

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 27 October 2024

Sermon Title : Right Kind of Church Leaders

Speaker : Rev John Foo

Text : 1 Timothy 3

INTRODUCTION

1 Timothy 3 talks about leaders in the church and we will come across terms like overseers and deacons, basically referring to persons in leadership positions in the early church. In our present-day church, we do not use such terms in the same way, as the terms used depend on the setup of the church or the denomination it belongs to. Hence, we will take a broad view of such positions and consider church leaders in general, whichever level they are at. While we will be reading almost the entire chapter 3 to get a feel about the qualifications required of overseers and deacons, the focus of this sermon will be on verses 1 and 2.

Although 2 levels of church leadership are described, i.e. the overseer and deacons, what God has recorded in His word here can and should be applied to all church leaders who have taken up office in church, be it the pastor, executive committee member, life group leader or any other recognized leader.

Three thoughts on church leadership:

1. Position does not make the leader

- Verses 1-2 tell us that if anyone aspires to be an overseer he must first be above reproach, husband of one wife, sober minded and so on with the list of traits and qualities. What it means is that the position does not make you to be the kind of person described in the passage here. First, you have got to be that kind of person. Getting into the position itself does not make you become the person of that position. We are who we are, with or without the position. The position does not define us.
- Verse 10 similarly says, “*let them also be tested first then let them serve as deacons..*”

In both cases, we are told to choose somebody who is already made and not go around choosing anybody and throwing that person into the position, and hope that somehow that position will build those qualities into the person. We need to look for somebody who is already having those qualities. Unfortunately, there are churches that do not operate that way. Just like the world, they tend to only see how skilful the person is. They tend to see how well the person does in the job rather than considering the kind

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of person he or she is. We usually end up putting the wrong person into the position. Scripture makes it very clear what is expected of a person who wants to be a church leader.

When we simply throw anybody who is available into a leadership position, two possible detrimental effects can happen:

- a. The church gets led by these so-called leaders who are not suited for the roles.
- b. These so-called leaders may be misled into thinking that it is more important to be skillful for the job rather than being the person with the right qualities. The focus invariably shifts to the position and performance, and so we become very performance oriented.

Church leadership is about godly leaders, not about high achieving, high performing leaders. If we just dump anybody into the positions of church leadership, we will bring about these two detrimental effects. Consequently, we will rule what is most important out...God! While God is preparing the right people for the right positions in church, we come in and throw anybody into the position and we end up running the church ourselves. Rather than being the church or the faith community we start sliding towards being a corporation. We become performance oriented and think in secular ways how the church can perform best.

What has these church leaders got to do with the rest of the church members?

The church is defined by who her church leaders are. If we have godly leaders, the church will tend towards godliness. Godly leaders will tend to bring out the godliness in the church members because the godly leaders themselves are bringing out the godliness within them in serving God. Light begets light. If we have godly leaders, we have godly members. We see that in the stories in the Old Testament, how evil kings would bring the nation off and how godly kings bring the nation back to God. It is the same with the church, so we need the right persons for the right positions in church leadership.

2. Church leaders are workers

Verse 1 says it very clearly – it is a task, a noble task. The word ‘task’ here in its original meaning in the verse suggests that it is incessantly laborious work. It is heavy work, but it is honourable and useful work in building up the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the office of the church leader is not so much about status or recognition; nothing attractive. In the context of the time at which Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, being a church leader then meant that they had to be exposed to the front line in a hostile environment where there was persecution. Only those with strong qualities and grace as described in the passage should desire for such a position because the nature of such work demands that the person must be of high character. Nothing less would do. One has to be able to stand up for one’s faith. Besides, amid persecution the Christian leaders were being martyred one by one. It became very crucial for the church to find

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worthy men and women to fill in the roles to take up the spiritual reins, to be able to unite the church together so that the members could look up to them and follow them.

This expectation is not any lesser now. In our time we need godly leaders in our church who constantly look to God for direction and have the courage to be able to steer the church towards a godly direction and put the church on the godly path.

3. The qualities expected of a church leader are non-negotiable

One word that kept popping up from the passage is 'must'. In v.2, the word "must" is implicitly applied to all the descriptions following 'must be above reproach' and carries on to say 'must be husband of one wife', 'must be sober minded', 'must be self-controlled', 'must be respectable', 'must be hospitable', 'must be able to teach'. It means that all these qualifications or qualities are non-negotiable. Yet our tendency is to ignore these qualities. We downplay them and do not even talk about them. Whenever we had to choose leaders, we never use this. I really do not know why we have another set of criteria that we use to decide who qualifies as a church leader. Are we using our own lenses to screen out the people to be church leaders? Are we ignoring these qualities and traits that are obviously laid out in God's word and choose instead based on our own list of criteria? What exactly are we basing it on? That is where we as a church struggle to be the church that God intends and desires, because God cannot and will not work through those whom He has not prepared and has not appointed to be the leaders over His people.

If God calls you to do something or He calls you to go somewhere, that is where His will is for you, His presence is with you and His blessings are for you. So when we listen and obey and follow God and do what God calls us to do, He is there. His grace will be sufficient for us there. When you have the right leader there, God's grace will be sufficient for the leader. God's blessings will be upon the leader and God will be able to tell the leader what to do and where to go. That is why we need godly leaders with the right qualities first before we consider the person suitable to be a leader.

When we look at these qualities, they do not seem extreme or special, but they are necessary. It seems like God has given us a basic set of requirements for somebody aspiring to be a church leader and maybe it is on this set that God is going to build some more into that person. When the person has all these qualities it suggests that:

- a. The person is open to what God is doing in him;
- b. The person is likely to be open to being transformed by God;
- c. The person is probably depending on God; is able to look to God;
- d. The person is able to seek God and depend on his wisdom.

Maybe God is looking for this kind of person that He can build up to be the leader of His church. The person who possesses such qualities will not have to struggle. He will not have to use his own wisdom. He will not have to direct the church according to where he wants to go. The church is God's church and He wants to put in place godly

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leaders, those who can catch God's Vision. We all need godly leaders who are humble enough to acknowledge the power of God, showing their dependence on Him.

CONCLUSION

The church of God is not some performance-oriented kind of organization. As a church, we live as a faith community and do not give ourselves some targets to achieve but learn to love God together. Let us remember that:

- Position does not make the leader - look at the person rather than the position.
- All church leaders are workers - if a church leader does not work then that particular person is not right for the job.
- The qualities expected of a church leader are non-negotiable - it is not about your skill set or whether you are available. It is who you really are that God will choose.

May those who are current leaders and those aspiring to be one be inspired to want to build the commendable qualities in verse 2 into your lives. And, If God is preparing you to take up that position and has called you, please rise up to take the challenge of the noble task.

A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk!?
- 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?

2. Appoint someone to read 1 Timothy 3:1-15 slowly.
Why is it important **not** to have the 'wrong' person in a church leadership position?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

3. *Position does not make the leader*

- a. How can you tell if a person has been called and prepared by God for a church leadership position?
- b.
 - (i) If you are (or were) a church leader, how were you selected and placed in the leadership position? Was it using the criteria in 1 Timothy 3?
 - (ii) How can you build the non-negotiable qualities in 1 Timothy 3 into your life?

4. *Church leaders are workers*

Consider the '*noble task*' of church leaders during Apostle Paul's time and church leaders today.

- a. Why do you think the expectation of a church leader should not be any lesser today?
- b. Do you think church leaders today are able to handle the '*noble task*' of church leaders during Apostle Paul's time? Why or why not?

5. *Non-negotiable qualities of a church leader*

- a.
 - (i) What are the non-negotiable qualities of a church leader in 1 Timothy 3?
 - (ii) What does that tell you about what God is looking for in a church leader?
- b. Which of the qualities do you think is usually missing in church leaders? Why?
- c. What changes will we need to make as a church to ensure we have godly leaders to lead us in the godly path?

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C. Testimonies, Prayers and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

6. Share your personal testimony on how God had inspired and impacted you through godly qualities in a church leader.

OR

Give thanks to God for the Holy Spirit who will transform and build up leaders He has called when the person rises up to take the challenge of the noble task of building up the Kingdom of God.

7. As a group, seek the discernment and wisdom of God upon your Life Group and our church to appoint leaders with qualities that God is looking for so your group and our church may be led to grow in godliness. Pray also for our current leaders to persevere in building the non-negotiable qualities and not put position and performance above these qualities so we may truly be the church that God wants us to be.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. This is Our God – Phil Wickham

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IC_el8B1qGI&ab_channel=PhilWickham

2. Give Us Clean Hands – Chris Tomlin

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBjpnIOYIWE&ab_channel=ShareThyWord

3. God I Look To You – Bethel https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KP1QKueGK-o&ab_channel=BethelMusic

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