



## **LEADERSHIP MATTERS**

According to a survey we conducted last week (and thanks everyone in MFC who responded) here are the 10 biggest challenges facing the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

- 10) Consumer-mentality / self before God.
- 9) Overly busy lives / 'hobby' Christianity.
- 8) Compromise.
- 7) Persecution / pressure to conform.
- 6) Biblical illiteracy.
- 5) False teaching.
- 4) Traditionalism / perceived irrelevance.
- 3) Grievances.
- 2) Lack of urgency / passion for the lost.

And ahead of them all (by quite some margin):

- 1) Loss of integrity, particularly in leaders.

I think most would agree that church leadership has a significant part to play in where the church is today.

But as we'll see, that kind of means we *all* do.

## 1 Timothy 3:1-13

Paul is following the thread of the previous chapter, where he talked about what power and authority should really look like, and he says, in effect, "There's nothing wrong with aspiring to be a leader – but you need to understand what the requirements are. An overseer (*episkopon*) looks like this; an assistant (*diakonos*) looks similar. So, a woman who wants a position of authority needs to look like that, too. And be careful not to gossip, but be temperate and trustworthy, in everything."

Now you might be looking at vs11 and thinking, "Hang on, Steve: my Bible says 'their wives', not 'women.' In fact, the ESV, GNT, KJV, old NIV and NLT all render it that way. Problem is: in Greek the possessive pronoun isn't there – it just reads *gynaikas*, 'women', rather than *gynaikas auton*, 'their women.' So, this appears to be talking about women in general, not deacons' wives in particular.

Does that mean women could potentially become deacons, or even pastors? In 1<sup>st</sup> century Ephesus, not yet; but elsewhere, we know they could become deacons at least, because Phoebe was one, in Kenkhrea (Romans 16:1). So, I think it might have been possible. Rare, perhaps, but possible. Hence you find women fulfilling that role long before this (e.g. Priscilla, who had set up the church in Ephesus with her husband, Aquila. And with Paul!).

So that's 1 Timothy 3, in a nutshell. At which point you might be thinking, "Wow, short sermon." But no. It can be easy to look at this and assume it's just for leaders. But if Paul were here now, and we were to ask him, "Why does this matter, Paul?" I think one of his answers would be:

"Because this is what the *church* should look like."

So, let's consider these requirements for leadership, and ask, "Lord, what are You saying here, to *me*?"

**1) Doctrine matters.** Leaders must have a good grasp of biblical truth, in word and deed. We live in a time when there is a famine of the Word of God (Amos 8:11): when Christians are more likely to build their beliefs on this worship song or on that self-help book than on Scripture. The question for all of us is: "How well do I know *this*?"

**2) Devotedness matters.** To God and spouse. When Paul says, 'husband of one wife', that could literally read 'one-woman man.' It's not saying you *have* to be married, or that you could never serve on leadership if you're a divorcee or remarried. But it's demanding commitment to *one* spouse, just as you're committed to? *One* God.

**3) Discipline matters.** Not in the church, first – in *ourselves*. In the slippery areas of attitudes towards others, potential addictions, patience-levels, pride, wealth (2 Corinthians 13:5). How am I going to correct a church (and it needs to be done, sometimes) if I can't correct myself? Hence the need for accountability in our lives.

**4) Direction matters.** As in managing your family. Now this does not mean your grown-up children need to be committed Christians with an

encyclopaedic knowledge of the Bible (on that basis God might be disqualified!). It's about nurturing your kids while young and engendering a culture of mutual respect (Ephesians 6:1-4).

**5) Development matters.** No leader should be a recent convert or novice. You can't take people to a place you haven't been! That's why we wouldn't rush someone into leadership: we'd need to know this person is sound, solid and servant hearted. And that means we'd need to see them in action, sleeves rolled up, on a regular basis.

**6) Declaration matters.** As in, our witness. This is more than just our ability to share *our* story or *His* story (important though that is). This is about living a life that is *consistent* with that (Leviticus 11:45). Living in such a way that, when we come to share our faith, people say, "I wondered if you might be a Christian" (in a positive sense).

This is what Paul means by "above reproach" (vs2) and a leader "worthy of respect" (vs8). Not perfect with a spotless record going back to day 1, otherwise Paul himself could never have become one (let alone us)!

We're talking about a person in whom we can see *these* qualities.

### **Train Them Up**

Recent years have seen fall after fall of high-profile church leaders, evangelists, apologists, worship artists, etc. Whether it's abuse scandals or sexual misconduct or pastoral bullying or struggles with personal demons, the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has reminded us of why Paul's words here matter so much. Because the *gospel* does.

But even so, whoever desires to be in leadership, desires a *good* thing. Because every team requires a leader. And the church is the most important team there is.

However, this chapter is more than a checklist, a tick-box exercise leaders need to fill in to prove their worthiness or credibility. This is what God wants us *all* to aspire to.

Which brings me to a picture I had a month ago, while I was reflecting on this passage. Now I don't know whether this is a God-given picture or just wishful thinking on my part. But in my mind's eye I had a snapshot, a vision of young people going out from MFC, Bibles in hand, as the pastors / teachers / evangelists / missionaries, of their generation – *to* their generation. Of disciples nurturing disciples.

Question is: who here is going to help make that a reality?

Answer: *we* must.

Which means God needs to do it in us, first.