servant leadership is not passive leadership, or spineless leadership. It is sacrificial, meek leadership. It leads, it can lead strongly, decisively, pointedly, but it always leads sacrificially, with meekness, meeting the needs of God's people, feeding and protecting the flock. Appointed by God, exemplary, and sacrificial – that's pilgrim leadership.

In the last six messages we've considered how we are not like the world system. In our worship, our fellowship, our discipleship, our stewardship, and our leadership, we are not like the world. But it's important for us as a church to ask ourselves, are we being conformed to the world. Is our worship directed at God, full of admiration, and done in reverence, or is it amusement, full of revelry directed at us? Is our fellowship shared spiritual life and mutual interdependence, or is it hyper-privacy, anonymity, autonomy? Is our discipleship sharing God's Word with integrity and demonstrating God's Word with involvement, or do we coerce and manipulate others? Is our stewardship a recognition that all we have is of God and through God and to God, or are we consumers? Is our leadership God-appointed, exemplary and sacrificial? If we are on that path, we will *proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1Pe 2:9).*