

LifeWay Family Bible Series for June 20: Building God's kingdom focus of church leaders_61404

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Building God's kingdom focus of church leaders

1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-18;

Hebrews 13:7, 17-18

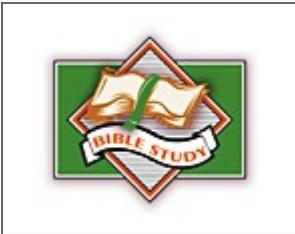
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I must confess that this lesson has been harder for me to write than any other. On the sixth draft, I decided it might be time to call the Standard and pass the pen to the next writer.

This lesson is on church leadership. There was a time many years ago when the answers to leadership questions came easily to me. In those days, all answers came easily to me. My seminary professors are to be commended for giving me all the answers to the questions of ministry. If only they had given me the memory to keep up with them.

Leaders need good judgment. The problem is, as someone smarter than me has noted, “Good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment.” If that is true, I have had plenty of opportunity to gain experience.



The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about the qualifications for church leadership in 1 Timothy 3. These verses frequently have been the source of controversy. Taken too literally, we will never have leaders. Who among us is “above reproach”? Taken too lightly, these verses allow anyone to serve in leadership.

I wish I knew where I put all those answers! Oh, well, let me tell you what Paul says about church leaders.

Leaders must have an unquestioned commitment to Christ. Many of the attributes ascribed to leaders in the Timothy text are restatements of the “fruits of the Spirit” as outlined in other parts of Scripture. Church leaders must be Christ followers. They should give evidence in their lives that they have been conformed to the image of Christ.

Leaders must have an unquestioned commitment to their family. They must be committed to their spouse and to their children. They must give loving, nurturing, caring leadership in the home.

I often am asked to explain the “husband of one wife” portion of the text. It is beyond the limits of this writing to jump in the middle of that one. Suffice it to say, after 30 years of marriage, I think I am beginning to understand a little of what that means.

Let me confess the part of the text that concerns me most. The King James Version said a church leader should be, “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection, with all gravity.”

You will need to ask me again in another 30 years. My children will need to be in their 50s before judgment can be fully rendered on that one.

Seriously, this is good news and bad news to parents. Keep being faithful. The book isn't closed on their raising. Don't despair. God is not through with them. Don't be proud. They can still stumble and fall. Keep praying. Keep raising.

Leaders must have an unquestioned commitment to the church. After 25 years of serving as a pastor, I have a more realistic view of the church. I know many of its shortcomings. I know where the skeletons are in the closet.

I also believe in it more than ever and am more committed to it. It is the bride of Christ. He loves his bride. Don't tell me you do not like my wife. If you do not love my family, you do not love me. I love the church of Jesus Christ, warts and all.

Leaders are examples. Hebrews 13:7 says: “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” Leaders must proclaim the truth faithfully. They also must be conformed to that truth personally. We remember the words of O.J. Simpson's attorney: “If you can't trust the messenger, you can't trust the message.” Leaders need to be trustworthy. They must have exemplary character.

Leaders should be followed if they are leading us to Jesus. We do not follow pastors and deacons because they are perfect. We follow them because they are following the One who is. It is a journey we take together. We all will need a little help along the way. He has given us leaders to serve all

those who follow Christ. Thank God for them. Serve with them. Pray for them. Follow Jesus with them.

The church needs leadership. Church leaders should be like conductors of great orchestras. When they do their best work, the audience hardly knows they are there. Never self-serving, they are servants to the music, faithfully leading their performers to work together to recreate the music of the masters. When church leaders do their best work, we do not seek to build monuments to the leader. We seek to follow the Savior. We desire to build his kingdom.

Questions for discussion

- ◆ How can the line be drawn between taking these verses too literally and taking them too lightly?
- ◆ Is one of the qualifications for church leadership seemingly more important than others to you?

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