

Chapter Eleven

WHO IS FIT TO LEAD?

That is not a unique situation. A few years ago, another prominent pastor who left his church after a sordid sex scandal was immediately hired by one of the largest churches in the country to be part of their teaching staff. Within two weeks after the scandal made national news, he was back to preaching in the pulpit of a megachurch.

Worldly standards are gradually creeping into the church. The prevailing mood in the Christian community today is that no one is ever really disqualified from Christian leadership, but the disgraced leader who is willing to make a public show of remorse *ought* to be restored to a position of prominence as soon as possible.

This means that in some circles, sexual immorality and marital infidelity are no longer deemed disqualifying sins for a pastor. I know of men who have dragged their churches through the grossest kinds of public scandal without missing a single week in the pulpit. Others take a little time off for “**rehab**” and “**counseling**,” but then resume the leadership role. Sadly, this has become quite commonplace, **because many in the church have responded to the leadership crisis by lowering expectations of their leaders.**

How far we have come from the New Testament standard! Notice that in every list of qualifications the apostle Paul gave for church leaders, the first and most indispensable qualification for men in leadership was that they be “**blameless**” ([1 Timothy 3:2, 10](#); [Titus 1:6–7](#)).

1 Timothy 3:2 (NASB)

² “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.”

1 Timothy 3:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ “These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.”

Titus 1:6-7 (NASB)

⁶ “*Namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.

⁷ For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain.”

Paul employed a Greek word that means “**above reproach**”—inculpable, unblemished, irreprehensible. Literally, it means “**not subject to accusation.**”

The term does not speak of sinlessness, of course, or no one would qualify ([1 John 1:8](#)).

1 John 1:8 (NASB)

⁸ “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.”



It does not disqualify people from leadership on the basis of sins they committed before conversion, or Paul himself would have been disqualified ([1 Timothy 1:12-16](#)).

1 Timothy 1:12-16 (NASB)

¹²“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service,

¹³even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief;

¹⁴and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are *found* in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*.

¹⁶Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”

But it describes a person whose Christian testimony is free from the taint of scandal—someone who is upright, sound in character, and without any serious moral blemish. Simply put, it means leaders must have a reputation for unimpeachable integrity.

The early church held leaders to the highest moral and ethical standards. Nowhere is that more clear in Scripture than [Acts 6](#), where Luke recorded how the first leaders were marked out and chosen by their fellow believers to assist the work of the apostles.

Of course, Christ Himself had already chosen and appointed the apostles ([John 15:16](#)).

John 15:16 (NASB)

¹⁶“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.”

But remember that at Pentecost alone, three thousand people were added to the church ([Acts 2:41](#)).

Acts 2:41 (NASB)

⁴¹“So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.”

Another five thousand men (and presumably many more from their families) were added in [Acts 4:4](#).

Acts 4:4 (NASB)

⁴“But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”

Since we know that many were being added to the church daily, it appears the church in Jerusalem quickly grew to include at least ten thousand believers (and very likely more than twice that). Obviously, the time soon came when the responsibilities of leadership in the church were more than twelve apostles could handle.



Someone once said that Christians become very unchristian when they get organized. Sometimes that seems true. But [Acts 6](#) reveals how things *ought* to be in the church.

Obviously, the early church was having a major impact on the Jewish community in Jerusalem. Multitudes were coming to faith in Jesus Christ. An amazing spirit of love and harmony existed among the Christians. Because so many in first-century Jerusalem were dispossessed and transient people, the community of believers:

[Acts 2:44-46 \(NASB\)](#)

⁴⁴“And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;

⁴⁵and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

⁴⁶Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.”

The first hint of any controversy in the church comes in [Acts 6:1](#), where Luke wrote,

[Acts 6:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹“Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.”

There were two groups of people in the early church. Since the church began in Jerusalem, practically all the early believers were Jewish. But some were *Hebrews*, and some were *Hellenists*. The Hebrews spoke Aramaic, a derivative of Hebrew. Most of them were native-born Judeans. The Hellenists were Jews who had adopted the Greek language and Greek lifestyle. Most of them were from Asia Minor, North Africa, and diverse places throughout the Roman Empire. But they remained loyal to the Jewish religion and returned en masse to Jerusalem every year for Passover season and Pentecost.

Many who were converted under Peter’s preaching at Pentecost were therefore Hellenists. Many of them apparently remained in Jerusalem to become part of the Christian community. One of the main practical reasons the early church became such a caring and sharing body was the necessity of meeting the collective needs of this massive immigrant community.

Obviously, with so many believers from two major strains of culture, people would tend to associate with their own language group. Moreover, the Hebrews had been brought up to regard Hellenistic Jews with a degree of suspicion, because they felt they had been polluted by alien culture. The apostle Paul said that in his pre-conversion life, one of the things he took pride in was that he was “a Hebrew of the Hebrews” ([Philippians 3:5](#))—not a Hellenistic Jew.

[Philippians 3:5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵“Circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee.”

CH-110 LEADERSHIP 1

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Lecture # 68



Although he had been born in Tarsus, in Cilicia (a Gentile nation), he had been brought up in Jerusalem, at the feet of Gamaliel, a strict Pharisee and Hebrew rabbi. The Hebrews tended to think the Hellenists were not true Jews, because they had not remained loyal to the land and the traditions of Israel. So in that cultural friction lay the makings of a potentially serious conflict.

“**The daily distribution**” refers to the apostles’ practice of dispensing food, money, and other resources to those in need ([Acts 4:35](#)), especially widows.

Acts 4:35 (NASB)

³⁵ “**And lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.**”

The Grecian Jews were no doubt in the minority, and Luke said some of them began to feel the needs of the widows in their group were being neglected.