

MINISTRY LEADERS ARE CALLED TO A HIGH STANDARD

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What's involved in being a good leader? Probably a church congregation, as well as the Christian public, would give various answers to this question. Many Church leaders are classified as "Old School" – meaning they would prefer to disregard the quote by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, "*You do not lead by hitting people on the head ... that's assault, not leadership.*"

Elders (pastors) of the church must follow *all* of I Timothy 3:1-7, not just some of it. Direct your attention to the NIV's rendering of verse 7, which is often ignored by church leaders: "*He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.*" (Italics and quotations are mine) A good example of the significance of this verse occurred about thirty years ago. A minister in my area had built a church of nearly 300 members, but was known to be unfair with everybody outside the church. It was common knowledge that he would lie, argue, scream, and curse. He drove expensive automobiles, lived a lavish lifestyle, beat his wife, and did not pay his bills. Over a period of time, the troubles and woes of this pastor and his family grew worse. Most of his church members left, and the pastor and his wife relocated to a thriving city in south Louisiana – leaving behind a trail of tears and broken promises. Nevertheless, he settled into his new environment and began a new church and a school (1st through 12th grades). Both ventures began to thrive. Was it God? No! I believe it was his inherent ability as a businessman, as well as a minister. He understood the "nuts and bolts" of building churches and manipulating people. Unfortunately, the man had a character flaw from the beginning; and in the end, was arrested and sentenced to twenty years in prison for molesting a young girl. Here we should experience a moment of illumination: "Eureka!" or "Behold!" ... "*He (the real person) hath been hiding himself under a cloak of religiosity for a season.*" When a pastor has a bad reputation with outsiders, eventually it will be proven that he/she has a serious character flaw.

Church leaders have many responsibilities relative to their calling to preach, teach and serve God's people. But on the other hand, the congregation has a responsibility also – which is to support the church financially, and ensure the pastor is not "starved out" or placed under undue hardship. In the old days of the Classical Pentecostal faith, many pastors labored under heavy burdens placed upon them by congregations believing the old adage, "*Lord, You keep our pastor humble and we'll keep him poor.*" In some circles, this kind of thinking still prevails.

On the other hand, however, many popular television preachers have convinced their listeners that every Christian should be rich -- which is nothing more than extremism in the opposite direction. A myriad of false teaching by TV preachers (so-called prophets, bishops, and teachers) concerning finances abounds. However, history has proven that most of the financial rewards are enjoyed by the TV preacher, who superimposes his or

her own “twisted” systematic theology on the listeners. Many Christians who were once faithful to attend church now give their tithes and offerings to the tele-evangelist or other prominent ministers and ministry organizations. At present, church research shows that 1500 pastors quit their churches every month. With a decline like this, Christianity in America will be almost non-existent within thirty years. This is a serious statistic! *We need to pray for our godly pastors and churches in America!*

Paul told Timothy that those who serve as elders [for God’s people] deserve to be paid [well] for what they do (I Tim. 5:17-19). In fact, Paul said those elders who preached the Word of God, and did a good job in teaching, deserved a double blessing. This opposes the view that pastors should live in poverty. I Timothy 5:17-19 (NIV) says (v17) “*The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching*”. For the Scripture says (v18) “*Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,*” and “*The worker deserves his wages.*” (v19) “*Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses*”.

It is apparent that some congregational members do not recognize the significance of verse 17, for many people tend to accuse church leaders falsely without adequate evidence. Yet Paul is saying “Do not even consider, or even entertain a thought that an elder (or pastor) is guilty of any accusation (or claim of impropriety), unless it can be proven by two or three witnesses”. In most instances, a male pastor will be seduced and lose his reputation through one or more of these three avenues: ***Girls, Gold, or Glory***. When a pastor has fallen prey to one or more of these sins, there must be solid evidence of impropriety. The witnesses must be reliable Christians who genuinely desire restoration for the pastor, and are not motivated by jealousy or malice.

The church should present an example of how God does business, and be a reflection of God’s character. ***Thus, for the ministry leader, to conform to a high standard is not a choice, it is a must.***

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