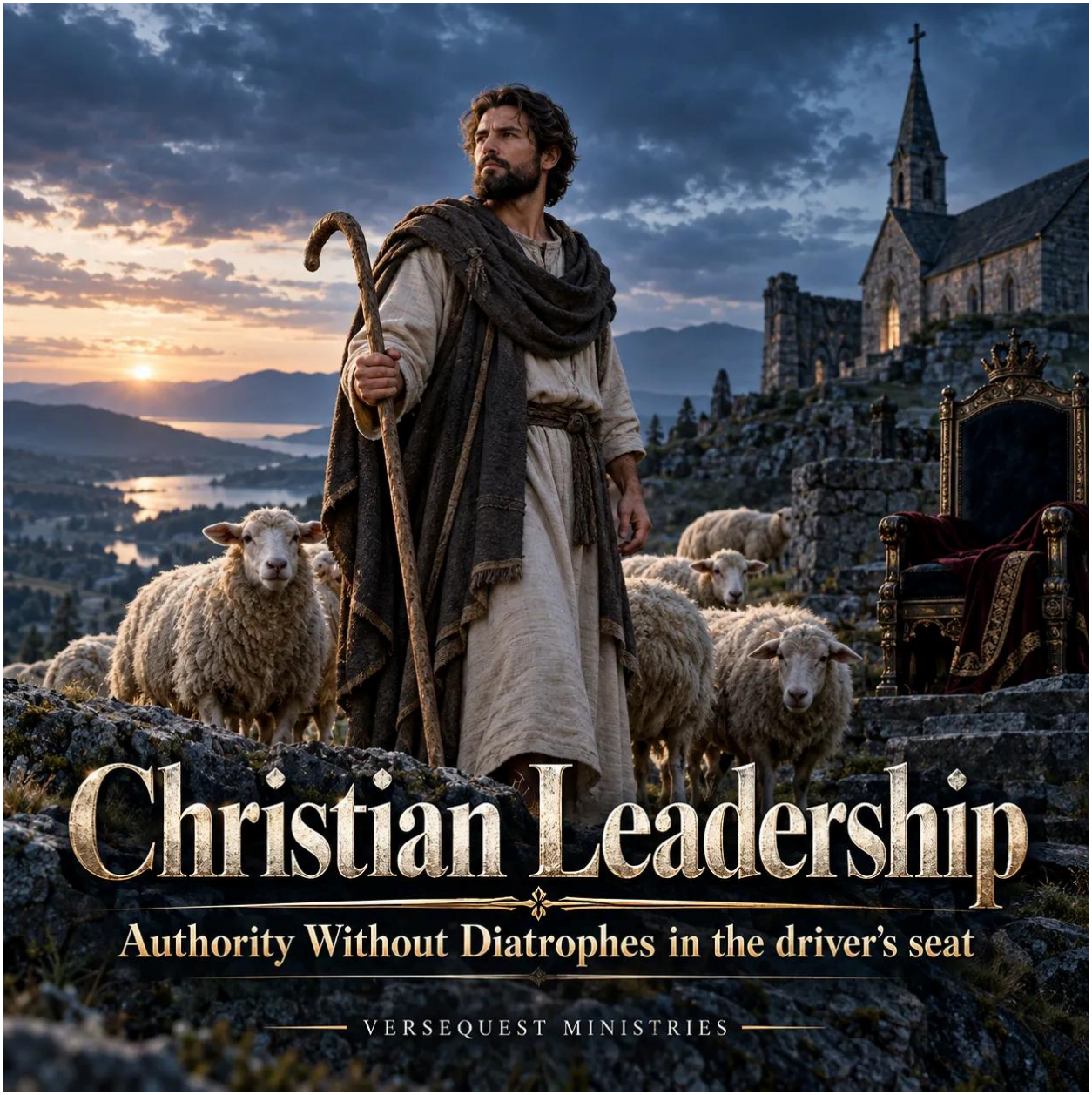
Christian Leadership

Subtitle: Authority Without Diotrephes in the Driver's Seat

Series 1-10

By Paul Tackett

VerseQuest Ministries




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Authority Without Diotrephes in the Driver's Seat

By Pastor Paul Tackett

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Scripture References

All Scripture quotations in this publication are taken exclusively from the King James Bible (Authorized Version of 1611).

The King James Bible is the sole biblical text used throughout this work. Scripture quotations, doctrinal explanations, and biblical applications are presented with the conviction that the written word of God is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

About This Publication

Christian Leadership: Authority Without Diotrephes in the Driver's Seat is an original ten-chapter biblical teaching work examining servant leadership, pastoral qualifications, spiritual authority, accountability, correction, stewardship, and the responsibility of preparing faithful leaders for future generations.

This publication is intended for biblical education, Christian discipleship, personal study, and the strengthening of local churches. Readers are encouraged to examine every teaching in light of the Scriptures, rightly dividing the word of truth according to 2 Timothy 2:15.

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All glory and honor belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

2 Corinthians 4:5 — KJV

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

Authority Without Diotrephes in the Driver's Seat

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Introduction — Christian Leadership: Authority Without Diotrephes in the Driver's Seat

There is something terribly wrong with a preacher who enters the ministry carrying a King James Bible and eventually begins acting as though the congregation belongs to him. Somewhere between his first sermon and his fifteenth pastoral anniversary, he forgets that the sheep were purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ, not with his sacrifices, education, personality, or years of service. The pulpit becomes a throne, the church office becomes a royal chamber, and every disagreement becomes an attempted overthrow of his imaginary kingdom. He still calls himself a servant, of course. That sounds considerably more spiritual than announcing that he has appointed himself the religious dictator of forty-seven people and a fellowship hall. But the Bible has never measured Christian leadership by the size of a man's personality, the volume of his preaching, or the number of people willing to applaud him. **God never called a man to become the fourth person of the Godhead, and He certainly never authorized a preacher to treat the Lord's congregation like his personal property.** The shepherd's staff was given for the care of the flock, not for the coronation of the shepherd.

The Lord Jesus Christ settled the question of leadership long before religious men discovered how profitable it could become to surround themselves with admirers. In Matthew 20:25–28, He distinguished the rulers of the Gentiles, who exercised dominion over others, from the servant character expected of His disciples. His declaration was unmistakable: "But it shall not be so among you." Then the Son of man demonstrated the meaning of greatness by ministering to others and giving His life a ransom for many. Consider that contrast. The Creator of heaven and earth humbled Himself in obedience unto death, while some preachers cannot endure the humiliation of somebody questioning their preferred order of service. The Lord washed feet while religious men competed for the highest seats. He gave Himself for others while ambitious men demanded that others exist for them. Those events occurred during Christ's earthly ministry to Israel, but the principle of servant leadership is reinforced in the direct instructions given to New Testament elders. **If the Lord of glory could take the place of a servant, a pastor ought to survive the terrible indignity of remembering that he is one.**

Yet the opposite error is equally dangerous. Servant leadership does not mean a pastor must become a spineless jellyfish who apologizes for every biblical conviction and allows the loudest complainer in the congregation to determine what may be preached. God never commanded a minister to surrender sound doctrine because the offering might decrease, to tolerate serious wrongdoing because the offender is influential, or to remain silent because somebody might become offended. Paul instructed Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2 to "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all

longsuffering and doctrine." Those commands require courage. A faithful shepherd must be prepared to confront wolves, defend truth, correct disorder, and make necessary decisions. But the same Bible that commands firmness also commands patience, humility, and accountability. **The church does not need dictators, but neither does it need jellyfish wearing neckties.** A bully exercises authority because he fears losing control. A coward refuses authority because he fears losing approval. A faithful shepherd exercises biblical authority because he fears God more than men.

The foundation of Christian leadership is the final authority of the written word of God. Second Timothy 3:16–17 establishes that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Titus 1:9 requires a bishop to hold fast the faithful word and to convince gainsayers by sound doctrine. Neither passage grants the preacher permission to transform his personal opinions into additional commandments. A pastor may possess legitimate responsibility concerning church schedules, financial administration, ministry assignments, and practical decisions, but those matters do not become inspired revelation simply because he announces them from behind a wooden pulpit. The King James Bible outranks the man holding it. When the Book corrects the preacher, the preacher is supposed to submit to the Book. Acts 17:11 commends the Bereans for examining the Scriptures to determine whether the things preached were so. If the apostle Paul's message could be examined against the written revelation of God, a modern preacher ought not become hysterical when somebody opens a Bible during his sermon. **The preacher's responsibility is to proclaim the authority of Scripture, not borrow that authority to make himself unquestionable.**

Then comes the question of character, and this is where the religious entertainment business begins losing some of its favorite performers. First Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9 establish qualifications for men entrusted with overseeing local churches. Those qualifications concern marital faithfulness, sobriety, vigilance, patience, hospitality, sound doctrine, responsible household leadership, freedom from covetousness, and a good reputation. Paul did not tell Timothy to find the fellow who could shout the loudest, raise the largest offering, or produce the most impressive church anniversary celebration. He commanded attention to the character of the man. A preacher may possess extraordinary talent while remaining thoroughly unqualified for pastoral oversight. The Corinthian believers came behind in no gift, according to 1 Corinthians 1:7, yet Paul rebuked their carnality in chapter 3. Spiritual gifts and spiritual maturity are not identical. **A man may know how to preach about righteousness without possessing enough personal righteousness to govern his own conduct.** A polished pulpit cannot hide a rotten character from the God who sees what happens when the congregation goes home.

Christian leadership also requires the humility to recognize that no single man possesses every ability necessary for the work. Moses learned that lesson in Exodus 18 when Jethro observed him attempting to judge Israel from morning until evening. The verdict was remarkably direct: "The thing that thou doest is not good." Moses was not lacking dedication. He was attempting to carry responsibilities that required the assistance of other qualified men. The historical circumstances concerned Israel's wilderness administration, not the government of a New Testament church, but the principle of responsible delegation remains instructive. Acts 6 records the appointment of seven qualified men to address practical needs while the apostles continued in prayer and the ministry of the word. First Corinthians 12 describes the body of Christ as possessing many members with differing functions. Yet some pastors behave as though every ministry must pass through their hands, every decision requires their personal approval, and every capable worker represents a possible threat to their importance. **A church is not a one-man circus with a congregation paying admission to watch the star performer.** If everybody remains helpless without the preacher, somebody has confused spiritual leadership with personal indispensability.

Wisdom must likewise govern the decisions a leader makes. Proverbs 15:22 declares, "Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established." Joshua 9 records the consequences of Israel's agreement with the Gibeonites when the leaders examined the appearances presented to them but failed to seek counsel from the LORD. Nehemiah examined Jerusalem's broken walls before publicly organizing the rebuilding effort. Paul made missionary plans while acknowledging the Lord's direction and remaining willing to adjust his arrangements. These historical accounts belong to their respective biblical settings, but they illustrate the necessity of careful judgment. A pastor should pray, examine Scripture, investigate facts, seek trustworthy counsel, consider consequences, and make responsible decisions. He should also distinguish God's direct commandments from practical judgments that may later require correction. **A preacher does not need to pretend that every idea passing through his head arrived by special delivery from the throne of heaven.** The Holy Ghost did not inspire the church budget, and the pastor's favorite building plan is not the sixty-seventh book of the Bible.

Another essential responsibility is correction, and here we must distinguish spiritual discipline from religious cruelty. Scripture commands preachers to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with longsuffering and doctrine. Galatians 6:1 directs spiritual believers to restore a fallen brother in the spirit of meekness. First Corinthians 5 demonstrates that a congregation must not tolerate established wickedness simply because confronting it would be uncomfortable. Second Corinthians 2:6–8 demonstrates the importance of forgiveness, comfort, and reaffirmed love when discipline has accomplished its proper

purpose. Biblical correction must be governed by truth, evidence, and a genuine concern for righteousness. It cannot become a personal execution platform from which the preacher settles grievances against people who have offended his pride. Neither can a pastor refuse to address destructive conduct because he fears controversy. **A shepherd who never corrects anything is neglecting his responsibility, but a shepherd who enjoys crushing people needs correction himself.** Biblical discipline exists to defend truth, protect the flock, and seek restoration, not to satisfy the personal appetite of a man who enjoys possessing power.

Accountability must also reach the man standing behind the pulpit. David was Israel's anointed king, yet Nathan confronted him in 2 Samuel 12:7 with the unforgettable declaration, "Thou art the man." Peter was a prominent apostle, yet Paul wrote in Galatians 2:11 that he withstood Peter to the face because he was to be blamed. First Timothy 5:19–20 establishes that accusations against elders require proper evidence and that elders who sin must be rebuked. Those instructions protect faithful ministers against malicious allegations while preventing leadership from becoming a sanctuary for wrongdoing. Financial integrity, impartial judgment, responsible administration, and honest examination of serious concerns are not attacks upon biblical authority. They are consistent with it. A preacher who demands accountability from everybody else while placing himself beyond examination has misunderstood the office he occupies. **The man who considers every honest question an act of rebellion may have mistaken the shepherd's staff for a royal scepter.** No ministry founder, pastor, missionary, elder, or teacher becomes infallible through years of service, and no amount of religious applause can repeal a single commandment of God.

Faithful leadership must also prepare the next generation to continue the work. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul instructed Timothy to commit sound teaching to faithful men who would be able to teach others also. Moses prepared Joshua for responsibility in Israel, while Paul entrusted Timothy and Titus with serious ministerial duties in the early Church. The principle is not the manufacture of personal disciples who remain permanently dependent upon the founder's personality. It is the preparation of qualified servants who know the Scriptures, possess godly character, and can faithfully carry responsibility when the older leader is no longer present. A preacher should rejoice when younger men demonstrate ability, mature through instruction, and become capable of serving independently under the authority of Jesus Christ. He should not sabotage their growth because their success threatens his importance. The church is not a hereditary estate to be transferred automatically to the founder's favorite relative, nor is the pastoral office an inheritance that passes through a family surname. **A faithful pastor raises up Timothys. A self-important ruler builds himself a throne and spends the rest of his ministry protecting it.**

All of these responsibilities lead directly to the man standing at the center of this series: Diotrephes. In 3 John 9–10, John identifies him as one "who loveth to have the preeminence among them." The apostle describes his refusal to receive John's communication, his malicious words, his rejection of faithful brethren, his interference with those who would receive them, and his casting people out of the church. Scripture does not specify his precise ecclesiastical office, and there is no need to invent details about his personal history. The record supplies everything necessary to recognize the danger. Here was religious ambition expressing itself through domination, opposition, and exclusion. Diotrephes did not merely hold a different opinion concerning an administrative matter. His desire for prominence became a governing influence over his treatment of others. The same spirit appears wherever a leader demands personal loyalty above biblical truth, retaliates against legitimate concerns, and begins treating the congregation as his private possession. **When disagreement becomes treason and the church door becomes a trapdoor beneath the feet of anybody who questions the ruler, Diotrephes has climbed into the driver's seat.**

But the Holy Ghost has already identified the rightful Head of the Church. Colossians 1:18 declares concerning Jesus Christ, "that in all things he might have the preeminence." That is the place Diotrephes wanted, and it is the place no Christian leader has authority to occupy. Ephesians 1:22–23 establishes Christ as the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body. Acts 20:28 declares that God purchased the Church with His own blood. First Peter 5:2–4 instructs elders to feed God's flock without becoming lords over God's heritage and directs their attention toward the appearing of the Chief Shepherd. The arrangement could hardly be clearer. Christ owns the Church. His word governs it. Qualified servants oversee local assemblies according to Scripture. The people are responsible to respect legitimate leadership, and the leaders remain responsible to the Lord for their conduct. A pastor is not a miniature pope, an earthly replacement for Jesus Christ, or a spiritual landlord collecting obedience from people he imagines belong to him. He is a steward. **The throne is occupied, the Book is settled, and the preacher is still a servant.**

The purpose of this examination is not to encourage contempt for pastors or manufacture suspicion against every man exercising spiritual authority. Faithful ministers deserve respect, support, prayer, and cooperation. Hebrews 13:17 establishes the responsibility of believers toward those who watch for their souls, while 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 instructs believers to esteem those who labor among them and admonish them. A church that constantly undermines qualified leadership will eventually suffer the consequences of its own disorder. But respect is not worship, submission is not slavery, and biblical oversight is not personal ownership. A faithful preacher should be able to lead without intimidation,

correct without cruelty, exercise judgment without arrogance, and receive legitimate correction without threatening everybody involved. He must possess enough courage to stand against error, enough humility to recognize his limitations, and enough integrity to practice what he preaches. **Christian leadership does not require a man to become weak. It requires him to become faithful. There is a tremendous difference between standing firmly upon God's word and standing proudly upon everybody else's neck.**

This series will therefore examine Christian leadership according to the Scriptures rather than the inflated opinions of religious personalities. The shepherd's staff will be distinguished from the royal scepter. The final authority of the Bible will be established above the man behind the pulpit. Character will be examined before popularity, courage before compromise, delegation before personal empire-building, wise counsel before reckless ambition, biblical correction before personal revenge, accountability before immunity, and faithful succession before religious dynasties. Finally, Diotrephes himself will stand beneath the searching light of the word of God as a warning against the desire for preeminence. The object is not to produce timid leaders who fear every complaint or rebellious congregations that reject every instruction. It is to establish the difference between the authority God commands and the domination He forbids. **The church needs men who can stand without becoming dictators, serve without becoming doormats, lead without becoming idols, and correct others without placing themselves beyond correction.**

And when every argument has been examined, every passage has been opened, and every religious excuse has been stripped away, the final question will remain: **Who is really in charge of the Church?** If the answer is the pastor's personality, the founder's reputation, the wealthiest contributor, the loudest complainer, or the man who threatens everybody who disagrees with him, something has gone terribly wrong. Jesus Christ did not shed His blood to establish a collection of miniature religious kingdoms governed by men competing for earthly importance. He purchased a people for Himself, established His Church, and gave His servants responsibilities to perform under His authority. The preacher may carry the staff, but he does not own the sheep. He may stand behind the pulpit, but he does not occupy the throne. He may lead the congregation, but he will answer to the Chief Shepherd. **Diotrephes wanted to be first. Jesus Christ already is. And the sooner every preacher remembers that, the healthier the Church will be.**

1 of 10 — Christian Leadership — The Shepherd’s Staff Was Never Meant to Be a Scepter

Key Passage — 1 Peter 5:2–3

"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock."

There is something terribly wrong with a preacher who enters the ministry carrying a shepherd's staff and eventually begins swinging it like a king's scepter. Somewhere between his calling and his coronation, that fellow forgot who owned the sheep. He may have started with a Bible under his arm, a burden for souls, and a desire to serve Jesus Christ, but after enough compliments, committee meetings, anniversary celebrations, and flattering introductions, he began confusing the Lord's congregation with his personal kingdom. Before long, his preferences became commandments, his disagreements became divisions, and questioning his judgment became practically equivalent to questioning the Almighty. He still calls himself a servant, of course. That word looks beautiful on a church bulletin, especially when printed beneath a photograph of the man who insists upon having the largest office, the final word, and the first place in everything. But the Bible does not measure a shepherd by the height of his platform. It measures him by his faithfulness to the One who owns the flock.

The Lord Jesus Christ settled this matter long before the first modern preacher discovered that a congregation could be managed like a corporation and controlled like a private estate. In Matthew 20:25–28, the Saviour distinguished the dominion exercised by Gentile rulers from the service expected of His disciples. He declared, "But it shall not be so among you." Those seven words ought to be nailed above the office door of every man who thinks a pastoral title comes with an invisible crown. Christ was not condemning leadership, abolishing authority, or suggesting that everybody should run the congregation according to personal preference. He was condemning the world's understanding of greatness, in which the important fellow sits above everybody else while lesser people scramble to satisfy his desires. The Son of man came to minister, not to be ministered unto. If the Lord of glory could descend to the place of a servant, a preacher with a theological diploma ought to survive the humiliation of being treated like an ordinary human being.

Peter brings the matter directly into the government and responsibility of the flock in 1 Peter 5:1–4. The same apostle who had once argued about greatness, denied his Lord, and needed restoration now exhorted elders to feed God's flock without becoming lords over God's heritage. Peter knew something about misplaced confidence and the painful

education of a self-assured man. His instructions were not written to produce weak leadership, doctrinal compromise, or congregational anarchy. They were written to establish what godly leadership actually looks like when the authority comes from God rather than from a man's appetite for importance. A shepherd must feed, guide, protect, correct, and watch. He must exercise oversight, but he must never confuse oversight with ownership. He must stand against wolves without becoming a wolf himself. The shepherd's staff was never meant to be a scepter, and the moment a preacher forgets the difference, the sheep begin paying for his confusion.

1. The Flock Belongs to God, Not the Man Holding the Staff

Notice the exact wording of 1 Peter 5:2: "Feed the flock of God which is among you." Peter did not say the flock of the pastor, the flock of the deacons, the flock of the founding family, or the flock of whichever religious personality happens to command the largest audience. He said the flock of God. The ownership is established before the responsibility is described. That order is not accidental. God establishes whose sheep they are before telling His servants what to do with them. Acts 20:28 makes the ownership even clearer when Paul tells the Ephesian elders to feed "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." The church was not purchased with a pastor's sacrifices, a building committee's donations, or the founder's years of hard work. It was purchased with blood. A man who did not purchase the flock has no biblical right to behave as though he personally owns it.

That ownership becomes even more important when we examine Ephesians 1:22–23 and Colossians 1:18. God gave Jesus Christ "to be the head over all things to the church," and Paul declares that Christ is "the head of the body, the church." That position is already occupied. There is no vacancy, no election scheduled, and no committee authorized to replace the Head with a charismatic personality wearing a good suit. Local churches have recognized officers and genuine responsibilities, but no pastor becomes the spiritual owner of the people simply because he occupies the pulpit. Paul called himself a minister, not a replacement head. The local assembly is not a religious plantation where the preacher holds the deed and everybody else works the property. When believers are taught to attach their spiritual identity to a man rather than to Jesus Christ, something has already gone wrong with the arrangement.

First Corinthians 4:1–2 provides the proper description of ministerial responsibility: "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." A steward manages what belongs to somebody else. He does not become the owner because the owner entrusted him with responsibility. Joseph administered Potiphar's house without becoming Potiphar,

and a preacher administers responsibilities within God's house without becoming God. The question is not whether the pastor possesses influence, authority, or responsibility. He certainly does. The question is whether he recognizes that those responsibilities must be exercised according to the Owner's instructions. A steward who rearranges the master's household for his personal amusement has forgotten the assignment. The same principle applies to ministry: faithfulness is measured by obedience to the Master, not by the number of people willing to applaud the servant.

2. Jesus Christ Put the World's Leadership System on Trial

Matthew 20:20–28 begins with an ambitious request involving the mother of Zebedee's children, who desired special places for her sons in Christ's kingdom. The context matters. The Lord was speaking to His disciples during His earthly ministry to Israel, and the immediate subject concerned positions associated with His coming kingdom. We do not need to pretend that the passage was originally a church constitution written to a modern congregation. Nevertheless, the moral distinction Christ established between selfish domination and genuine service is confirmed in direct instructions to the Church through Peter and Paul. The disciples were interested in places of distinction, and the Lord answered by teaching them the cost and meaning of greatness. Religious ambition is an old disease. It did not begin with television ministries, expensive conferences, or glossy photographs on church websites. Men were reaching for the best seats while the Saviour was approaching the cross.

Listen to Matthew 20:25: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them." The Lord described an arrangement in which greatness was demonstrated through power over others. Then He declared, "But it shall not be so among you." He was not merely recommending better manners. He was overturning the worldly definition of greatness for those who followed Him. The man seeking greatness was instructed to become a minister, and the man seeking the chief place was instructed to become a servant. That is precisely opposite to the flesh. The flesh wants recognition before responsibility, privilege before sacrifice, and obedience from others before obedience to God. It wants the chief seat without the servant's towel. The Lord's instruction exposes the foolishness of a religious leader who claims to represent Christ while conducting himself like a petty monarch whose kingdom consists of thirty folding chairs and a church parking lot.

The final words of Matthew 20:28 provide the supreme example: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Notice that Christ's service was not merely courteous behavior. His ministry led to the giving of His life. He was not surrendering His deity, abandoning His authority, or becoming

subordinate to human opinion. He was demonstrating the character of divine greatness through obedient sacrifice. Philippians 2:5–8 applies that humility directly to believers, describing the Lord taking the form of a servant and becoming obedient unto death. A Christian leader cannot claim the mind of Christ while insisting that everybody else exist for his comfort. The cross exposes the absurdity of religious vanity. The Lord Jesus Christ humbled Himself unto death, while some preachers become offended because somebody forgot to reserve their favorite parking space. That is quite a distance between Calvary and the church office.

3. Biblical Oversight Is Real Authority, Not Religious Dictatorship

Peter did not say, "Feed the flock of God, and then allow everybody to do whatever seems right in his own eyes." He said, "taking the oversight thereof." Those words establish actual responsibility. The New Testament recognizes elders, bishops, and men charged with shepherding local assemblies. First Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9 establish qualifications for such men, and Hebrews 13:17 commands believers to obey those who have the rule over them and submit themselves. A church without biblical leadership is not demonstrating superior spirituality. It is ignoring clear New Testament instruction. Yet the very existence of authority establishes the necessity of defining its limits. The pastor is responsible to oversee according to Scripture, not to manufacture new commandments according to personal taste. He may direct church activities, make necessary decisions, correct disorder, and protect sound doctrine. He may not claim divine authority for everything that happens to cross his mind between breakfast and Wednesday evening prayer meeting.

Hebrews 13:17 deserves careful treatment because it is frequently quoted by men who enjoy the first half while quietly forgetting the second. The verse says, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account." There is the reason for submission: responsible spiritual oversight. There is also the warning to the leaders: they must give account. That is not an invitation to unquestioning worship of a man. It is a serious statement concerning believers who watch over souls under God's authority. The same New Testament that commands submission also commands elders not to lord over God's heritage. Those instructions do not contradict one another. They define one another. Biblical submission recognizes properly exercised authority, while biblical leadership recognizes accountability to the Lord. A preacher who quotes Hebrews 13:17 to demand obedience while ignoring 1 Peter 5:3 is using half a Bible to defend a whole appetite for control.

Paul provides another necessary boundary in 2 Corinthians 1:24: "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand." Consider who

made that statement. This was not an inexperienced minister afraid to exercise authority. This was the apostle Paul, entrusted with direct revelation and apostolic responsibility, dealing with a troubled congregation that required serious correction. Yet Paul did not claim ownership over their faith. He identified himself and his fellow workers as helpers. If an apostle would not claim dominion over believers' faith, a modern pastor has no business pretending he possesses greater authority than an apostle. The written word is the standard by which preaching, doctrine, and conduct must be tested. A pastor may instruct a believer to obey Scripture, but he cannot become that believer's substitute conscience. There is no ordination ceremony that transforms a sinful man into an infallible authority. The Bible is already sufficient without adding a local pope to interpret every breath a Christian takes.

4. The Shepherd's Staff Must Guide, Protect, and Correct

Psalm 23:4 contains David's declaration, "thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." David wrote as a man belonging to Israel, and his psalm must be understood within its proper biblical setting. We need not steal Israel's national promises or pretend that every detail of David's earthly circumstances belongs doctrinally to the Church. Nevertheless, the shepherding imagery illustrates principles confirmed elsewhere in the New Testament. A rod and staff were not ornamental equipment carried so the shepherd could look impressive in photographs. They were instruments associated with protection, guidance, and care. A staff could help direct a wandering animal, while a rod represented the shepherd's readiness to defend against danger. There is a world of difference between using a staff to rescue a sheep from a ravine and using it to beat the animal because the shepherd dislikes being inconvenienced. The instrument is not the problem. The spirit and purpose governing its use reveal the character of the man carrying it.

A faithful shepherd must also correct wrongdoing. Second Timothy 4:2 instructs the preacher to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." Those words leave no room for the modern idea that loving leadership means never confronting sin. A pastor who refuses to address false teaching, destructive behavior, immorality, or disorder because somebody might become offended is not demonstrating tenderness. He is neglecting responsibility. Paul instructed Titus to hold fast the faithful word so that he might exhort and convince gainsayers. Biblical oversight has teeth. It protects the flock from dangerous doctrine and confronts conduct that threatens the spiritual health of the assembly. But notice that correction must be accompanied by doctrine and longsuffering. The preacher is not commissioned to vent his temper, settle personal scores, or use the pulpit as a public whipping post. The purpose of correction is obedience to God's word, not

the satisfaction of a bruised ego. The difference between a shepherd and a bully is not whether either carries a staff, but what he does with it.

Ezekiel 34 provides a devastating historical indictment of Israel's unfaithful shepherds. The chapter concerns the shepherds of Israel and looks toward God's intervention on behalf of His scattered flock, including the promised shepherd associated with David. Its national and prophetic setting must remain intact. Yet the conduct condemned there provides a sobering warning wherever leadership exists. In Ezekiel 34:4, the Lord charges those shepherds with failing to strengthen the diseased, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring back the driven away, and seek the lost. Instead, they ruled "with force and with cruelty." That is not shepherding. That is exploitation dressed in official clothing. A pastor should certainly exercise judgment, maintain order, and confront rebellion, but he should not confuse cruelty with conviction. The man who enjoys frightening the congregation more than feeding it has misunderstood his assignment. Sheep are not improved by having a wolf promoted to the position of shepherd. God condemns neglectful leadership, and He also condemns leadership that turns responsibility into cruelty.

5. The Hireling Counts the Benefits While the Shepherd Watches the Sheep

The Lord Jesus Christ exposed the hireling in John 10:11–13. Speaking during His earthly ministry in a passage filled with imagery concerning the sheep and His identity as the good shepherd, Christ declared, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." He contrasted Himself with the hireling, who sees the wolf approaching and abandons the flock because he does not genuinely care for the sheep. The passage reveals Christ's unique saving work and His identity, not merely a handbook for modern church administration. Nevertheless, the distinction between sacrificial care and self-interested abandonment applies directly to ministerial conduct. A hireling may perform the visible duties while the weather is pleasant and the paycheck arrives on schedule. His actual allegiance becomes apparent when danger approaches. Some men can preach courage magnificently until courage threatens their salary. Then suddenly every wolf becomes a misunderstood visitor who deserves a seat on the finance committee.

First Peter 5:2 says that oversight must not be exercised "for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." Scripture does not condemn properly supporting faithful ministers. First Corinthians 9:14 teaches that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel, and 1 Timothy 5:17–18 recognizes the material support of elders who labor in the word and doctrine. The sin is not receiving legitimate support. The sin is making financial gain the controlling motive of ministry. A man may receive wages without being a hireling in the corrupt sense, and another man may preach without a salary while still being driven by greed, influence, or personal advantage. The question is what governs his heart and conduct. First Timothy 6:5

warns of men "supposing that gain is godliness." That error has built more religious machinery than many people would care to admit. When the collection plate becomes the compass, the preacher's direction will change whenever the wealthy passengers threaten to stop financing the journey.

Paul demonstrated a different spirit in 2 Corinthians 12:14 when he told the Corinthians, "for I seek not yours, but you." That statement should strike the conscience of any leader more interested in what people can contribute than in what Scripture can accomplish in their lives. In Acts 20:33, Paul declared, "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel." He was not preaching a doctrine that all ministers must refuse support. He was demonstrating his own integrity and freedom from covetousness. A faithful shepherd does not regard struggling believers as disappointing customers, elderly members as exhausted resources, or generous families as financial assets to be carefully cultivated. He cares for souls because souls matter to God. The man who knows every wealthy donor's birthday but cannot remember the name of a grieving widow has revealed something about his priorities. A shepherd counts sheep to make certain none are missing. A hireling counts sheep to determine how much they are worth.

6. A Shepherd Must Be Accountable Without Becoming a Coward

The moment a preacher announces that questioning his actions is equivalent to rebelling against God, the congregation ought to open its Bible and inspect that remarkable claim. There is a difference between legitimate pastoral authority and personal immunity from correction. In Galatians 2:11, Paul wrote concerning Peter, "I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." Peter's position did not make his conduct unquestionable. His inconsistency concerning fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers had serious consequences, and Paul confronted him openly. This occurred during the apostolic period and involved matters central to the truth of the gospel. We should not stretch the account into permission for every disgruntled person to organize a rebellion over trivial disagreements. But neither should we ignore its unmistakable lesson. If Peter could be corrected when he was wrong, a local pastor can survive having somebody ask why a particular decision was made.

First Timothy 5:19–20 establishes necessary safeguards concerning accusations against elders. Paul commands that an accusation against an elder not be received except before two or three witnesses, and he directs that those who sin be rebuked before all so that others also may fear. These instructions protect elders against careless charges while also demonstrating that elders are not above correction. Both parts belong in the same Bible. A church must not become a playground for malicious gossip, fabricated accusations, and personal vendettas. Neither may it become a sanctuary where proven misconduct

disappears because the guilty man holds an impressive title. Scripture requires truth, evidence, judgment, and accountability. A preacher who demands strict discipline for ordinary members while arranging permanent exemptions for himself has established two standards of holiness: one for the sheep and another for the fellow holding the microphone. That arrangement may survive a church business meeting, but it will not survive the judgment of God's word.

Accountability also requires courage. Some leaders are so frightened of disagreement that they surrender biblical responsibility to whichever personality complains the loudest. Others become so obsessed with control that they regard every question as an attempted overthrow. Both extremes reveal leadership governed by the flesh rather than Scripture. Joshua was commanded to be strong and courageous, and Timothy was instructed to preach the word regardless of whether hearers found the season convenient. Those commands do not authorize personal tyranny, but they certainly condemn cowardice. A pastor must possess enough backbone to correct error, enough patience to hear legitimate concerns, and enough humility to acknowledge his own mistakes. He should neither surrender the pulpit to a committee of chronic complainers nor convert it into a throne surrounded by frightened flatterers. The man who cannot hear a question without reaching for his crown may need to examine whether he is defending the truth or merely defending his importance. Biblical courage does not require pretending to be incapable of error.

7. The Chief Shepherd Will Examine the Man Carrying the Staff

First Peter 5:3 says that elders are not to act as lords over God's heritage, "but being ensamples to the flock." The word "ensamples" establishes the positive alternative to domination. A pastor is not merely instructed to issue correct orders. He must demonstrate the character and conduct that he expects believers to follow. Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12 to be an example of the believers in word, conversation, charity, spirit, faith, and purity. Those requirements expose the emptiness of religious authority based solely upon position. A title cannot substitute for holiness. A certificate cannot produce faithfulness. A prominent pulpit does not excuse a corrupt private life. The congregation should see the effects of biblical truth in the man who teaches it. The shepherd who demands patience while exploding in anger, preaches humility while craving applause, and condemns worldliness while living for personal prestige is providing an example, all right. Unfortunately, he is illustrating precisely what his own sermons ought to condemn.

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:1 are equally important: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." There is the proper limitation upon following a spiritual leader. Paul did not instruct believers to imitate him regardless of whether his conduct agreed with the Lord Jesus Christ. He directed them toward Christ as the standard. Hebrews 13:7 likewise

connects remembering spiritual leaders with the word of God they have spoken and the faith believers are to follow. The emphasis is not personality worship. It is godly conduct shaped by divine truth. The preacher who insists that loyalty to his personality must survive every contradiction of Scripture is demanding something the apostle Paul never demanded. Faithful ministers should direct attention toward the Saviour, not collect disciples as personal trophies. A church may rightly appreciate a gifted pastor, honor his labor, and follow his biblical instruction without turning appreciation into idolatry. Respect is proper. Worship belongs to God. Confusing the two has ruined plenty of otherwise promising ministries.

Peter concludes this instruction in 1 Peter 5:4: "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." That verse places the entire question of leadership beneath a future reckoning. The men addressed are not being promised ownership of the flock. They are being directed toward the appearing of the Chief Shepherd and the reward associated with faithful service. For believers in the Church Age, 2 Corinthians 5:10 teaches that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." This concerns the judgment of believers' works, not a second opportunity to purchase salvation or a reversal of the finished work of Christ. Salvation is received by grace through faith, as Ephesians 2:8–9 declares. Service will nevertheless be examined. A preacher may impress the congregation, intimidate his critics, and decorate his office with awards, but he will not impress the Lord Jesus Christ with religious theatrics. The Chief Shepherd will not need a committee to explain what happened to His sheep. He already knows.

Conclusion

The question before every Christian leader is not whether he has authority, but whether he understands where that authority begins, where it ends, and to whom he must answer. Scripture has not commanded churches to operate without oversight, and it has not instructed congregations to treat faithful pastors with contempt. Hebrews 13:17, 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5 establish responsibilities that must be taken seriously. But the same Bible that commands submission to godly oversight forbids men from becoming lords over God's heritage. Those truths belong together. Remove authority, and disorder follows. Remove accountability, and tyranny grows. Remove the Bible, and the entire arrangement becomes a contest of personalities. A faithful pastor must stand firm against sin, defend sound doctrine, care for the weak, correct the disorderly, and set an example worthy of imitation. He must exercise authority without worshipping it. The staff belongs in the hand of a servant who remembers that the flock belongs to another.

The modern religious world has enough personalities building monuments to themselves. It has enough men who want the respect given to faithful shepherds without accepting the

sacrifices required of them. It has enough pulpit royalty, religious celebrities, professional manipulators, and insecure dictators who quote submission passages as though the New Testament were a royal charter for their personal ambitions. What the Church needs is not another self-appointed king with a Bible tucked beneath his arm. It needs men who tremble at the word of God, preach sound doctrine, love the brethren, expose false teaching, confront sin, and remember that their own conduct remains subject to the very Scriptures they proclaim. A genuine shepherd will occasionally have to disappoint people, make difficult decisions, and endure unjust criticism. None of that excuses cowardice. But neither does the difficulty of leadership excuse pride. The cross did not produce a new aristocracy of preachers. It redeemed a people who belong to Jesus Christ.

So let the preacher preach. Let the pastor oversee. Let the elders exercise their biblical responsibilities. Let the congregation honor faithful labor and submit to sound instruction. But let every man involved remember that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, the Scriptures are the final written authority, and every servant will answer to his Master. A man may carry a staff, but he had better not mistake it for a scepter. He may occupy a pulpit, but he had better not imagine it has become a throne. He may guide the flock, but he had better remember whose blood purchased those sheep. The Lord never called a man to become the fourth person of the Godhead, and He never appointed a local pastor to serve as a substitute for Jesus Christ. **The shepherd's greatness is not measured by how many people bow before him, but by how faithfully he leads them to the One before whom every knee shall bow.**

2 of 10 — Christian Leadership — When the Bible Outranks the Man Behind the Pulpit

Key Passage — 2 Timothy 3:16–17

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

There is something terribly wrong with a preacher who claims to believe the Bible is the final authority until somebody opens that Bible and proves him wrong. Suddenly the final authority becomes his interpretation, his experience, his education, his years in the ministry, or that famous explanation about how God has given him a special responsibility nobody else could possibly understand. The Book was sufficient when he was correcting somebody else, but apparently it needs a little assistance when it starts correcting him. That is where biblical leadership becomes religious dictatorship. A preacher may possess a

calling, a congregation, an ordination certificate, and enough degrees to wallpaper his office, but none of those things gives him permission to promote his personal opinions to the level of divine revelation. God did not inspire the man's preferences. He inspired the Scriptures. The pulpit was never intended to become a printing press for producing additional commandments, and a man's position behind it does not make everything coming out of his mouth the word of God.

Paul settled the matter in 2 Timothy 3:16–17 when he declared that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Notice what is being described. It is not the personality of the preacher, the reputation of the institution, the historical influence of a denomination, or the supposed spiritual superiority of a religious organization. It is Scripture. Paul was writing to Timothy, a minister responsible for preaching sound doctrine in the present dispensation of grace. Timothy was not instructed to develop a personal kingdom where his decisions carried unquestionable authority. He was instructed to remain faithful to the written revelation God had provided. A preacher who understands that distinction will possess the courage to proclaim what God has said and the humility to recognize what God has not said. A preacher who forgets it will eventually begin using the Bible as a decorative introduction to whatever he already wanted to tell everybody.

The danger becomes especially serious when believers are taught that disagreeing with a man's judgment is equivalent to rebelling against Almighty God. Scripture certainly establishes legitimate pastoral authority, and congregations are commanded to respect faithful spiritual oversight. But authority exercised under the Bible is not authority exercised above the Bible. A pastor may make decisions concerning church schedules, ministry responsibilities, financial administration, building policies, and the orderly conduct of services. Those decisions may be reasonable, necessary, and deserving of cooperation. Yet a practical decision does not become inspired Scripture simply because a pastor made it while wearing a necktie and holding a King James Bible. There is a difference between saying, "This is how our congregation will organize its work," and announcing, "God commands you to accept my personal preference." One statement concerns responsible administration. The other attempts to manufacture divine authority where God has not supplied it. When the Bible speaks, the preacher must submit. When the Bible is silent, he had better be careful about pretending Heaven has issued a memorandum.

1. The Scriptures Are Inspired, but the Preacher's Opinions Are Not

Second Timothy 3:16 begins with an absolute declaration: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." Paul does not say that Scripture becomes inspired when a qualified preacher explains it. He does not say the Bible acquires authority when a church council

recognizes it or when a religious institution approves its teaching. The authority comes from God Himself. Inspiration belongs to the Scripture, not to the personality handling it. That distinction destroys the notion that a preacher's words must be accepted simply because he has a reputation for knowing the Bible. A man may faithfully explain the Scriptures, but his explanation remains accountable to the text he is explaining. When he gets the passage right, the authority belongs to the word of God. When he gets it wrong, his office cannot rescue the error. A preacher does not become inspired through association any more than a man becomes a carpenter by sleeping beside a toolbox. The Bible is inspired. The preacher is responsible to study it.

The verse continues by identifying the practical work accomplished through Scripture: doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Those four functions leave no room for the idea that the Bible exists merely to support the preacher's conclusions. Doctrine establishes what is right. Reproof exposes what is wrong. Correction addresses the error. Instruction in righteousness teaches the proper course. Notice that correction stands directly in the passage describing the equipment of the man of God. If the preacher himself cannot be corrected by Scripture, he has somehow exempted himself from the very process Paul says is necessary for his perfection. That is quite an achievement for a fellow who still misplaces his keys and occasionally forgets his own announcements. The word of God corrects the man in the pew, and it corrects the man in the pulpit. A pastor who welcomes reproof when administering it but resents reproof when receiving it has confused his position with perfection.

Verse 17 completes the argument: "That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." The word "perfect" here concerns the man being properly equipped and complete for the work before him. The passage does not promise that every minister will become incapable of mistakes. It teaches that the inspired Scriptures provide what the man of God needs for faithful service. Timothy had known the holy Scriptures from childhood, as verse 15 states, and those Scriptures were able to make him wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. The immediate historical reference includes the Scriptures available during Timothy's upbringing, while the New Testament also recognizes apostolic writings as Scripture, as demonstrated in 2 Peter 3:15–16. The minister's equipment is God's revelation, not his imagination. A preacher who constantly needs to manufacture new revelations to maintain control has already advertised his dissatisfaction with the sufficiency of the Book.

2. The Pulpit Is a Place to Preach Christ, Not Advertise the Preacher

Paul made a remarkable statement in 2 Corinthians 4:5: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." There is enough

doctrine in that verse to straighten out an entire generation of confused religious leadership. Paul identifies the subject of the preaching, the position of Christ, and the responsibility of the minister. Christ Jesus is the Lord. Paul and his fellow workers are servants. That arrangement is not difficult to understand unless somebody is determined to reverse it. The preacher is not the central attraction, the final authority, or the object of the congregation's spiritual devotion. He is a messenger commissioned to proclaim Jesus Christ. A faithful pulpit should direct people toward the Saviour rather than create an audience permanently fascinated with the man standing behind the furniture. When the sermon becomes a weekly celebration of the preacher's greatness, somebody has confused the gospel ministry with a personal advertising campaign.

The Corinthian church had already demonstrated the danger of attaching spiritual identity to human personalities. In 1 Corinthians 1:12, Paul confronted divisions among those claiming allegiance to Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ. He immediately asked, "Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" Those questions exposed the foolishness of elevating ministers into competing centers of allegiance. The Corinthians possessed genuine spiritual gifts, yet their carnality appeared in the way they organized themselves around personalities. Paul returned to the issue in 1 Corinthians 3:21, commanding, "Therefore let no man glory in men." That rebuke still belongs wherever believers confuse appreciation for a gifted teacher with unconditional loyalty to his opinions. A man may teach you valuable biblical truth without becoming the owner of your conscience. You can thank God for the messenger without installing the messenger in the position reserved for the Lord.

First Corinthians 4:6 carries the warning further when Paul writes "that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written." The immediate context concerns the way the Corinthians were evaluating and exalting ministers, but the principle strikes directly at religious personality worship. The written standard must not be displaced by exaggerated opinions of men. A preacher may be gifted, courageous, experienced, and unusually knowledgeable, but he remains a man. The congregation does not need to pretend otherwise to honor his labor. Indeed, genuine respect for faithful ministry requires recognizing the distinction between the message and the messenger. The man may become ill, grow old, make a mistaken judgment, or eventually die. The word of God remains. A ministry built upon Scripture can endure the departure of its founder. A ministry built upon personality often collapses when the personality leaves the building. A preacher ought to make himself useful to the congregation, not indispensable to its understanding of God.

3. The Bereans Opened Their Bibles Even When an Apostle Was Preaching

Acts 17:10–12 records one of the finest examples of responsible examination of biblical teaching found anywhere in Scripture. Paul and Silas arrived at Berea during their missionary work, and Paul entered the synagogue of the Jews. The Bereans received the message with readiness of mind, but they did something else that the Holy Ghost specifically commended. Verse 11 declares that they "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Consider the circumstances. They were hearing the apostle Paul, a man personally entrusted with revelation from the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Yet Scripture describes their examination favorably rather than condemning it as rebellion. They did not simply accept the message because an impressive religious figure delivered it. They compared what they heard with the written revelation already available to them. Apparently, opening a Bible to examine preaching was a noble activity before modern religious personalities decided it constituted disrespect.

The historical setting deserves attention. Paul was preaching in a Jewish synagogue during the transitional period recorded in Acts. The Bereans were examining the Old Testament Scriptures in connection with Paul's proclamation that Jesus was the Christ. Acts 17:2–3 explains Paul's customary reasoning from the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must have suffered and risen again from the dead. The Bereans were not comparing his preaching with a completed New Testament bound in leather, because that completed collection was not yet available. Nevertheless, the principle is unmistakable: the claims of the preacher were examined against the written revelation of God. Their readiness to receive did not eliminate their responsibility to investigate. Their investigation did not require an unbelieving attitude toward the message. They listened willingly and examined carefully. That combination is almost extinct in certain religious circles, where people are expected either to believe everything the preacher says or be accused of having a rebellious spirit.

Galatians 1:8 strengthens the same principle with extraordinary force: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Paul placed even his own future preaching under the authority of the gospel already revealed. He did not reserve the right to rewrite salvation because his circumstances changed or his reputation increased. The gospel declared in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 concerns Christ's death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection the third day according to the Scriptures. Salvation is by grace through faith, not through the preacher's approval, institutional membership, or ritual requirements. If even an angel appearing from heaven cannot authorize a contrary gospel, a man standing behind a wooden pulpit certainly cannot. The Berean spirit does not mean treating every personal preference as a doctrinal dispute. It means refusing to grant any human voice authority to contradict the written word of God.

4. A Personal Conviction Is Not Automatically a Commandment from Heaven

One of the most common abuses of religious authority occurs when a leader takes a personal conviction, clothes it in biblical terminology, and presents it as a universal commandment. There is nothing wrong with having convictions. In fact, Christians ought to possess convictions grounded in Scripture rather than floating through life like leaves in a ditch. But a conviction must be distinguished from a direct biblical command, and a church policy must not be confused with divine revelation. Romans 14:5 declares, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." Paul was addressing matters of differing judgments among believers, not granting permission to disregard explicit commandments. The chapter distinguishes personal accountability before God from the temptation to judge another servant in matters where the Lord has allowed liberty. When a preacher turns every matter of Christian liberty into an absolute rule, he has walked beyond his commission and begun issuing orders under a signature God never authorized.

Consider the difference between biblical commands and practical church arrangements. Hebrews 10:25 warns against forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, but it does not establish a universal command that every congregation must meet at precisely eleven o'clock on Sunday morning or conduct a particular number of weekly services. A church may establish reasonable meeting times, and members should cooperate faithfully with the congregation's ministry. Yet the pastor who announces that changing a Wednesday evening schedule constitutes disobedience to God had better produce a verse specifying the hour. Likewise, a congregation may establish standards for workers, policies for facilities, procedures for handling finances, and orderly methods of ministry. Those decisions may be wise and necessary, but they remain administrative applications of biblical principles rather than additional chapters of Scripture. God did not leave a blank page after Revelation for the pastor to fill with his favorite regulations. The distinction is simple: administer what God has entrusted without pretending He personally dictated every administrative choice.

The Lord Jesus Christ exposed the danger of replacing divine commandments with human traditions during His earthly ministry to Israel. In Mark 7:7, He declared, "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Verse 9 continued, "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." The immediate confrontation involved Jewish religious traditions and their conflict with God's commandments under the law. We must preserve that historical setting rather than pretend Christ was originally addressing a modern Church Age business meeting. Yet the danger He exposed remains recognizable: men can elevate their own regulations until those regulations displace the word of God. Colossians 2:20–23 likewise warns believers

against fleshly religious ordinances presented as spiritual superiority. The Bible establishes holiness through truth, not through an expanding collection of arbitrary restrictions. When personal preferences become tests of spirituality, somebody has started manufacturing commandments without divine authorization.

5. A Bishop Must Hold Fast the Faithful Word, Not Invent His Own

Titus 1:9 establishes a governing requirement for qualified church leadership: "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." Paul was instructing Titus concerning the appointment and qualifications of elders in local assemblies. The emphasis falls upon fidelity to the word, not creativity in developing personal commandments. A bishop must hold fast what God has revealed. He must possess sufficient knowledge of sound doctrine to instruct believers and answer those who contradict the truth. That requires serious study, doctrinal understanding, and courage. It does not require pretending that every personal conclusion is infallible. The qualification is not that a man can win every argument by raising his voice. It is that he can establish truth from Scripture. A preacher who cannot explain his position without threatening the questioner is advertising a weakness in his argument, not demonstrating strength in his calling.

First Timothy 3:2 requires a bishop to be "apt to teach." That phrase carries an obligation. The leader must actually be capable of instructing others in the truth. He cannot substitute authority for explanation, personality for doctrine, or intimidation for biblical evidence. Second Timothy 2:15 instructs the workman to study, rightly dividing the word of truth. The minister who wants to preach with authority must first submit himself to the labor required to understand what he is preaching. This is where many religious dictators become uncomfortable. It is easier to demand submission than to study a difficult passage. It is easier to announce that God revealed something privately than to demonstrate it publicly from the Book. But the man of God is called to handle Scripture faithfully, not to escape examination through theatrical certainty. Loudness is not proof. Confidence is not inspiration. A preacher can pound the pulpit until the wood cracks, but the noise will not transform a mistaken interpretation into sound doctrine.

The authority of a bishop is therefore genuine but limited. Hebrews 13:17 commands believers to obey those who have the rule over them, explaining that such leaders watch for souls and must give account. First Peter 5:2–3 commands elders to exercise oversight without becoming lords over God's heritage. Those passages establish responsibility on both sides. Believers should not use the doctrine of biblical authority as an excuse to despise legitimate leadership, create disorder, or reject correction. Neither should ministers use the doctrine of submission as permission to control matters beyond their

biblical responsibility. Paul declared in 2 Corinthians 1:24, "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand." That statement came from an apostle possessing authority far beyond any modern pastor. If Paul refused dominion over the faith of believers, what possesses an ordinary preacher to imagine his ordination certificate grants him authority over every decision in their lives?

6. Rightly Dividing Prevents a Preacher from Turning Scripture into a Weapon

Second Timothy 2:15 commands the workman to study and rightly divide the word of truth. That instruction is essential because a man can quote genuine Scripture while applying it to the wrong people, the wrong dispensation, or the wrong doctrinal circumstances. Every word of Scripture is true, but not every command in Scripture was issued directly to the Church in the present dispensation. God dealt with Israel under the law, made national promises to Abraham's descendants, and revealed particular instructions concerning Israel's priesthood, sacrifices, temple worship, and earthly kingdom. The Church, which is Christ's body, receives its doctrinal instruction concerning salvation, standing, and Christian living through the revelation committed to the apostles, especially the apostle Paul. Romans 15:4 teaches that things written aforetime were written for our learning, not that every instruction given to Israel becomes a Church Age command. A preacher who ignores those distinctions can turn the Bible into a box of disconnected quotations and pull out whichever one supports his latest demand.

Consider the frequent misuse of Malachi 3:10, where God commands Israel to bring the tithes into the storehouse and speaks of blessings associated with obedience. The passage belongs to God's dealings with Israel under the Mosaic covenant. It is not a blank check authorizing a modern preacher to threaten blood-bought Christians with covenant curses unless they satisfy his chosen financial arrangement. Giving under grace is addressed in passages such as 2 Corinthians 9:7, where Paul declares, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." That does not excuse selfishness or abolish the responsibility to support legitimate ministry. It establishes the proper doctrinal ground. A preacher who drags Israel's covenant requirements into the Church Age to control people's wallets is not demonstrating reverence for Scripture. He is mishandling it. The fact that a verse appears in the Bible does not authorize a man to ignore its audience and historical setting.

Rightly dividing also protects the gospel from religious control. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares that salvation is by grace through faith, not of works. First Corinthians 15:1–4 identifies the gospel concerning Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Ephesians 1:13 describes believers being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after hearing and believing the gospel. These are not negotiable doctrines to be altered by denominational regulations or a

pastor's personal requirements. A church cannot make water baptism, financial contributions, institutional loyalty, or obedience to a preacher the means of receiving eternal life. The Christian's salvation rests upon Jesus Christ and His finished work, not upon a religious superior's ability to maintain administrative control. A preacher who makes himself the gatekeeper of eternal salvation has moved beyond mistaken leadership into corruption of the gospel. God has not appointed the local pastor as the cashier at heaven's entrance. The price was paid at Calvary, and salvation is received through faith in the risen Saviour.

7. When the Bible Corrects the Preacher, the Preacher Ought to Submit

Galatians 2:11 records Paul's confrontation with Peter: "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." The issue involved Peter's conduct toward Gentile believers and the inconsistency that developed when certain men arrived from James. Peter had previously eaten with the Gentiles, but he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those of the circumcision. Other Jewish believers were carried away with the dissimulation, and even Barnabas became involved. Paul recognized that their conduct did not agree with the truth of the gospel. Notice the significance. Peter was a prominent apostle, personally acquainted with the Lord during His earthly ministry, and entrusted with extraordinary responsibility. Yet none of those credentials made his conduct immune from correction. Paul did not approach the problem by determining which apostle had the more impressive religious résumé. He confronted conduct that contradicted the truth.

The lesson is not that every disgruntled church member possesses permission to insult the pastor, manufacture accusations, or create factions whenever a decision disappoints him. Scripture condemns rebellion, tale-bearing, false witness, and disorder. First Timothy 5:19 requires proper evidence before receiving an accusation against an elder, while verse 20 establishes the necessity of rebuking those elders who sin. Both requirements matter. A faithful pastor deserves protection against malicious charges, and a guilty pastor must not receive immunity from biblical correction. The issue is truth, not the pleasure of humiliating a leader. A man may be falsely accused, and Scripture provides safeguards. He may also be legitimately corrected, and Scripture provides no exemption merely because he holds an office. If the congregation must submit to biblical correction, the preacher must submit to it as well. The pulpit does not contain a trapdoor through which a man can escape the commandments he preaches to everybody else.

Acts 20:29–30 provides an additional warning from Paul's address to the Ephesian elders. He predicted that grievous wolves would enter among the flock and that men would arise from among themselves speaking perverse things, "to draw away disciples after them."

That final expression identifies a particular danger: spiritual leadership corrupted into personal recruitment. The false leader does not merely introduce error. He attempts to redirect disciples toward himself. That is why the Bible must remain above the preacher. When the written word possesses final authority, false doctrine can be examined, personal claims can be tested, and believers can distinguish legitimate oversight from the ambition of a man seeking followers. When a personality replaces Scripture as the controlling authority, the congregation loses the very standard necessary to expose the corruption. The preacher who fears an open Bible in the hands of his listeners has already revealed a serious problem. A faithful shepherd wants people established in the truth. A religious dictator wants them dependent upon his permission to recognize it.

The tragedy of corrupted leadership is that it often begins with small concessions that appear harmless. A pastor grows accustomed to being obeyed, and eventually he stops explaining his decisions. He receives appreciation, and eventually he expects admiration. He makes a practical judgment, and eventually he describes that judgment as divine direction. He encounters disagreement, and eventually he labels every questioner rebellious. None of those developments requires a formal announcement that the Bible has been replaced. The replacement occurs gradually whenever the authority of the written word becomes secondary to the authority of the man. That is why the preacher must continually return to the Book, examine his teaching, test his motives, and distinguish the commands of God from the decisions required by his position. It is better for a minister to admit one mistake publicly than to defend a hundred mistakes simply because he fears appearing human. Humility before Scripture strengthens legitimate authority; pride against Scripture destroys it.

A congregation must also accept its responsibility. Believers should study the King James Bible, examine preaching carefully, support faithful ministers, and refuse the temptation to treat spiritual maturity as something that can be purchased through another man's knowledge. Second Timothy 2:15 is not an invitation to remain ignorant while a religious professional does all the thinking. The workman must study. The believer must grow. The Church needs preachers who know the Book and congregations that know enough of the Book to recognize when it is being faithfully preached. That does not produce rebellion against biblical leadership. It produces greater respect for leadership that is genuinely governed by Scripture. A pastor should be able to rejoice when members understand sound doctrine, ask thoughtful questions, and recognize the difference between an explicit command and a reasonable administrative decision. The goal of ministry is not to produce permanent dependence upon a personality. It is to establish believers in Jesus Christ and His word.

The final authority question is therefore unavoidable. Will the preacher submit to the Bible, or will he expect the Bible to submit to him? Will he preach Christ Jesus the Lord, or will he gradually replace the Lord's prominence with his own? Will he hold fast the faithful word, or will he invent religious commandments whenever Scripture refuses to provide the control he desires? The answer determines whether the pulpit becomes an instrument of truth or a platform for spiritual domination. God has established genuine pastoral responsibilities, but He has never surrendered His authority to the man performing them. The preacher may explain the Book, proclaim the Book, defend the Book, and correct others with the Book. He cannot outrank the Book. **When the Scriptures correct the preacher, the preacher ought to thank God for the correction, open his Bible, and get himself straightened out. The King James Bible does not need a crown from the man behind the pulpit. The man behind the pulpit needs enough humility to bow before the authority of the Book.**

3 of 10 — Christian Leadership — A Polished Pulpit Cannot Hide a Rotten Character

Key Passage — 1 Timothy 3:2–3

"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous."

A man can preach until the windows rattle, quote Scripture until the congregation forgets what time it is, raise enough money to build a cathedral, and still be unqualified to pastor a church. That may come as a terrible disappointment to the religious entertainment industry, where an impressive performance is frequently mistaken for the power of God and a crowded auditorium is treated as proof of divine approval. But the Holy Ghost never instructed Timothy to find the loudest preacher, the smoothest speaker, or the fellow with the most expensive suit. He gave him qualifications of character. There is a considerable difference between possessing the ability to command attention and possessing the spiritual qualifications necessary to oversee God's people. Balaam could deliver a true prophecy while harboring a corrupt heart, and Judas Iscariot could occupy a place among the twelve while remaining a devil. If a man thinks ministerial ability automatically proves spiritual integrity, he has not been paying very close attention to his Bible. **A polished pulpit cannot hide a rotten character from the God who sees behind it.**

First Timothy 3:1 begins, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." Notice that Paul calls the office a good work, not a prestigious position, a religious inheritance, or a convenient occupation for somebody who enjoys

being admired. The next verse immediately establishes the standard: "A bishop then must be blameless." That little word "must" has ruined many a modern leadership qualification committee. It does not say a bishop preferably should be blameless, might become blameless after establishing a successful ministry, or may disregard the requirement if his preaching attracts sufficient financial support. The instruction is addressed to Timothy concerning leadership in the Church during the present dispensation of grace. These are not ceremonial qualifications borrowed from Israel's Levitical priesthood. They are direct instructions governing the character of men entrusted with oversight in New Testament assemblies. Before God discusses a man's ability to impress people, He establishes the kind of man he must be.

Titus 1:5–9 reinforces the same standard. Paul instructed Titus to ordain elders in every city and immediately described the necessary qualifications. The bishop must be blameless, not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, and not given to filthy lucre. He must be a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate, and faithful to sound doctrine. There is not one requirement concerning the size of his congregation, the popularity of his sermons, the number of books he has sold, or the amount of money flowing through his ministry. Those accomplishments may reflect legitimate labor, but they cannot substitute for the character God demands. A church may advertise its pastor as a tremendous preacher, a gifted administrator, or a visionary leader, but none of those descriptions cancels a single biblical qualification. God is not impressed by the size of the religious machinery when the man operating it cannot govern his own conduct. **The question is not merely whether a man can build a ministry. It is whether he is biblically qualified to lead one.**

1. God Looks at the Man Before He Looks at the Ministry

The word "blameless" appears prominently in both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 because a man's personal conduct cannot be separated from his public responsibility. Blameless does not mean sinlessly perfect. If that were the requirement, no descendant of Adam could qualify, and the ministerial directory would be considerably shorter than it already is. First John 1:8 declares, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The requirement concerns a man's established character, conduct, and reputation. He must not be living under a legitimate, disqualifying reproach that contradicts the office he seeks to occupy. A preacher cannot use the universal sinfulness of mankind to excuse persistent immorality, dishonesty, drunkenness, violence, or corrupt conduct. Everybody being a sinner does not mean every sinner is qualified to be a bishop. That argument would make the qualifications meaningless before the ink dried on the page. God

knows the difference between a man who struggles against sin and a man who builds a ministry around concealing it.

Consider the repeated emphasis upon observable conduct. First Timothy 3:2 requires a bishop to be "of good behaviour," while verse 7 requires "a good report of them which are without." That last qualification is especially revealing. The Lord is concerned not only with how a man appears before his congregation but also with what his conduct reveals to those outside the church. A preacher may have admirers who excuse practically anything he does, but the surrounding community may know him as dishonest, abusive, unreliable, or corrupt. The congregation cannot simply declare every unfavorable report persecution and consider the matter settled. False accusations certainly exist, and Scripture requires truthful evidence rather than gossip. Nevertheless, an established pattern of credible wrongdoing cannot be erased with a stirring sermon about the devil attacking the ministry. The world already possesses enough excuses for despising Christian testimony without churches manufacturing additional ones. A preacher's character should support his testimony, not require a permanent committee to explain away his behavior.

Acts 6:3 provides another useful principle when the apostles instructed the Jerusalem believers to select seven men "of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" for an important responsibility. The passage concerns a particular situation during the early development of the Jerusalem assembly, but the emphasis upon spiritual character is unmistakable. Even the administration of material assistance required men whose lives could withstand examination. How much more serious is the responsibility of overseeing a congregation and teaching the word of God? First Corinthians 4:2 declares, "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." Faithfulness is not measured merely by activity. A man can be extraordinarily active while remaining thoroughly unfaithful. He can attend every meeting, supervise every department, and produce impressive statistics while living a double life. Religious busyness has never been an acceptable substitute for righteousness. A man may successfully organize the church calendar while making a complete disaster of his own character. **God did not call a preacher to look holy under the lights and live like the devil when they go out.**

2. A Man Who Cannot Govern Himself Has No Business Governing God's People

First Timothy 3:2 requires a bishop to be vigilant and sober, while Titus 1:8 adds the words "just, holy, temperate." These are not decorative adjectives intended to make an ordination service sound impressive. They describe essential characteristics of a man entrusted with spiritual responsibility. A sober man exercises sound judgment. A vigilant man remains watchful concerning dangers to himself and the congregation. A temperate man demonstrates restraint rather than allowing every desire, provocation, or appetite to take

command of his conduct. The Holy Ghost does not present self-government as an optional accessory for exceptionally mature ministers. It belongs among the qualifications for the office itself. A fellow who cannot control his temper, appetites, speech, or conduct is not qualified simply because he knows how to control an audience. There is a tremendous difference between controlling a microphone and controlling the flesh. One requires a switch and an amplifier. The other requires obedience to God.

Paul becomes particularly direct concerning anger and violence. Titus 1:7 says a bishop must be "not selfwilled, not soon angry," while 1 Timothy 3:3 requires him to be "no striker" and "not a brawler." Those requirements expose an ugly counterfeit of spiritual authority. Some men have persuaded themselves that constant anger demonstrates conviction, that public humiliation proves courage, and that frightening people into silence constitutes strong leadership. But the Bible distinguishes firmness from brutality. Second Timothy 2:24–25 declares that "the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." The same apostle who commanded Timothy to reprove and rebuke also commanded him to exercise patience and meekness. Biblical correction is not permission for a preacher to unload his personal frustrations upon the congregation. A man who enjoys crushing people may be displaying considerable force, but force is not necessarily spiritual strength. A bull can destroy a china cabinet without possessing one ounce of biblical discernment.

Proverbs 16:32 declares, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." That proverb was written within Israel's wisdom literature, but its moral truth remains consistent with the New Testament qualifications for Christian leadership. Self-control is superior to uncontrolled displays of strength. A preacher may denounce the sins of the world with appropriate biblical force while remaining patient with a struggling believer. He may confront a dangerous false teacher without becoming cruel toward ordinary people seeking instruction. He may exercise firm discipline without secretly enjoying another person's humiliation. Galatians 5:22–23 identifies temperance among the fruit of the Spirit, and a minister who continually excuses uncontrolled behavior should examine whether he is walking in the Spirit or merely preaching about Him. The Holy Ghost never required a pastor to become a timid weakling, but neither did He authorize a sanctified temper tantrum. **A man who cannot rule his own spirit should not be surprised when Scripture questions his fitness to exercise spiritual oversight.**

3. Covetousness Can Wear a Suit and Carry a King James Bible

First Timothy 3:3 requires a bishop to be "not greedy of filthy lucre" and "not covetous." Titus 1:7 repeats the warning against filthy lucre. Peter adds in 1 Peter 5:2 that elders must

take oversight willingly, "not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." The repetition is important because money has a remarkable ability to expose what a man really worships. Scripture does not condemn the legitimate support of ministers. First Corinthians 9:14 teaches that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel, and 1 Timothy 5:17–18 recognizes proper financial support for elders who labor in the word and doctrine. But receiving support is one thing; making financial gain the ruling desire of ministry is another. A faithful preacher may receive wages without being covetous, while another man may refuse a salary and still be consumed with the desire for gifts, influence, and personal advantage. The issue is not merely how much money enters his hands. It is whether money has captured his heart.

First Timothy 6:10 declares, "For the love of money is the root of all evil," and Paul warns that covetous desires have caused some to err from the faith and pierce themselves through with many sorrows. That warning applies with particular force to men handling funds contributed for the Lord's work. Church offerings are not a private allowance for financing a preacher's personal ambitions. They are entrusted resources requiring faithful stewardship. Second Corinthians 8:20–21 demonstrates Paul's concern to avoid blame in the administration of financial gifts and to provide honest things in the sight of both God and men. A pastor should welcome reasonable financial accountability rather than treat every request for proper records as an attack upon his character. If everything is honest, transparency protects the ministry. If everything is dishonest, secrecy protects the thief. A preacher who can explain seventy weeks in Daniel but cannot explain where the church money went has discovered a rather embarrassing gap in his theological education.

Covetousness also produces favoritism. James 2:1–4 rebukes the sin of showing preferential treatment to the wealthy while humiliating the poor. James addresses the twelve tribes scattered abroad, and his epistle must be handled within its proper doctrinal setting, but the condemnation of partiality agrees with the character required of Christian leaders. A congregation should never discover that one standard of conduct applies to ordinary members while another applies to families financing the building project. Wealth does not purchase immunity from biblical correction. Poverty does not make a believer spiritually insignificant. A preacher who remembers the generous donor's preferences while ignoring the struggling widow's needs has begun measuring souls with a financial calculator. The Lord Jesus Christ did not shed more blood for rich believers than poor ones. **The collection plate may reveal a congregation's generosity, but it must never become the instrument by which a pastor determines whose sins deserve attention.**

4. The Man Behind the Pulpit Must Be the Same Man at Home

First Timothy 3:2 establishes that a bishop must be "the husband of one wife," while verses 4–5 require him to be "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity." Paul then asks, "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" That question destroys the notion that a man's public religious achievements can compensate for disorderly private conduct. The bishop's household matters because his conduct there reveals important evidence concerning his capacity for responsible leadership. The requirement concerning one wife must be treated as a genuine qualification rather than explained away to accommodate arrangements Scripture does not approve. A man cannot collect wives like trophies and then claim that an impressive sermon should settle the matter. Biblical marriage is not an accessory to pastoral reputation. Faithfulness in marriage forms part of the character required of a qualified overseer.

The same passage establishes responsibility for household leadership, but it does not authorize tyranny within the home. Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands, "love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." Colossians 3:19 adds, "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." A preacher who demands submission from his wife while refusing to demonstrate biblical love is not faithfully representing the whole counsel of God. Likewise, the requirement concerning children emphasizes responsible household order rather than providing a license for violence, humiliation, or unreasonable domination. Ephesians 6:4 instructs fathers not to provoke their children to wrath but to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. A man's family is not supposed to become a theatrical production designed to protect his pastoral image. His responsibility is to lead faithfully according to Scripture. The same man who preaches patience on Sunday ought to recognize its necessity when the family is watching him on Monday.

Private dishonesty is equally revealing. A preacher who lies to his family, conceals financial misconduct, manipulates those closest to him, or maintains a secret pattern of sexual sin cannot excuse his conduct by appealing to his public usefulness. Proverbs 10:9 declares, "He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known." The proverb is not a promise that every concealed sin will immediately become public knowledge. It establishes the security of uprightness and the danger of crooked conduct. First Thessalonians 4:3–4 addresses sanctification and the believer's responsibility concerning sexual purity, while Hebrews 13:4 declares marriage honorable and warns that God will judge whoremongers and adulterers. Those instructions do not disappear when the offender becomes a preacher. The pulpit is not a moral hiding place. A man may deceive an audience for years through carefully managed appearances, but he cannot deceive the God before whom all things are naked and opened, as Hebrews 4:13 declares.

5. David's Fall Proves That Spiritual Position Does Not Cancel Personal Sin

Second Samuel 11 records one of the most sobering examples of moral failure in Scripture. David was Israel's anointed king, a man who had experienced remarkable victories and possessed an extraordinary place in God's dealings with that nation. Yet he committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged circumstances leading to the death of Uriah. These events occurred under the Mosaic law in the history of Israel's monarchy. David was not a New Testament bishop, and the passage should not be twisted into a direct statement concerning Church Age pastoral qualifications. Nevertheless, the moral lesson is unmistakable. Spiritual privilege, previous obedience, public reputation, and divine appointment do not make a man incapable of grievous sin. David's earlier victories over Israel's enemies did not transform his later wrongdoing into righteousness. A record of faithful service does not create permission for future disobedience. The man who defeated Goliath still had to answer for what happened concerning Bathsheba and Uriah.

In 2 Samuel 12, God sent Nathan to confront the king. Nathan presented the account of a rich man taking a poor man's lamb, drawing David into a judgment that exposed his own guilt. Then came the unforgettable declaration in verse 7: "Thou art the man." Nathan did not apologize because David occupied the throne. He did not explain that confronting the king would damage Israel's reputation. He did not propose keeping everything quiet until the next national celebration had concluded. God had sent him with a message, and he delivered it. David's position made the matter serious; it did not make him exempt. That principle should trouble any religious organization that treats a leader's misconduct as less important than maintaining the appearance of success. A congregation that protects a guilty preacher by destroying everyone who questions him has learned nothing from Nathan. Sometimes the most faithful words spoken to a powerful man are the very words his admirers are afraid to say.

David responded in 2 Samuel 12:13, "I have sinned against the LORD." Psalm 51 reveals the depth of his repentance and his appeal to God's mercy. But forgiveness did not erase every earthly consequence of his conduct. Nathan announced serious judgments that followed David's sin, and the historical record demonstrates the destructive effects upon his household. Here is a necessary distinction for Christian leadership. Under the present dispensation, salvation is received through faith in Jesus Christ, whose finished work provides eternal redemption. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not through works. Forgiveness and spiritual restoration must never be confused with an automatic restoration to every position of responsibility. A man may genuinely repent and still have disqualified himself from certain forms of leadership. The Lord's mercy is not a

document canceling the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3. **Grace can restore a fallen believer to fellowship without requiring a congregation to hand him the keys to the pulpit again.**

6. Ministerial Gifts Are Not Certificates of Spiritual Maturity

The Corinthian church provides an extraordinary warning against confusing spiritual gifts with spiritual maturity. Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 1:7 that the believers came behind in no gift, yet in 1 Corinthians 3:1–3 he described them as carnal and identified envying, strife, and divisions among them. Those two passages belong together. Possessing gifts did not mean the Corinthians were spiritually mature. Their abilities and privileges had not prevented serious disorder. The same distinction applies when evaluating a preacher's qualifications. A man may possess remarkable speaking ability, extensive biblical knowledge, organizational skill, and unusual influence while demonstrating serious defects in character. The ability to explain a doctrine is not proof that the speaker obeys it. A gifted voice may carry truth across a crowded auditorium while the man possessing that voice refuses to practice the truth privately. **A spiritual gift is not a moral inspection certificate, and a crowded church is not evidence that God has approved everything happening behind its doors.**

Paul understood this distinction and applied it to himself. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, he declared, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." The immediate context concerns discipline, labor, and the pursuit of an incorruptible crown. Paul was not teaching that a saved man maintains eternal life through bodily discipline. His concern involved being disapproved in connection with his service and reward after preaching to others. The passage exposes the danger of ministerial activity disconnected from personal obedience. Paul did not imagine that his apostolic calling excused carelessness. He recognized the necessity of governing himself. That should settle the arrogance of any preacher who considers moral examination beneath his position. If the apostle Paul exercised discipline concerning his body and service, a modern minister with considerably less authority ought not regard personal restraint as an unreasonable burden.

First Corinthians 13 continues the warning by demonstrating the emptiness of impressive abilities without charity. Paul describes extraordinary speech, knowledge, faith, and sacrifice, yet insists that these things without charity are spiritually deficient. The chapter originally addresses a congregation confused about spiritual gifts and their proper exercise. It does not provide an excuse for abandoning doctrinal truth in favor of sentimental tolerance. Biblical charity rejoices in the truth, according to verse 6. That means genuine love cannot require a congregation to conceal corruption, excuse sexual immorality, or protect an abusive leader. A preacher may possess extraordinary gifts and still fail the

character requirements established elsewhere in Scripture. A ministry may display remarkable activity while remaining morally compromised. The answer is not to despise gifted preaching or treat every accomplished minister with suspicion. The answer is to measure men by the qualifications God actually provided. Talent may open a door, but biblical character determines whether a man is qualified to occupy the office.

7. A Church That Protects Its Reputation Instead of Confronting Sin Has Lost Its Bearings

First Timothy 5:19–20 establishes a necessary balance concerning accusations against elders. Paul instructs Timothy, "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." He then declares, "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." Both instructions must be honored. The first protects qualified leaders from malicious accusations, personal vendettas, and irresponsible gossip. The second establishes that elders who sin are not immune from appropriate correction. A congregation must not destroy a man's reputation through unsupported allegations. Neither may it dismiss credible evidence because the accused preacher is influential, wealthy, popular, or difficult to replace. Justice requires truth, careful examination, proper safeguards, and impartiality. The man who automatically believes every accusation is not exercising biblical discernment. The man who automatically rejects every accusation against a favored leader is not exercising it either. Scripture does not command churches to protect appearances at the expense of truth.

The responsibility becomes especially serious when wrongdoing involves vulnerable people, financial exploitation, violence, or criminal conduct. Romans 13:1–4 recognizes civil authorities and their responsibility to punish evildoers. A church must not misuse religious language to obstruct legitimate civil accountability or persuade harmed individuals that reporting criminal behavior constitutes betrayal of the ministry. Spiritual discipline and civil responsibility are not interchangeable. Where conduct requires the involvement of lawful authorities, an internal conversation or a private apology does not replace that responsibility. Likewise, a church should take appropriate steps to protect those at risk rather than leaving them exposed while leaders debate the financial consequences of public embarrassment. Galatians 6:1 instructs spiritual believers to restore a fallen brother in meekness, but restoration must be governed by truth, repentance, and biblical qualifications. Forgiveness does not require denying what happened. Compassion does not require pretending that danger has disappeared. **A church that sacrifices the vulnerable to preserve the powerful has abandoned shepherding and begun protecting the wolves.**

The temptation to conceal wrongdoing often comes wrapped in language about protecting God's testimony. Leaders worry that public knowledge of misconduct will damage the ministry, discourage members, or provide ammunition to unbelievers. Those concerns may be understandable, but they cannot justify dishonesty. The testimony of Jesus Christ is not protected by lying about what His servants have done. Proverbs 28:13 declares, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." That is a wisdom principle, not permission to disregard proper processes or expose every private matter publicly. Nevertheless, it establishes that concealment is no substitute for repentance. When organizations intimidate witnesses, manipulate evidence, punish legitimate complainants, or move an unqualified leader into another position without addressing the wrongdoing, they multiply the damage. They may preserve the institution's public image for a season, but they do so at the expense of truth. The Lord never instructed His people to sacrifice righteousness upon the altar of favorable publicity.

The qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 were never intended to become ceremonial decorations recited during an ordination service and forgotten afterward. They establish the character required of those entrusted with oversight. A bishop must be blameless, sober, vigilant, faithful, temperate, hospitable, and capable of teaching sound doctrine. He must not be covetous, violent, selfwilled, or given to conduct that contradicts the office. His household, testimony, and treatment of others matter. These requirements are not canceled by age, reputation, institutional loyalty, or past accomplishments. A church should honor faithful ministers, support them properly, and protect them against false accusations. But respect for the office requires fidelity to the Scriptures governing that office. There is nothing noble about lowering God's standards to accommodate a useful personality. A man's usefulness cannot become the excuse for disregarding his unfitness. The question is not whether he has done impressive things. The question is whether he presently meets the biblical qualifications for the responsibility he claims.

At the same time, these truths should produce humility rather than a spirit of suspicion and cruelty. No Christian leader possesses sinless perfection. Every believer depends upon the grace of God, and every faithful minister must continue watching his own conduct. First Corinthians 10:12 warns, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." A pastor who has served faithfully for decades should not imagine that previous victories have made him immune to temptation. A congregation should not demand impossibility, but it must insist upon the qualifications Scripture actually establishes. When a leader sins, the nature of the wrongdoing, the evidence, the consequences, and the requirements of the office must be faced honestly. Repentance should be encouraged, forgiveness should be extended where appropriate, and necessary accountability must not be abandoned. A church that refuses mercy contradicts the gospel it proclaims. A church

that refuses truth contradicts the God whose mercy it claims to represent. Biblical leadership requires both without allowing either to erase the other.

The final verdict is plain. A preacher's greatest qualification is not his ability to impress an audience but his faithfulness to the God whose word he proclaims. His reputation may travel farther than his character, but eventually the distance between them becomes dangerous. The polished pulpit, impressive building, glowing endorsements, and enthusiastic crowds cannot transform corruption into holiness. A tremendous sermon does not excuse a dishonest life. A large offering does not excuse covetousness. A celebrated ministry does not excuse cruelty, immorality, or the abuse of responsibility. When God established the qualifications for a bishop, He did not invite religious organizations to negotiate exemptions for their favorite personalities. **The preacher must live under the authority of the same Bible he expects everybody else to obey. A polished pulpit cannot hide a rotten character, because the Lord is not examining the furniture. He is examining the man standing behind it.**

4 of 10 — Christian Leadership — God Never Called a Jellyfish to Lead His People

Key Passage — 2 Timothy 4:2

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

There is something mighty peculiar about a preacher who claims to have been called by Almighty God but spends his entire ministry afraid of offending somebody. He will preach against sin provided nobody in the congregation is committing it, denounce false doctrine provided no influential member believes it, and defend biblical truth provided the offering plates are not endangered by the controversy. He has a backbone when discussing dead Pharisees, tremendous courage when condemning ancient idolaters, and absolutely no trouble rebuking people who have been in their graves for three thousand years. But let a wealthy donor threaten to leave, a prominent family complain, or a determined troublemaker begin throwing his weight around, and suddenly our courageous champion begins resembling a jellyfish floating helplessly with the current. He calls it wisdom. He calls it diplomacy. He calls it keeping peace in the church. The Bible has another word for a man who knows what God says but refuses to stand upon it because he fears the consequences. That word is cowardice.

The apostle Paul did not tell Timothy to preach the word whenever the atmosphere was agreeable, the congregation was enthusiastic, and the financial report looked encouraging. He commanded him to preach it "in season, out of season." Paul did not advise Timothy to replace reproof with compliments, rebuke with entertainment, or exhortation with whatever religious nonsense happened to be fashionable that particular month. The command was to preach, reprove, rebuke, and exhort with longsuffering and doctrine. Those are not the instructions of a man trying to produce a religious entertainer. They are the instructions of an apostle preparing a younger minister to stand when people would rather hear almost anything except the truth. The Lord never called a preacher to become a weather vane on top of the church building, spinning around whenever public opinion changes direction. He called him to proclaim the word of God. A man who cannot stand against the wind has no business volunteering to guide others through the storm.

Yet we must establish something before proceeding. Biblical courage is not the same thing as arrogance, and spiritual backbone is not permission to become a religious bully. Some preachers have mistaken their foul temper for the power of God, their personal stubbornness for doctrinal faithfulness, and their inability to receive correction for courageous leadership. Those men are not examples of biblical strength. They are examples of the flesh wearing a ministerial title. First Peter 5:3 expressly forbids elders from behaving "as being lords over God's heritage," while 2 Timothy 2:24 requires the servant of the Lord to be gentle and patient. Those instructions do not contradict the commands to rebuke error and stand for truth. They establish the character with which those responsibilities must be exercised. A faithful shepherd must possess enough courage to confront wolves without developing the habits of one. The church does not need dictators, but neither does it need jellyfish wearing neckties. It needs men who fear God more than men and love truth more than applause.

1. Joshua Was Commanded to Be Strong, Not Popular

Joshua 1:6 contains a direct command from the Lord: "Be strong and of a good courage." Verse 7 repeats the instruction, adding that Joshua must observe to do according to all the law commanded through Moses. Verse 9 reinforces the command again: "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." Three times within this short passage, courage is emphasized. But notice the historical setting. Moses had died, Joshua was being appointed to lead Israel, and the nation was preparing to enter the land promised to its fathers. These were covenant responsibilities belonging to Israel, not instructions promising that every Church Age pastor will conquer a neighborhood or inherit a particular piece of real estate. Rightly dividing the word of truth requires preserving the

original setting. Nevertheless, the passage demonstrates a principle confirmed throughout Scripture: a man entrusted with responsibility must not allow fear to prevent obedience.

Joshua's courage was inseparably connected to the written word of God. Joshua 1:8 commands, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night." God did not command Joshua to become a reckless military adventurer who invented his own objectives and expected Heaven to approve them. He commanded him to obey the revelation already given. That distinction is important because some religious leaders have converted courage into permission to pursue whatever ambition happens to interest them. They announce that God has given them a vision, demand unquestioning support, and accuse doubters of lacking faith. Joshua was not authorized to invent God's commandments. He was commanded to obey them. The modern preacher's responsibility likewise begins with submission to Scripture, not with confidence in his own imagination. Courage without biblical direction is merely stubbornness with a religious vocabulary. A man can march boldly in the wrong direction and still arrive at the wrong destination.

First Corinthians 16:13 brings the principle directly into New Testament Christian conduct: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." Paul was addressing believers in Corinth, a congregation troubled by divisions, immaturity, doctrinal confusion, and disorder. They needed vigilance and steadfastness, not another lesson in becoming socially acceptable. Yet the following verse adds, "Let all your things be done with charity." There is the biblical balance. Strength must operate alongside love, and love must not become an excuse for surrendering truth. A pastor should possess enough courage to make difficult decisions, defend sound doctrine, and refuse ungodly demands. He should also possess enough charity to treat sincere questions with patience. Courage is not measured by how many people a preacher can frighten into silence. It is measured by whether he remains faithful when obedience becomes costly. **A backbone is not evidence of pride when it is holding a man upright beneath the authority of God's word.**

2. Preach the Word Even When Nobody Wants to Hear It

Second Timothy 4:1–5 places the command to preach within a solemn charge before God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was writing to Timothy concerning his responsibility as a minister during the present dispensation of grace. The apostle directed him toward the appearing of Christ and the certainty of divine judgment. Then came the command: "Preach the word." Not preach public opinion, popular philosophy, denominational advertising, political entertainment, or whatever happens to produce the most favorable reaction from the audience. Preach the word. The command is not dependent upon the preacher's personality or the congregation's enthusiasm. It establishes a responsibility to

proclaim divine revelation faithfully. The expression "in season, out of season" removes the excuse that truth must wait until circumstances become convenient. There will be occasions when biblical preaching is welcomed and occasions when it is despised. The preacher's assignment does not change with the temperature of the room. **Truth does not become less true because the congregation becomes less interested in hearing it.**

Paul explains the danger in 2 Timothy 4:3: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." Notice the problem. The hearers are not merely uninformed. They refuse to endure sound doctrine because their own lusts govern their preferences. They seek teachers willing to satisfy those desires. The following verse declares that they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned unto fables. This is not a condemnation of clear explanations, thoughtful illustrations, or engaging preaching. It is a warning against replacing sound doctrine with messages designed to accommodate sinful appetites. The preacher who studies the congregation's preferences more carefully than he studies Scripture has already begun moving in the wrong direction. A religious entertainer can always find an audience willing to applaud him. The question is whether he has anything worth saying when the applause stops. A polished sermon that conceals the truth is still a failure of biblical ministry.

The gospel itself must never be compromised for approval. First Corinthians 15:1–4 declares the death of Christ for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection the third day according to the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not of works. A preacher who changes that message to satisfy a religious organization, accommodate human pride, or preserve attendance has surrendered the very truth he was appointed to proclaim. The same faithfulness applies when addressing sin, holiness, sound doctrine, and Christian conduct. Yet the command to preach the word does not authorize a man to turn personal preferences into divine commandments. He must distinguish what Scripture expressly teaches from what he personally prefers. A faithful minister should be unmovable where God has spoken and appropriately flexible where God has allowed liberty. There is no courage in inventing a prohibition and then congratulating yourself for defending it. Biblical bravery requires standing upon the Bible, not standing upon your own opinion while borrowing the Bible's reputation.

3. A Wealthy Donor Must Never Become the Church's Real Pastor

The fear of losing money has silenced more religious mouths than a shortage of preaching ability ever did. Proverbs 29:25 declares, "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." That proverb belongs to Israel's wisdom literature, but its moral warning agrees with New Testament instruction concerning

faithfulness and freedom from covetousness. A preacher becomes trapped when he allows influential people to determine which biblical truths may be proclaimed. Perhaps a wealthy family finances an important ministry, a prominent businessman contributes heavily to the building fund, or a longtime member enjoys considerable influence over the congregation. Those people deserve the same pastoral care, respect, and scriptural instruction as everybody else. They do not deserve additional commandments tailored to their preferences or immunity from commandments that offend them. A man who purchases control over the pulpit with financial contributions has made a terrible investment, and the preacher who sells that control has committed an even worse transaction.

First Timothy 5:21 gives Timothy an unmistakable instruction concerning impartiality: "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality." The immediate context concerns the treatment of elders, accusations, correction, and responsible judgment. The command is especially significant because favoritism corrupts the very process by which truth and justice should be established. A leader must not determine guilt according to a person's influence or innocence according to the size of his contributions. James 2:1–4 likewise condemns the preferential treatment of the wealthy, although the epistle's address to the twelve tribes scattered abroad must be respected in its historical setting. Partiality is not transformed into righteousness simply because a church labels it practical wisdom. If a poor member is corrected for conduct that a wealthy member is permitted to continue, the church has introduced an unofficial price list for obedience.

The preacher who fears losing a substantial contributor must remember who actually owns the work. Philippians 4:19 declares, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Paul made that statement to believers who had participated in supporting his ministry. It is not a promise that God will finance every expensive project a preacher dreams up, nor does it excuse financial irresponsibility. It does establish the sufficiency of God as the ultimate source of His people's provision. A pastor must handle money honestly, recognize the value of faithful supporters, and avoid unnecessary offense. But he cannot permit financial considerations to overthrow biblical truth. There is nothing wrong with thanking a generous donor. There is something terribly wrong with allowing him to become the unofficial bishop. **When the largest offering purchases the loudest voice in church government, the collection plate has become a ballot box for buying spiritual influence.**

4. Nehemiah Would Not Come Down Because His Enemies Complained

Nehemiah 6 records a remarkable demonstration of steadfast leadership. Nehemiah had been entrusted with the work of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls during the period of Jewish restoration following the Babylonian captivity. This was a historical undertaking concerning Jerusalem and the Jewish people, not a prophetic promise that every modern building campaign carries the same divine authorization. Nevertheless, the account provides a striking example of a man refusing to abandon a legitimate responsibility because adversaries attempted to intimidate him. Sanballat and Geshem invited Nehemiah to meet them in the plain of Ono, but Nehemiah recognized that they intended mischief. His answer in Nehemiah 6:3 was magnificent: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." There are times when a leader must recognize that every invitation does not deserve acceptance, every accusation does not require endless debate, and every opponent does not have the right to interrupt the work. Some distractions deserve a polite refusal and a closed door.

The enemies continued their efforts. Nehemiah 6:4 says they sent the same request four times, and Nehemiah returned the same answer. When repetition failed, they attempted intimidation through a letter containing accusations about rebellion and ambition. Nehemiah rejected those allegations, declaring in verse 8, "There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart." That is what leadership sometimes requires: the ability to distinguish a legitimate concern from a manufactured controversy. Not every complaint deserves agreement, and not every critic deserves control of the agenda. Yet the passage must not be abused by pastors who label everyone questioning their conduct a modern Sanballat. Nehemiah was defending a genuine responsibility against documented hostile schemes. He was not using the language of opposition to escape accountability for misconduct. **A man who refuses to abandon God's work because enemies threaten him demonstrates courage; a man who calls every honest question an enemy attack demonstrates something considerably less impressive.**

Nehemiah also demonstrated that courage requires discernment. In Nehemiah 6:10–13, an attempt was made to frighten him into taking refuge in the temple. Nehemiah recognized the deception and refused to act in a manner that would compromise his position. He asked in verse 11, "Should such a man as I flee?" His refusal was not theatrical bravado. He understood that fear was being used to manipulate him into wrongdoing. The wall was eventually completed, as Nehemiah 6:15 records, despite opposition and intimidation. Christian leaders should learn the practical distinction between avoiding foolish distractions and refusing legitimate correction. A pastor must not surrender every difficult decision simply because opposition arises. Neither should he claim that completing a large project proves every decision was righteous. Nehemiah's courage was joined to

prayer, judgment, and fidelity to his responsibility. The church needs leaders who can recognize manipulation without becoming suspicious of every person who disagrees. Courage is not the refusal to listen; it is the refusal to be governed by fear.

5. A Shepherd Who Refuses to Confront Wolves Is Abandoning the Sheep

Acts 20:28–31 contains one of Paul's most solemn warnings to church leaders. Speaking to the elders of Ephesus, he declared, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." He commanded them to feed the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. Then Paul warned that grievous wolves would enter among them, not sparing the flock, and that men would arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves. Notice that pastoral responsibility includes more than teaching pleasant lessons and organizing meetings. The overseer must recognize danger and protect the congregation from destructive influences. A shepherd who sees wolves approaching and refuses to respond because confrontation might damage attendance has misunderstood his calling. Sheep do not need a shepherd who negotiates with the wolves about maintaining a friendly atmosphere while the flock is being devoured. They need somebody willing to recognize the danger and act.

Titus 1:9 requires a bishop to hold fast the faithful word so that he may exhort and convince gainsayers by sound doctrine. Verses 10–11 identify unruly and vain talkers whose mouths must be stopped because they subvert whole houses, teaching things they ought not for filthy lucre's sake. Those are strong words, and they concern real doctrinal dangers. A pastor who refuses to confront false teaching because the offender is popular has failed to perform an essential responsibility. However, the means of correction must remain governed by Scripture. The preacher is not authorized to threaten people, fabricate charges, or silence honest biblical questions. He must demonstrate the error from the word of God and take appropriate action within the responsibilities entrusted to church leadership. There is a difference between stopping destructive teaching and suppressing examination of the preacher's own teaching. **A shepherd should silence the wolf's destructive doctrine with Scripture, not silence the sheep's legitimate questions with intimidation.**

First Corinthians 5 demonstrates another necessary aspect of courage: confronting serious sin within a congregation. Paul addressed an established case of sexual immorality that the Corinthian church had failed to handle properly. He condemned their glorying and instructed them to exercise discipline. The chapter concerns identifiable wrongdoing, not a preacher's irritation over personal disagreements. Church discipline is not a license for public humiliation whenever a member challenges an administrative decision. Its purpose is to address sin faithfully, protect the assembly, and uphold the truth. Second Corinthians

2:6–8 subsequently demonstrates the importance of forgiveness, comfort, and reaffirmed love toward a disciplined individual in the circumstances Paul describes. Biblical courage therefore includes both correction and restoration. A coward refuses to confront sin because the consequences are unpleasant. A tyrant enjoys confrontation because it gives him power over others. A faithful shepherd corrects because Scripture requires it and seeks restoration because the Lord values the souls involved. Discipline without biblical purpose becomes cruelty, while compassion without truth becomes permission for continued destruction.

6. Spiritual Backbone Is Not Permission to Become a Religious Bully

First Peter 5:2–3 instructs elders to feed God's flock, taking oversight willingly and not for filthy lucre, while expressly forbidding them to behave "as being lords over God's heritage." That passage destroys the popular misconception that strong leadership requires personal domination. A pastor possesses real responsibilities, but the congregation does not become his private property. His authority is ministerial, accountable, and governed by Scripture. A bully depends upon fear, humiliation, and unquestioning loyalty to maintain control. A faithful shepherd depends upon the word of God, sound judgment, and responsible oversight. The difference becomes especially apparent when a leader faces disagreement. The bully treats an honest question as personal treason because his authority rests heavily upon his own importance. The faithful pastor examines the question, answers from Scripture, and remains willing to correct his judgment when necessary. **A man who needs everybody frightened of him has confused spiritual authority with the management of a hostage situation.**

Second Timothy 2:24–25 provides the character requirement: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." The command comes from the same apostle who instructed Timothy to reprove, rebuke, and exhort in the following chapters. There is no contradiction. The minister must possess strength without becoming quarrelsome, conviction without becoming cruel, and patience without surrendering doctrine. The expression "apt to teach" is especially important. A qualified leader should be able to explain biblical truth instead of resorting immediately to threats and insults. A man who knows the Scriptures should not fear opening them before someone who sincerely desires understanding. This does not mean a pastor must debate every disruptive individual indefinitely. It means his conduct must remain consistent with the responsibilities and qualifications established by the Holy Ghost. The preacher's temper is not an additional gift of the Spirit.

The Lord Jesus Christ established the proper understanding of leadership in Matthew 20:25–28. Speaking to His disciples during His earthly ministry, He contrasted the dominion exercised by Gentile rulers with the servant character expected of those following Him. "But it shall not be so among you," He declared. His own example involved ministering and giving His life a ransom for many. Although the immediate setting concerns the disciples and the kingdom expectations surrounding Christ's earthly ministry, the principle of servant leadership is reinforced in direct New Testament instructions to elders. Biblical service does not mean abandoning responsibility, and biblical authority does not mean demanding personal worship. The Saviour possessed absolute authority and yet demonstrated genuine humility. A preacher possesses limited authority and sometimes behaves as though the universe would collapse if somebody questioned his seating arrangements. That is not Christlike leadership. The Lord washed feet while religious men competed for prominence. A preacher would do well to remember which example he has been commanded to follow.

7. Real Courage Includes Admitting When You Are Wrong

Galatians 2:11 records Paul's confrontation with Peter: "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." The issue involved Peter's inconsistent conduct concerning fellowship with Gentile believers and the influence of those associated with the circumcision. Paul recognized that the conduct did not agree with the truth of the gospel. Peter's apostolic position did not place him above correction, and Paul's willingness to confront him demonstrated courage in defense of revealed truth. This was not a disagreement over personal taste or an excuse for Christians to treat every administrative judgment as a doctrinal crisis. It concerned conduct that compromised the truth Paul was commissioned to proclaim. Nevertheless, the lesson concerning accountability is unmistakable. If a prominent apostle could be confronted when wrong, an ordinary pastor cannot reasonably claim exemption from biblical examination. A preacher who can correct everybody except himself has not achieved superior spirituality. He has developed a very convenient blind spot.

First Timothy 5:19–20 establishes safeguards concerning accusations against elders and the necessity of rebuking those who sin. The requirement for credible evidence protects leaders from malicious charges, while the instruction concerning rebuke demonstrates that position does not eliminate accountability. Genuine courage must operate in both directions. A pastor must stand against false accusations without surrendering to intimidation, but he must also acknowledge established wrongdoing without hiding behind his office. He should defend vulnerable believers against exploitation, refuse to protect influential offenders, and make decisions according to truth rather than personal

relationships. Proverbs 31:8–9 contains an instruction associated with King Lemuel's royal responsibilities to speak for those unable to speak for themselves and judge righteously. That passage is not a direct Church Age command establishing a pastor's office, but its moral concern for righteous judgment agrees with the New Testament's rejection of partiality. **The courage to rebuke a powerless person means very little if a preacher becomes speechless whenever the guilty party possesses influence.**

Admitting a mistake requires a particular kind of strength because pride naturally resists surrendering its appearance of perfection. Proverbs 28:13 declares, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." The principle does not authorize careless accusations or require every personal matter to become public entertainment. It does establish the necessity of honesty before God. A pastor may make an incorrect administrative decision, misunderstand a situation, speak too quickly, or judge a matter without sufficient information. When the facts become clear, he should correct his course. That does not weaken legitimate authority. It demonstrates that his authority remains subject to truth. There is nothing admirable about defending a foolish decision merely because admitting error would embarrass the man who made it. A preacher can recover from being wrong about a schedule, a policy, or a practical judgment. What destroys trust is insisting that his mistakes must be treated as divine wisdom. **The strongest leader in the room is not necessarily the man who never changes his mind, but the man who will change it when God's word and the truth require him to do so.**

The Christian church does not need another generation of leaders trained to smile at false doctrine, surrender to influential complainers, and measure faithfulness by the absence of controversy. It needs men who know the word of God, rightly divide it, and possess enough courage to proclaim it when obedience becomes inconvenient. A preacher must not manufacture disputes simply to prove that he has convictions, but neither may he abandon convictions because somebody threatens to leave. He must recognize the difference between matters established by Scripture and matters requiring reasonable judgment. He must protect the flock, confront destructive conduct, maintain sound doctrine, and exercise oversight with patience and integrity. His responsibility is not to win every popularity contest or preserve every relationship at the expense of truth. It is to be faithful to Jesus Christ. The applause of a congregation cannot replace the approval of the Lord, and the displeasure of influential people cannot cancel a commandment of God.

The congregation also bears responsibility. Believers should support faithful pastoral leadership, receive sound instruction, and refuse the temptation to turn every disagreement into a campaign against the preacher. Hebrews 13:17 establishes a genuine responsibility to obey those who have the rule over believers, recognizing that such leaders

watch for souls and must give account. Yet that responsibility does not require unconditional submission to unbiblical demands or the concealment of proven wrongdoing. First Peter 5:3 establishes that elders must not become lords over God's heritage. Both passages belong in the same Bible, and both must be obeyed. A congregation that continually undermines faithful leadership produces disorder. A congregation that treats a pastor as incapable of error invites domination. The answer is neither rebellion nor unquestioning personal loyalty. It is biblical order under the authority of Jesus Christ and His written word. The pastor must lead faithfully, and the people must respond faithfully. Neither possesses permission to replace Scripture with personal preference.

So let the preacher stand. Let him open the King James Bible, proclaim the gospel of the grace of God, expose false doctrine, rebuke sin, defend the vulnerable, and refuse to sell his convictions for financial security or public approval. Let him exercise the courage of Joshua without stealing Israel's covenant promises, the steadfastness of Nehemiah without labeling every critic an enemy, and the doctrinal faithfulness of Paul without claiming apostolic infallibility for himself. Let him also possess enough humility to admit his mistakes, enough patience to instruct the sincere, and enough love to restore those who repent. A bully uses authority because he fears losing control. A faithful shepherd exercises authority because he fears God more than men. **The Lord never called a man to become a dictator with a Bible, but He certainly never called him to become a jellyfish with a necktie. God did not give His servants a backbone so they could keep it folded inside their Sunday suits. He gave them His word, commanded them to stand, and expects them to remain standing when the crowd decides it would rather hear something else.**

5 of 10 — Christian Leadership — Even Moses Could Not Carry the Whole Camp on His Back

Key Passage — Exodus 18:17–18

"And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone."

There is something mighty foolish about a preacher who believes Almighty God cannot accomplish anything in the local church unless he personally supervises every nail, every nickel, every nursery schedule, and every nervous soul who walks through the front door.

He wants to preach every sermon, teach every class, approve every announcement, organize every ministry, examine every expenditure, and make every decision from the color of the carpet to the temperature of the baptistry. Then, after working himself into exhaustion, he stands before the congregation complaining that nobody wants to help him. Well, perhaps somebody ought to explain that people cannot help a man who refuses to let them touch anything. A church is not supposed to operate like a one-man circus where the preacher sells the tickets, trains the animals, raises the tent, and then demands applause because he is exhausted. God never established the body of Christ so that ninety-nine members could sit around watching one member perform. Even Moses could not carry the whole camp on his back.

Exodus 18 records a remarkable moment in the life of Israel's great leader. Moses had confronted Pharaoh, witnessed the plagues upon Egypt, led Israel through the Red Sea, and stood at the center of God's extraordinary dealings with His chosen nation. Yet when his father-in-law Jethro observed the way Moses was attempting to administer judgment among the people, he recognized a serious problem. Moses was sitting to judge the people from morning until evening, and the entire congregation was standing around waiting for him. Jethro did not congratulate Moses for demonstrating superior dedication. He did not suggest that the length of the line proved what a magnificent leader he was. He said plainly, "The thing that thou doest is not good." That statement ought to be printed in large letters and hung over the desk of every minister who confuses personal indispensability with spiritual faithfulness. A man can be doing good work in a bad manner, and the fact that he is exhausted does not automatically prove he is obedient.

The lesson requires careful biblical handling. Exodus 18 concerns Moses and Israel during the wilderness journey, before the giving of the law at Sinai recorded in the following chapters. Moses occupied a unique position as God's appointed leader and mediator in the nation's history. He was not a New Testament bishop administering a Church Age congregation, and Israel's judicial organization is not a ready-made constitution for a Baptist church. Nevertheless, the passage establishes principles of responsible leadership that agree with New Testament teaching concerning spiritual gifts, shared service, qualified workers, and orderly administration. Moses retained his responsibility before God while entrusting appropriate judgments to other capable men. He did not abandon his office, surrender the truth, or appoint everybody who happened to volunteer. He recognized that faithful leadership sometimes requires allowing other qualified people to carry genuine responsibility. The lesson is not that every man should become a leader. It is that no leader should imagine God has made everybody else unnecessary. **A shepherd is supposed to tend the flock, not carry every sheep around on his shoulders until he collapses beneath the wool.**

1. Moses Was Doing God's Work, but He Was Doing Too Much of It Himself

Exodus 18:13 tells us that Moses sat to judge the people while the people stood by him "from the morning unto the evening." Jethro observed the arrangement and asked a perfectly reasonable question in verse 14: "What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?" Notice that Jethro was not questioning the necessity of righteous judgment. Moses explained in verses 15–16 that the people came to him to enquire of God and that he made them know the statutes and laws of God. The work itself was legitimate. The difficulty was that Moses had concentrated the entire operation upon himself. Every question, controversy, and judgment apparently required his personal attention. That arrangement placed an enormous burden upon Moses and created unnecessary delays for the people. A man can possess genuine authority and still administer it unwisely. Sometimes the problem is not a shortage of dedication but a shortage of judgment concerning how responsibility should be distributed.

Jethro's response in Exodus 18:17–18 is unusually direct. He does not wrap the correction in enough compliments to make Moses forget the point. He tells him that the arrangement is not good and warns that both Moses and the people will wear away under the burden. That second observation is particularly important. The consequences of poor leadership were not confined to Moses. The people were suffering because everything had to pass through one man. The same problem appears when a pastor insists that every legitimate responsibility requires his personal approval. Workers cannot proceed, decisions accumulate, ministry opportunities are delayed, and capable believers eventually become discouraged. Then the preacher complains that the congregation lacks initiative. Of course it does. Every time somebody attempts to exercise initiative, the fellow behind the pulpit grabs the steering wheel. **A bottleneck is not necessarily evidence that a leader is important. Sometimes it is evidence that he has positioned himself where everything gets stuck.**

The most revealing words appear at the end of verse 18: "thou art not able to perform it thyself alone." Moses was a remarkable man, but he was still a man. His calling did not eliminate human limitations, and his extraordinary experiences with God did not make him capable of performing every task personally. That fact should humble modern preachers who imagine their own presence is essential to every activity in the congregation. God has never required a pastor to possess omniscience, omnipresence, or unlimited physical strength. Those attributes belong to God, not to a minister who happens to own a particularly impressive collection of commentaries. A faithful leader should work diligently, but he must also recognize the distinction between responsibilities that require his

personal attention and work that qualified people can faithfully perform. A church becomes healthier when its members are taught to serve rather than trained to wait helplessly for the pastor's permission. The objective is not to make the leader less faithful, but to make the work more faithfully accomplished.

2. Jethro Did Not Recommend Appointing Every Volunteer With a Pulse

Exodus 18:21 establishes the necessary qualifications for the men who would share responsibility: "Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness." Those requirements deserve serious examination. Jethro did not recommend selecting the loudest men, the wealthiest men, the most popular men, or the men who had contributed the most impressive number of animals to the congregation's provisions. He emphasized ability, reverence toward God, truthfulness, and freedom from covetousness. These were judicial responsibilities involving decisions that could affect people's lives and possessions. The men entrusted with them needed more than enthusiasm. They required established character. A man who fears God is less likely to sacrifice truth to please influential people. A man of truth is less likely to manipulate testimony. A man who hates covetousness is less likely to turn judgment into an opportunity for personal gain. Godly delegation requires discernment, not desperation.

The same concern for qualifications appears in the New Testament. First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 establish character requirements for bishops and deacons, and 1 Timothy 3:10 declares concerning deacons, "And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." Notice the word "proved." A congregation should not place someone in responsibility simply because he volunteers enthusiastically or happens to be related to an influential family. Faithfulness should be demonstrated, qualifications should be examined, and the nature of the responsibility should be considered. A man may be exceptionally gifted in one area while lacking the maturity required for another. Someone who handles physical maintenance competently is not automatically qualified to teach doctrine, and someone who can explain Romans may not possess the judgment necessary to oversee church finances. Ability matters, character matters, and the work itself matters. **Putting an unqualified man in charge because he is available is rather like hiring a blind watchman because he owns a flashlight.**

Jethro's advice also included an important qualification in Exodus 18:23: "If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so." The counsel was not presented as permission to disregard God's authority over Israel. Moses was to remain responsible before God while establishing an orderly arrangement for lesser judgments. Verses 24–26 record that Moses hearkened to his father-in-law and appointed able men as rulers of thousands, hundreds,

fifties, and tens. Difficult matters continued to come before Moses, while smaller matters were judged by the appointed rulers. Deuteronomy 1:9–18 later recounts the appointment of these leaders and emphasizes righteous judgment without respect of persons. The organization was designed to accomplish the work faithfully, not merely to make Moses comfortable. That distinction matters in every generation. Delegation is not an excuse for laziness. It is a responsible distribution of labor so that necessary work is performed by capable people under proper authority. A wise leader asks whether a responsibility requires his attention, not whether surrendering personal control will damage his importance.

3. The Seven in Acts 6 Prove That Necessary Work Must Not Replace the Word

Acts 6:1 records a serious problem in the growing Jerusalem congregation. The number of disciples was multiplying, and a murmuring arose because the Grecian widows were being neglected in the daily ministration. The issue concerned the fair administration of assistance to vulnerable women within the early church. This was not a trivial complaint over decorations, seating arrangements, or somebody's favorite hymn. Real people were being overlooked in an important responsibility. The twelve apostles did not dismiss the problem as an inconvenience or announce that widows should simply learn to be patient. They recognized that the matter required attention. However, they also recognized that the solution could not involve abandoning the particular responsibilities Christ had entrusted to them. Their response in Acts 6:2 was unmistakable: "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables." Both kinds of work mattered, but they did not belong to the same men in the same manner.

The apostles instructed the believers to select seven men "of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom," whom they could appoint over the business. Acts 6:3 identifies the character necessary for the responsibility, while verse 4 declares the apostles' continuing priority: "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." These seven are not expressly called deacons in the passage, although their service illustrates principles reflected in the later New Testament office. The appointment did not suggest that distributing material assistance was beneath the dignity of the apostles. It recognized that different responsibilities required faithful attention without allowing one necessary work to consume another. A pastor who spends his entire week supervising routine administrative details while neglecting prayer and serious Bible study should examine his priorities. **The congregation does not need a preacher who can personally repair every leaking faucet but cannot explain the difference between law and grace because he never has time to study.**

Acts 6:5–7 records that the congregation chose the seven, the apostles prayed and laid their hands upon them, and the word of God increased. The number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. We should not pretend that every modern church following a particular organizational formula will experience identical numerical growth. The historical setting involved the early Jerusalem assembly during the period recorded in Acts, and God's dealings must be understood in that context. Nevertheless, the relationship between responsible administration and continued ministry of the word is instructive. The neglected widows received appropriate attention, qualified men received meaningful responsibility, and the apostles continued their appointed work. The solution was not to minimize service but to organize it faithfully. A church does not honor Scripture by allowing practical neglect to continue, nor does it honor Scripture by burying its teachers beneath administrative details until preaching becomes an afterthought. Necessary work requires qualified workers, and faithful leadership recognizes the distinction.

4. Nehemiah Built a Wall by Putting the People to Work

Nehemiah 3 provides a striking account of organized labor in the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall. The chapter records priests, rulers, craftsmen, families, and other workers repairing assigned portions of the wall and its gates. The project belonged to the historical restoration of Jerusalem following the Babylonian captivity. It was not a Church Age building program, and its completion does not guarantee that every modern church construction project carries divine approval. Nevertheless, Nehemiah's organization illustrates an important principle: a leader can possess clear responsibility without personally performing every portion of the work. The wall was not rebuilt because Nehemiah acquired the ability to occupy every location simultaneously. It was rebuilt through organized labor involving many people. Each portion mattered because the completed structure depended upon the work being accomplished together. **A leader who insists upon laying every brick himself should not be surprised when the wall remains unfinished and the congregation grows tired of watching him carry a trowel.**

Nehemiah 4 introduces the additional difficulty of opposition. Sanballat and Tobiah mocked the rebuilding efforts, and threats eventually required measures for protecting the workers. Nehemiah organized the people according to their families and responsibilities while continuing the work. Verse 6 declares, "So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work." Notice the emphasis upon the people. Nehemiah provided leadership, but the people labored. Later, the workers continued under conditions requiring vigilance, with provisions for defense and communication. This arrangement did not eliminate Nehemiah's responsibility. He assessed the danger, encouraged the people, established measures for their protection,

and remained involved. That is the difference between responsible delegation and careless abandonment. A leader does not simply announce that somebody else is responsible and disappear when trouble arrives. He must provide direction, recognize danger, and maintain the oversight necessary for the work to proceed faithfully.

Nehemiah 3:5 also records an uncomfortable detail concerning the nobles of the Tekoites: "but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord." There were people willing to labor and others who considered themselves too important to participate. That distinction remains instructive. Delegation must not become an arrangement where influential people receive titles while faithful workers carry every burden. A church can develop an impressive collection of committees, directors, coordinators, and supervisors while accomplishing remarkably little actual ministry. Titles do not build walls. Work builds walls. A pastor should recognize capable people, assign appropriate responsibilities, and encourage actual service rather than creating a religious bureaucracy that spends more time discussing work than performing it. The object is not to reproduce Nehemiah's historical arrangements in a modern congregation but to recognize the value of organized, responsible labor. God has never been impressed by an elaborate organizational chart when everybody on the chart is waiting for somebody else to pick up a hammer.

5. The Body of Christ Was Never Designed to Operate Like a One-Man Show

First Corinthians 12:12–27 establishes the spiritual unity and diversity of the body of Christ. Paul declares in verse 12 that the body is one and has many members, and in verse 13 that believers are baptized by one Spirit into one body. This passage concerns the Church, not Israel's national organization under Moses or Jerusalem's reconstruction under Nehemiah. The body of Christ is a spiritual organism formed through the work of the Holy Ghost, and its members possess differing functions. Verse 18 declares, "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him." That statement is fatal to the notion that one minister should perform every meaningful function while the remaining believers exist merely to provide an audience. God has placed members in the body according to His own purpose. A leader who treats those members as unnecessary has not discovered a superior form of ministry. He has demonstrated a poor understanding of the body God established.

Paul presses the illustration further in 1 Corinthians 12:21: "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." The immediate illustration concerns the interdependence of members, not a system of church offices copied directly from human anatomy. Nevertheless, its meaning is unmistakable. God designed the body to function through the contribution of different members. A preacher may possess unusual ability to teach Scripture, but that does not make him

equally capable of every responsibility within the assembly. Another believer may excel in administration, practical assistance, hospitality, or financial stewardship. Those abilities do not threaten the preacher's calling. They contribute to the work. A pastor who views capable workers as rivals is behaving like an eye jealous of a hand because the hand can pick something up. **The body of Christ is not improved by cutting off every useful member until the pastor becomes the only limb permitted to move.**

Ephesians 4:11–16 reinforces the principle by explaining that Christ gave ministers for "the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Verse 16 describes the body being joined and compacted together through the contribution of its parts, making increase unto the edifying of itself in love. The text does not teach that every believer possesses identical gifts or that established offices should be abolished. It teaches that the body matures through the proper functioning of its members under Christ, who is the Head. The minister's responsibility includes preparing believers for faithful service, not maintaining their dependence upon his personal supervision. The extraordinary sign gifts associated with the apostolic period must be understood within their biblical setting, but the continuing principle of differing responsibilities and mutual service remains clear. A congregation grows stronger when its members are instructed, equipped, and encouraged to serve according to Scripture. The preacher is supposed to develop workers, not manufacture spectators.

6. Delegation Is Not Abdication, and Oversight Is Not Micromanagement

Some leaders make the mistake of refusing to delegate anything. Others make the opposite mistake of delegating everything and then disappearing whenever responsibility becomes unpleasant. Neither extreme represents faithful oversight. First Peter 5:2 commands elders to feed the flock of God and take the oversight thereof. The instruction requires active responsibility. A pastor cannot appoint someone to an important task and then pretend he has no further concern about whether the work is performed honestly, competently, or according to Scripture. Responsibility should be accompanied by appropriate direction, authority, and accountability. The nature of the oversight will vary according to the task and the qualifications of the worker, but delegation never converts a leader into an uninterested spectator. A faithful pastor should know enough about the ministries under his care to recognize serious problems and respond properly. **Handing somebody the steering wheel does not mean the captain has permission to jump overboard and claim the ship is no longer his concern.**

At the same time, oversight must not become relentless interference. A pastor who assigns a responsibility and then questions every small decision, reverses every judgment, and insists upon personally approving every detail has not genuinely delegated anything. He

has merely recruited another person to perform work while remaining chained to his permission. That arrangement discourages initiative and prevents capable workers from developing judgment. Exodus 18:22 established that the appointed rulers would judge the smaller matters while the greater matters came before Moses. The distinction mattered. If every small cause continued returning to Moses for approval, the arrangement would have accomplished almost nothing. Wise oversight therefore requires defining responsibilities, communicating expectations, establishing appropriate limits, and allowing trustworthy people to perform the work entrusted to them. A leader who cannot tolerate another man's judgment should reconsider whether he selected a qualified worker in the first place. **There is no virtue in appointing someone to carry a load and then keeping both hands on the package because you are afraid he might carry it differently.**

Paul's dealings with his fellow laborers demonstrate both delegation and continued concern. In Titus 1:5, he explains that he left Titus in Crete to set things in order and ordain elders in every city, according to his appointment. Timothy likewise received serious responsibilities involving doctrine, discipline, and the ordering of church affairs. These men were not apostles possessing Paul's unique authority, but they were entrusted with meaningful work under apostolic instruction. Paul communicated expectations, gave doctrinal direction, addressed difficulties, and recognized the importance of qualified men. His letters do not present a model of personal indifference, nor do they suggest that faithful workers should remain incapable of acting without constant supervision. A leader must know when to provide detailed instruction, when to exercise judgment, and when to trust a proven worker. The purpose of delegation is to accomplish the work faithfully while preparing others for greater responsibility. A ministry that can function only when one particular personality is present has developed a dangerous weakness, regardless of how impressive that personality may be.

7. The Man Who Refuses to Develop Other Leaders Is Building Himself a Throne

Second Timothy 2:2 contains one of the clearest instructions concerning the continuation of faithful teaching: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Notice the successive responsibility. Paul had instructed Timothy, Timothy was to commit the teaching to faithful men, and those men were to become capable of instructing others. The objective was not to preserve permanent dependence upon Paul's personal presence. It was to transmit sound doctrine faithfully through qualified teachers. That requires more than collecting admirers. It requires instruction, patience, examination, correction, and the willingness to recognize the growth of others. A pastor who never prepares anyone else to teach, serve, or accept meaningful responsibility has neglected an important aspect of

ministerial stewardship. **A faithful leader should produce capable servants of Jesus Christ, not an expanding collection of people who are helpless whenever he leaves the room.**

There is also a matter of pride that must be confronted. Some men refuse to develop other workers because they cannot tolerate the possibility that somebody else might perform a task successfully without them. They enjoy being needed, consulted, admired, and treated as indispensable. Every ministry must carry their fingerprints, every successful worker must publicly acknowledge their importance, and every promising younger man is quietly regarded as a potential threat. That attitude is not spiritual discernment. It is selfish ambition. Third John 9 identifies Diotrephes as a man "who loveth to have the preeminence among them." His conduct included rejecting apostolic authority and acting against those who received the brethren. A leader who desires preeminence more than faithful service will eventually regard other people's usefulness as competition. But the Church belongs to Jesus Christ, not to the man occupying the pulpit. The Lord has not appointed pastors to construct monuments to their own indispensability. A preacher should rejoice when faithful workers mature, not behave as though their success represents an attempted overthrow.

The ultimate purpose of Christian leadership must remain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:18 declares concerning Christ, "that in all things he might have the preeminence." There is the position no pastor may claim for himself. The preacher is a servant, the workers are servants, and the congregation belongs to the Lord. First Corinthians 3:6–7 establishes the proper attitude: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." Paul immediately adds that neither the planter nor the one watering possesses the ultimate importance, because God gives the increase. This does not diminish the value of faithful labor. It places that labor under the authority of the One who makes it fruitful. A pastor should be willing to invest in workers who may eventually become more capable than he is in particular responsibilities. That is not failure. It is faithful multiplication of service. **The man who measures success by how helpless everybody becomes without him is not building the body of Christ. He is building a monument to himself.**

The lesson from Moses should be plain enough for any preacher willing to open his Bible and read it. A man may be genuinely called, sincerely dedicated, unusually gifted, and still be attempting to accomplish more than he can faithfully administer alone. Moses needed trustworthy men to share appropriate judicial responsibilities. The apostles recognized the necessity of qualified workers to address practical needs while they continued in prayer and the ministry of the word. Nehemiah organized labor rather than attempting to rebuild

Jerusalem's wall single-handedly. Paul described a body composed of many members and instructed Timothy to prepare faithful men capable of teaching others. Those passages belong to different historical settings and must not be carelessly blended into one undifferentiated system of church government. Yet their consistent practical lesson is unmistakable. Responsible leadership recognizes both the limits of the individual and the value of qualified fellow laborers. A preacher does not become more spiritual by refusing help that God has made available through faithful believers.

The congregation must also understand its responsibility. Members should not expect the pastor to perform every act of service while they criticize the results from comfortable seats. A church is not a religious restaurant where the preacher cooks every meal, serves every table, washes every dish, and then receives complaints because somebody wanted a different dessert. Believers should recognize their opportunities for service, develop faithfulness in the responsibilities entrusted to them, and support the orderly administration of the assembly. At the same time, workers must not confuse delegated responsibility with independent authority to disregard Scripture or overturn legitimate oversight. First Corinthians 14:40 declares, "Let all things be done decently and in order." That instruction belongs to Paul's correction of disorder within the Corinthian assembly, but its governing principle remains essential. The work should be organized, responsibilities should be understood, and everyone should labor under the authority of God's word. A healthy congregation does not revolve around one exhausted performer or descend into disorderly competition among ambitious workers.

So let the pastor preach, teach, pray, oversee, correct, and lead according to the Scriptures. Let qualified workers carry real responsibilities, and let those responsibilities be accompanied by appropriate direction and accountability. Let capable believers develop their gifts and abilities without being treated as threats to the preacher's importance. Let the congregation recognize that service belongs to the whole body, not merely to the man standing behind the pulpit. Moses was not diminished when other men began judging appropriate matters. The apostles were not dishonored when seven qualified men were appointed over an important responsibility. Nehemiah was not made less significant because other people laid the stones. And Paul was not threatened because faithful men would teach the truth after him. **God never called a preacher to become a one-man religious empire. He called him to be faithful. The body of Christ was never designed to operate like a circus with one star performer and a congregation buying tickets. Even Moses could not carry the whole camp on his back, and the modern preacher who thinks he can has mistaken his own shoulders for the everlasting arms of Almighty God.**

6 of 10 — Christian Leadership — Decisions Made With Scripture and Counsel, Not Ego and Impulse

Key Passage — Proverbs 15:22

"Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established."

There is something terribly dangerous about a preacher who believes every thought passing through his head must have arrived directly from the throne of God. He wakes up Monday morning with an idea, announces Tuesday evening that the Lord has given him a vision, and by Wednesday he expects the entire congregation to surrender its judgment, empty its pockets, and follow him into whatever adventure his imagination has manufactured. If somebody asks a reasonable question, he accuses them of lacking faith. If somebody examines the financial consequences, he calls them carnal. If somebody opens the Bible and asks where God commanded the project, he announces that they are resisting the leadership of the Holy Ghost. What began as a personal preference has suddenly become a divine decree, complete with an unofficial threat against anybody foolish enough to disagree. But the Bible never appointed a pastor to become an infallible decision-making machine. God gave him Scripture, commanded him to exercise wisdom, and established responsibilities that require something more substantial than religious excitement dressed in a necktie.

Proverbs 15:22 declares, "Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established." That verse was written within the wisdom literature of Israel, and its original setting must be respected. It is not a promise that every church committee will make perfect decisions or that a pastor must conduct a congregational election before choosing a hymn. Nevertheless, the principle agrees with the New Testament's repeated emphasis upon wisdom, sound judgment, humility, and responsible stewardship. God did not design leadership to operate according to the unchecked impulses of a man who considers himself too important to receive advice. The verse contrasts disappointed purposes with purposes established through counsel. It recognizes that human judgment is limited and that wise instruction can expose dangers an individual has overlooked. A man who refuses counsel because he cannot bear the possibility of being corrected has already demonstrated why he needs it. **A preacher may have a calling from God without possessing the personal wisdom of Solomon, the administrative ability of Joseph, and the infallibility of the Holy Ghost.**

Christian leadership frequently involves decisions for which Scripture provides governing principles without supplying every practical detail. The Bible commands believers to

assemble, but it does not establish the hour of every local church service. It requires honest stewardship, but it does not specify the price of a church van, the annual utilities budget, or the square footage necessary for a fellowship hall. It commands the preaching of the gospel, but it does not provide a universal itinerary for every missionary. These matters require judgment under biblical authority. A pastor must distinguish between what God has commanded and what responsible leadership must determine. He must pray, study, seek appropriate counsel, investigate the facts, consider consequences, and exercise the authority legitimately entrusted to him. Then he must accept responsibility for the decision. The absence of a direct command does not give him permission to act foolishly, and the presence of an administrative responsibility does not transform his opinion into Scripture. **God never instructed a shepherd to lead the flock by closing his Bible, shutting his eyes, and charging through the nearest fence.**

1. The Bible Must Govern the Decision Before the Preacher Announces It

Second Timothy 3:16–17 establishes the foundational responsibility of the man of God: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Paul continues by declaring that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works. Those words establish the sufficiency and authority of divine revelation. A pastor must begin his decision-making with the question of what Scripture actually commands, prohibits, or permits. If God has spoken plainly concerning a matter, the preacher does not need to manufacture an alternative conclusion through committee meetings, personal impressions, or financial calculations. No amount of money makes false doctrine acceptable. No increase in attendance justifies immorality. No administrative advantage authorizes the corruption of the gospel. The written word establishes the boundaries within which Christian leadership must operate. **When God has already settled a matter in Scripture, a preacher does not need additional revelation. He needs enough backbone to obey what has already been revealed.**

But the sufficiency of Scripture does not mean the Bible contains an individually specified answer to every practical choice. A pastor may examine every chapter from Genesis through Revelation without discovering whether his congregation should purchase a particular building, schedule a missionary conference in April, or replace an aging heating system before winter. The Scriptures provide principles concerning honesty, stewardship, order, responsibility, and the proper purposes of ministry. Those principles must guide practical decisions, but they should not be confused with explicit commands that God has not given. First Corinthians 4:6 warns against thinking of men above that which is written, while Colossians 3:17 instructs believers to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. A leader

must not invent biblical commandments merely because he possesses strong preferences. A church can reasonably establish policies without declaring those policies eternally inspired. The difference between wise administration and religious manipulation begins when a man stops distinguishing God's commandments from his own conclusions.

Ephesians 5:15–17 supplies direct instruction concerning the believer's conduct in the present dispensation: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Paul continues, "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." The word "circumspectly" describes careful conduct rather than reckless movement through life. A pastor must therefore consider whether his decisions agree with revealed truth, whether they serve legitimate ministry purposes, and whether they demonstrate wisdom in the circumstances before him. He should not confuse activity with obedience or enthusiasm with direction. A congregation may be tremendously busy accomplishing very little that Scripture actually requires. The question is not whether a proposed project sounds impressive when announced from the pulpit. The question is whether it represents faithful stewardship of the responsibilities already entrusted to the church. **A preacher who cannot explain why a decision is biblically sound should be careful about claiming that questioning it demonstrates a lack of faith.**

2. Joshua Learned That Appearances Can Make Fools of Experienced Leaders

Joshua 9 records one of the most instructive failures of judgment in Israel's history. The Gibeonites recognized the danger confronting them as Israel advanced into the promised land. Instead of meeting Israel openly in battle, they devised a plan to convince Joshua and the leaders that they had traveled from a distant country. Their representatives carried old sacks, damaged wine bottles, worn shoes, and dry, mouldy bread. Everything had been carefully arranged to support their story. Joshua and the men of Israel examined the evidence presented to them and apparently found the account convincing. But Joshua 9:14 identifies the fatal omission: "And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD." There is the problem. They examined the bread, inspected the clothing, listened to the explanation, and neglected to seek God's counsel. The evidence looked convincing because the deception had been designed to look convincing. **A convincing presentation is not necessarily a truthful presentation, and a well-dressed lie remains a lie even when it carries photographs and supporting documents.**

The historical circumstances matter. Joshua was leading Israel under the Mosaic covenant during the conquest of Canaan, and the decisions involved God's particular commands concerning the inhabitants of the land. These were not instructions establishing a modern Church Age foreign policy or authorizing a pastor to claim territory by divine conquest.

Nevertheless, Joshua's failure illustrates the danger of making consequential decisions without properly seeking God's direction. Joshua 9:15 records that Joshua made peace with the Gibeonites and established a league with them. Three days later, Israel discovered that the supposed travelers were actually neighbors living within the land. The decision had already been made, and the oath created serious consequences. The leaders had accepted a manufactured appearance as sufficient grounds for an important commitment. A modern pastor should recognize the danger whenever an impressive presentation substitutes for factual investigation. A proposal may arrive with attractive numbers, glowing recommendations, and enthusiastic promises while concealing obligations that become painfully obvious after the documents are signed.

The lesson is not that every Christian leader should expect a direct audible command from heaven before making an administrative decision. Joshua operated within a particular covenant relationship and historical assignment, and that setting cannot be transferred wholesale into Church Age leadership. The continuing principle is that human judgment must remain subject to God's revealed truth rather than relying merely upon appearances. Proverbs 14:15 declares, "The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going." A pastor considering a major financial obligation, ministry partnership, property purchase, or leadership appointment ought to investigate what can reasonably be investigated. He should examine agreements, verify representations, consult qualified people, and consider the consequences. Prayer does not excuse carelessness, and confidence does not establish facts. **Joshua had enough evidence to make a decision, but not enough discernment to make the right one. The preacher who refuses to investigate because he has already decided may be preparing to repeat the lesson at his congregation's expense.**

3. Wise Counsel Is Not a Room Full of Men Paid to Agree With You

Proverbs 11:14 declares, "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." Proverbs 20:18 adds, "Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war." These statements emphasize the value of receiving sound judgment before pursuing serious objectives. But the Bible is not recommending that leaders surround themselves with people who automatically approve every decision. A room filled with frightened flatterers does not constitute wise counsel merely because everybody possesses a title and attends the same meeting. Genuine counsel must have the freedom to identify errors, question assumptions, and expose dangers. A pastor who asks for advice but punishes disagreement is not seeking wisdom. He is conducting a religious applause rehearsal. **Ten men agreeing with a fool do not transform foolishness**

into wisdom; they merely increase the number of people participating in it. The value of counsel rests upon truth, knowledge, judgment, and willingness to speak honestly.

First Kings 12 provides a sobering example in Rehoboam's dealings with Israel after Solomon's death. The people requested relief from the heavy yoke associated with Solomon's reign. Rehoboam first consulted the older men who had stood before his father. They advised him to serve the people and speak good words to them. He rejected their counsel and turned to the young men who had grown up with him. Their advice encouraged a harsh response, and Rehoboam followed it. The resulting division of the kingdom fulfilled God's announced judgment concerning Solomon's house, yet Rehoboam's conduct remains an example of foolish leadership. His problem was not that he lacked access to counsel. He preferred counsel that reinforced his own ambition. The account concerns Israel's monarchy and the division of the kingdom, not the government of a New Testament church. Nevertheless, its warning concerning pride and selective listening is unmistakable. A leader can consult numerous people while remaining determined to hear only himself.

Responsible counsel also requires choosing the right people for the right questions. First Timothy 3 establishes moral and spiritual qualifications for church officers, while Proverbs repeatedly commends wisdom and understanding. A pastor should seek biblical counsel from spiritually mature men concerning doctrine, discipline, and spiritual oversight. Financial decisions may also require trustworthy individuals competent to examine budgets, obligations, and accounting procedures. Building decisions may require reliable information concerning construction, safety, and legal requirements. Seeking such knowledge does not place secular expertise above Scripture. It recognizes that a preacher does not automatically become a qualified engineer, accountant, or attorney because he can explain Romans 8. Counsel must remain accountable to biblical principles, but proper expertise should not be despised. Nor should a pastor surrender the authority of the church to outside advisers simply because they possess impressive credentials. Wise counsel informs responsible judgment; it does not replace it. **A man who refuses knowledgeable advice because he considers ignorance more spiritual than preparation has confused faith with presumption.**

4. Nehemiah Inspected the Walls Before Announcing the Work

Nehemiah 2 demonstrates a very different approach from the reckless leader who announces an enormous project before discovering whether it can be accomplished. Nehemiah had received troubling news concerning Jerusalem's condition. He mourned, fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, as Nehemiah 1 records. When the opportunity came to speak with King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah did not merely deliver an emotional speech and hope somebody else would handle the details. He made specific

requests concerning permission to travel, letters for safe passage, and timber for the work. Nehemiah 2:4 records that he prayed before answering the king. His preparation and prayer operated together. He recognized dependence upon God while also addressing practical requirements. The historical setting concerns the restoration of Jerusalem during the Persian period, not a direct promise that God will approve every modern church construction program. Nevertheless, Nehemiah demonstrates that serious prayer and thoughtful preparation are not enemies.

After arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah did something that would save many church leaders considerable embarrassment. He inspected the actual condition of the walls. Nehemiah 2:12–16 describes his nighttime examination before he publicly announced his intentions. He did not immediately assemble the people and declare that God had commanded an enormous construction project while remaining ignorant of the damage. He examined the situation. He observed the broken walls and burned gates. He understood that the work required more than religious enthusiasm. Only afterward did he address the leaders and present the need. Nehemiah 2:17 records his appeal: "Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." Notice that he could describe the problem because he had investigated it. **A leader who announces the solution before understanding the problem may discover that he has purchased a ladder for a building that needs a foundation.**

Luke 14:28–30 provides another useful principle, although the immediate context concerns the cost of discipleship during Christ's earthly ministry. The Lord spoke of a man intending to build a tower and first sitting down to count the cost. The illustration exposes the foolishness of beginning something without considering whether it can be finished. A church should apply the principle of responsible calculation without pretending the passage constitutes a divine promise concerning construction projects. Before borrowing money, purchasing property, launching an expensive program, or establishing continuing financial obligations, leaders should examine the probable costs and available resources. They must distinguish genuine necessities from personal ambitions and recognize the difference between faith and financial recklessness. A congregation should not be shamed into supporting a proposal merely because the pastor has already publicly announced it. **Faith does not require a church to pretend that invoices disappear when someone writes a Scripture reference across the top of the budget.** Honest stewardship is not unbelief. It is part of responsible service.

5. David Demonstrated Both the Wisdom of Enquiring and the Cost of Presumption

David's life demonstrates how important it is to seek God's direction rather than rely upon previous victories or personal confidence. In 1 Samuel 23:2, David enquired of the LORD

concerning the Philistines attacking Keilah. The Lord answered, directing him to go and smite the Philistines and save Keilah. Later, David sought further direction when circumstances changed. The setting concerns David's life before becoming king over all Israel and the particular revelation God provided him. It is not a guarantee that every modern pastor will receive an audible answer concerning every ministry decision. Nevertheless, David's conduct demonstrates his recognition that circumstances required more than military ability. He did not assume that because he had previously defeated Goliath, every future decision could be settled by appealing to his reputation. A man may possess considerable experience and still require wisdom concerning a new situation. Yesterday's victory is not a substitute for today's obedience.

First Samuel 30 provides another example. After the Amalekites attacked Ziklag and carried away the women and children, David and his men experienced terrible distress. His own men spoke of stoning him, yet verse 6 declares that "David encouraged himself in the LORD his God." Then David enquired of the LORD concerning whether he should pursue the enemy. Verse 8 records the answer directing him to pursue and promising recovery. That historical promise belonged to David in those circumstances, not to every Christian who experiences a financial setback or difficult ministry season. The application concerns David's refusal to allow distress alone to determine his actions. He faced facts, sought God's direction, and then acted decisively. Christian leaders should likewise avoid making major decisions solely because they are angry, frightened, embarrassed, or determined to silence criticism. Emotional urgency is not necessarily divine urgency. **A preacher who makes every important decision while his temper is boiling should not be surprised when the results resemble something cooked in a furnace rather than prepared with wisdom.**

David's handling of the ark provides a contrasting warning. Second Samuel 6 records the disastrous incident involving Uzzah when the ark was transported upon a new cart. First Chronicles 15:13 later supplies David's explanation: "For because ye did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order." The regulations concerning the ark belonged to Israel under the law, and Christian leaders must not transfer the ceremonial requirements into the present dispensation. Nevertheless, David's acknowledgment reveals the danger of pursuing a desirable objective through an unauthorized method. Bringing the ark to Jerusalem was not inherently the problem. Failing to observe God's established order was the problem. There is an important distinction between wanting something that appears good and doing it according to Scripture. A pastor may possess a sincere desire to expand a ministry while employing dishonest fundraising, improper manipulation, or unbiblical methods. **A worthy**

objective does not sanctify an unlawful method, and putting God's name on a bad decision does not make Him responsible for it.

6. Paul Made Plans Without Pretending His Calendar Was Inspired Scripture

The apostle Paul provides a remarkable example of planning combined with submission to God's direction. In 1 Corinthians 16:5–7, he discussed his intention to travel through Macedonia and possibly spend time with the Corinthians. Then he added, "For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit." Notice the distinction between his intended arrangements and the Lord's ultimate permission. Paul did not treat every proposed itinerary as an unchangeable divine decree. He recognized the legitimacy of making plans while acknowledging his dependence upon God. This was an apostle entrusted with direct revelation, yet he did not present every personal travel preference as inspired Scripture. That should settle the pretensions of a modern preacher who announces that God personally approved his complete schedule twelve months in advance and then accuses everyone of rebellion when circumstances require an adjustment. **If Paul could say, "if the Lord permit," a pastor can survive admitting that next Thursday's meeting might need to be rescheduled.**

Second Corinthians 1:15–24 addresses Paul's change of travel plans and the resulting questions concerning his reliability. The passage demonstrates that changing an intention may require explanation, especially when others have formed expectations around the original arrangement. Paul defended the integrity of his ministry and distinguished his personal movements from the certainty of God's promises in Christ. He did not argue that his apostolic authority exempted him from communicating honestly about his intentions. Nor did he treat the congregation as entitled to dictate every aspect of his itinerary. He explained himself responsibly. This provides a valuable pattern for Christian leadership. A pastor should not promise what he cannot reasonably guarantee, and he should communicate meaningful changes when they affect others. Uncertainty does not automatically indicate incompetence. Sometimes circumstances change, new facts emerge, or a previously reasonable plan becomes unwise. **The leader who cannot distinguish between an inspired promise of God and his own Tuesday afternoon appointment is operating with a dangerously inflated understanding of his authority.**

Acts 16:6–10 records a particular instance of divine direction during Paul's missionary journeys. The Holy Ghost forbade Paul and his companions to preach the word in Asia at that time, and the Spirit did not permit their attempted movement into Bithynia. Paul subsequently received the vision involving the man of Macedonia, after which the company concluded that the Lord had called them to preach the gospel there. These events belong to the apostolic period and must not become an excuse for modern leaders to claim

identical revelation whenever they wish to justify an unsupported preference. Nevertheless, Paul's conduct demonstrates that legitimate plans can be redirected. His objective remained the preaching of the gospel, but the immediate location changed. First Corinthians 9:19–23 further reveals Paul's willingness to adapt his manner of ministry without altering the gospel itself. Faithful leadership must distinguish unchanging doctrine from adaptable methods. A preacher should be immovable concerning biblical truth and willing to reconsider practical arrangements when circumstances warrant it. Changing methods is not necessarily compromise; changing the gospel certainly is.

7. A Wise Leader Must Decide, Explain, and Accept Responsibility

There comes a point when counsel has been received, Scripture has been examined, facts have been investigated, and a decision must actually be made. Some leaders are reckless, while others become permanently paralyzed by the fear of making a mistake. Neither condition reflects the wisdom expected of responsible oversight. James 1:5 declares that a man lacking wisdom should ask of God, who gives liberally. The epistle is addressed to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, and its setting should be respected, but the principle of seeking divine wisdom agrees with the believer's continual dependence upon God. Proverbs 16:9 declares, "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps." Planning is not condemned by that verse; human independence from God's direction is exposed. A pastor must make responsible decisions without pretending that every outcome is guaranteed. He should possess enough humility to acknowledge uncertainty and enough courage to act when the available information establishes a reasonable course. **Indecision is not automatically humility, and endless meetings do not become spiritual simply because nobody has the courage to reach a conclusion.**

Once a significant decision has been made, responsible communication becomes essential. Acts 15 provides an important example of leadership addressing a serious doctrinal controversy during the transitional period of the early Church. The apostles and elders considered the question concerning Gentile believers and the requirements being pressed upon them. Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James contributed to the proceedings, and the resulting judgment was communicated through a letter. The council's unique apostolic setting and authority must not be confused with the ordinary decisions of a modern church board. Nevertheless, the account demonstrates the value of addressing the actual issue, appealing to God's revealed dealings, and communicating conclusions intelligibly. A pastor does not need to provide every private detail concerning sensitive matters, but important decisions should not be surrounded by unnecessary mystery. Members affected by legitimate administrative changes should receive sufficient explanation to understand the

purpose and responsibilities involved. **A congregation should not need the interpretive abilities of Daniel merely to discover why the church budget suddenly changed.**

Responsible leadership also includes acknowledging mistakes and correcting them. Proverbs 12:15 declares, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." That principle becomes especially important after a decision has produced unexpected consequences. A proud leader may continue defending an obviously harmful arrangement because he considers admitting error a threat to his position. A wise leader distinguishes between remaining faithful to biblical truth and stubbornly protecting his personal reputation. If new facts demonstrate that an administrative judgment was mistaken, he should examine the evidence and correct the decision where possible. If an obligation cannot be reversed, he should deal honestly with its consequences. First Timothy 5:21 warns Timothy to do nothing by partiality, and that standard should govern the handling of errors as well as initial decisions. A leader must not shift blame onto innocent workers simply to preserve his appearance of competence. **The man who can admit a mistake has not surrendered his authority. He has demonstrated that truth matters more to him than the preservation of his own image.**

The Christian church needs leaders who know the difference between divine commandments and human judgment. Scripture establishes the doctrines that must be believed, the moral standards that must be maintained, and the responsibilities entrusted to the local assembly. Within those boundaries, leaders must exercise wisdom concerning matters God has not individually specified. They should pray without abandoning investigation, seek counsel without surrendering responsibility, and plan without pretending to possess knowledge of every future circumstance. They should recognize that a good decision may still involve difficulty and that an attractive opportunity may conceal serious danger. Joshua's agreement with the Gibeonites warns against neglecting counsel. Nehemiah's preparation demonstrates the value of examining conditions before acting. David's experiences reveal the difference between enquiring of God and proceeding without proper regard for His established order. Paul's ministry demonstrates that plans can be made honestly while remaining subject to the Lord's direction. These passages do not remove the burden of judgment. They establish principles for bearing it faithfully.

The congregation must likewise understand its responsibilities. Members should not demand that a pastor possess supernatural knowledge of every practical question, nor should they treat every reasonable administrative decision as an invitation to rebellion. Legitimate leadership requires cooperation, patience, and respect for the responsibilities established by Scripture. Yet those responsibilities do not require believers to accept manufactured claims of divine revelation, disregard proven misconduct, or surrender their

judgment concerning matters God has left open. Hebrews 13:17 commands submission to those who watch for souls, while 1 Peter 5:3 forbids elders from becoming lords over God's heritage. Both instructions remain necessary. A pastor should be willing to hear thoughtful questions, and members should be willing to accept reasonable decisions that do not violate Scripture merely because they would have chosen differently. Agreement on every preference is not a requirement for Christian unity. Faithfulness to the truth, however, is never optional. The Lord did not establish His Church so that every administrative disagreement would become a contest for personal supremacy.

The final matter is whether the leader desires to serve Jesus Christ or protect his own importance. A man governed by ego will reject counsel, conceal uncertainty, exaggerate divine approval, and defend mistakes long after the evidence has exposed them. A man governed by Scripture will seek wisdom, examine the facts, listen to trustworthy counsel, make responsible decisions, and accept correction when necessary. He will not confuse prayer with presumption, confidence with infallibility, or leadership with personal ownership. He will recognize that no amount of religious vocabulary can transform foolishness into obedience. **The preacher does not need to know everything, control everybody, or pretend that every idea in his head came directly from heaven. He needs enough humility to open his Bible, enough wisdom to receive counsel, enough patience to investigate, enough courage to decide, and enough honesty to admit when he was wrong. God never called a pastor to become an infallible oracle in a Sunday suit. He called him to be a faithful steward under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

7 of 10 — Christian Leadership — Correction Is Not Cruelty, and Silence Is Not Love

Key Passage — 2 Timothy 4:2

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

There is something terribly wrong with a preacher who can identify every sin in the congregation except the one sitting behind his own pulpit. He will thunder against rebellion, denounce worldliness, rebuke disobedience, and announce that God has called him to preach the whole counsel of God. That sounds wonderful until somebody disagrees with one of his personal preferences. Suddenly the pulpit becomes a courtroom, the congregation becomes a jury, and the preacher appoints himself prosecutor, judge, and executioner. On the other hand, there is another kind of minister who would rather watch

the entire church deteriorate than confront one influential troublemaker. He can explain the importance of love for forty-five minutes but cannot bring himself to tell a man that adultery is sin, false doctrine is dangerous, or destructive conduct must stop. One fellow enjoys the hammer too much, and the other is afraid to pick it up. Neither represents biblical leadership. **Correction is not cruelty, and silence is not love.**

The apostle Paul settled the matter in 2 Timothy 4:2 when he commanded Timothy to "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." Notice that Paul did not present these responsibilities as optional features of the ministry. The preacher must reprove, rebuke, and exhort. But notice something else. The command includes "all longsuffering and doctrine." Those words are not decorative additions intended to make a hard instruction sound pleasant. They govern the manner and substance of the correction. A rebuke must be grounded in biblical truth, not personal irritation. Exhortation must direct people toward obedience, not merely remind them how displeased the preacher has become. Longsuffering requires patience with people who need instruction and restoration. The same apostle who commanded Timothy to rebuke error also commanded him to exercise meekness when instructing those who opposed themselves. God never authorized a minister to replace doctrinal correction with the uncontrolled discharge of his temper.

Paul was writing to Timothy concerning his responsibility as a minister during the present dispensation of grace. This was direct apostolic instruction to a man entrusted with preaching and guarding sound doctrine in the Church. The surrounding verses warn that people would eventually refuse to endure sound doctrine and gather teachers who would satisfy their itching ears. Timothy was not supposed to surrender truth because his hearers preferred comfortable fables. Yet the command to remain faithful did not transform him into a religious tyrant. Biblical correction exists to uphold God's word, confront sin, protect the congregation, and seek the restoration of those who have gone astray. It is not a weapon for defending the preacher's popularity, satisfying personal resentment, or humiliating people who have offended his pride. A faithful shepherd must possess the courage to correct wrongdoing and the spiritual maturity to correct it properly. **The Bible gives the preacher authority to use the sword of the Spirit, not permission to swing his personal grievances around like a drunken swordsman.**

1. The Bible Commands Reproof, Rebuke, and Exhortation

Second Timothy 4:2 contains three important responsibilities that belong together. Reproof exposes what is wrong. Rebuke confronts the error and calls for correction. Exhortation urges the hearer toward the conduct required by God. The preacher who emphasizes only one of these responsibilities produces an unbalanced ministry. If he does nothing but

identify wrongdoing, he may leave people convicted without properly instructing them concerning obedience. If he continually rebukes without teaching, he may produce fear without understanding. If he merely exhorts people to do better while refusing to identify sin, he reduces preaching to religious encouragement without doctrinal substance. Paul joins all three responsibilities and places them beneath the authority of the word. The preacher must explain what God has said, demonstrate where conduct contradicts it, and direct people toward obedience. **A sermon that never corrects anything may be pleasant to hear, but pleasantness has never been a biblical test of faithful preaching.**

Second Timothy 3:16 establishes why correction belongs in the ministry. Paul declares that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. The word of God itself possesses corrective authority. The preacher does not manufacture that authority through his personality, education, or position. He communicates what God has revealed. That distinction protects the congregation from men who attempt to turn personal preferences into divine commandments. A pastor may rightly rebuke dishonesty, immorality, false teaching, covetousness, or destructive conduct because Scripture addresses those matters. He cannot legitimately announce that somebody has sinned against God merely because they disagree with his favorite meeting schedule, building arrangement, or administrative decision. There is a considerable difference between correcting a violation of Scripture and punishing somebody for failing to admire the preacher's judgment. **A man's wounded pride is not an additional book of the Bible, and the congregation is not required to treat it as inspired revelation.**

The command also requires longsuffering. That word destroys the notion that every mistake must immediately produce a public explosion from the pulpit. People differ in knowledge, maturity, circumstances, and understanding. Some require patient instruction because they have never been properly taught. Others require firm confrontation because they knowingly persist in destructive conduct. The preacher must possess enough discernment to recognize the difference. First Thessalonians 5:14 instructs believers to warn the unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, and be patient toward all men. Notice that different conditions require different responses. A weak believer should not be treated as though he were a hardened rebel, and a deliberate troublemaker should not be excused indefinitely because the pastor wants to appear compassionate. Biblical correction requires judgment as well as courage. The physician who gives every patient the same treatment regardless of the disease is not demonstrating medical genius. Neither is the preacher who applies the same thunderous rebuke to every spiritual problem.

2. Private Offenses Must Not Become Public Entertainment

Matthew 18:15 begins with a direct instruction from the Lord Jesus Christ: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." The passage continues by describing the involvement of witnesses and, ultimately, the church when the offender refuses to hear. The historical setting must be understood. Christ was speaking to His disciples during His earthly ministry to Israel, before His death, resurrection, and the full revelation of Church Age doctrine through the apostle Paul. The reference to the church appears within that setting and anticipates an assembly exercising responsibility. We should not pretend that every detail can be mechanically transferred into every modern disciplinary situation without examining the context. Nevertheless, the instruction establishes a sound principle concerning personal offenses: an ordinary private trespass should not automatically become a public spectacle. The initial objective is to address the wrong and gain the brother, not recruit an audience.

That principle would eliminate a tremendous amount of unnecessary trouble in modern congregations. A believer becomes offended by something another member said, and instead of speaking directly with the person involved, he tells six friends, contacts three relatives, and begins explaining the situation to anybody unfortunate enough to stand beside him after the service. By the time the supposed offender discovers there is a problem, half the congregation has already heard three competing versions of the account. Proverbs 11:13 declares, "A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter." That proverb does not require concealing serious wrongdoing or protecting dangerous offenders. It condemns the irresponsible spreading of matters that should be handled faithfully. A pastor who encourages gossip or publicly embarrasses someone over a matter that could have been addressed privately has multiplied the offense rather than corrected it. **Some church problems do not need a committee, a public announcement, or a sermon. They need two Christians with open Bibles and enough humility to speak honestly.**

The distinction between private offenses and serious public wrongdoing must never be ignored. Matthew 18 does not require a victim of violence, abuse, coercion, or criminal conduct to confront a dangerous offender alone before seeking protection. Nor does it require church leaders to conceal known public wrongdoing until someone completes a private sequence of conversations. The nature of the offense determines what responsibilities apply. Public false teaching may require public correction. Criminal acts may require reporting to lawful authorities, and vulnerable people must be protected from further harm. Romans 13:1–4 recognizes civil authority in the punishment of evildoers. A church cannot replace legitimate civil accountability with an internal religious conversation. At the same time, ordinary personal disagreements should not become disciplinary emergencies simply because somebody possesses an unusually loud

personality. Biblical leadership must distinguish between a private trespass, a public offense, and conduct requiring immediate protective action. **Wisdom knows when to close a door for a private conversation and when keeping that door closed would protect the wrong person.**

3. First Corinthians 5 Proves That Silence Can Become Complicity

First Corinthians 5 presents a situation in which the congregation's failure to confront serious wrongdoing had become a matter of apostolic rebuke. Paul identified sexual immorality involving a man who had his father's wife. He declared in verse 1 that such fornication was reported among them and was of a kind not even named among the Gentiles. The church's response was astonishing. Instead of mourning the wickedness, the Corinthians were puffed up. Paul confronted not only the offender's conduct but also the congregation's attitude toward it. The problem was not that the church lacked religious activity. Corinth was already known for spiritual gifts, divisions, and an abundance of activity. The problem was that serious sin remained within the assembly while the believers failed to exercise necessary judgment. **A congregation can possess tremendous gifts, impressive meetings, and enough religious excitement to shake the windows while remaining shamefully negligent concerning obvious wickedness.**

Paul commanded decisive action in 1 Corinthians 5:4–5. His instructions concerned the gathered assembly acting in the name and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, not an angry preacher independently punishing somebody who had challenged his preferences. Verse 5 speaks of delivering the offender unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." This is a severe passage concerning church discipline, not a command authorizing ministers to threaten individuals with supernatural destruction whenever they become troublesome. The context concerns identified sexual sin within the congregation and apostolic instruction for addressing it. The purpose was not the satisfaction of personal revenge. It involved confronting the wrongdoing with the seriousness it deserved. Church discipline must remain subject to biblical authority, established facts, and the legitimate responsibilities of the assembly. A preacher who enjoys using disciplinary language to frighten people has missed the solemn character of the passage.

First Corinthians 5:6 declares, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" Paul uses leaven to illustrate the corrupting influence of tolerated sin. He then distinguishes the responsibility of the congregation toward those within its fellowship from its relationship with unbelievers outside. Verse 12 asks, "do not ye judge them that are within?" Verse 13 concludes, "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." This is not permission to conduct witch hunts, spread rumors, or invent

accusations. It is a command concerning actual wrongdoing that the assembly was responsible to address. A church that refuses to confront established sin because the offender is influential has compromised its stewardship. A church that disciplines innocent people to protect an influential offender has compounded the wickedness. **The flock is not protected when the shepherd refuses to recognize the wolf, and it is not protected when he begins calling innocent sheep wolves merely because they question his judgment.**

4. Sharp Rebuke Has a Biblical Purpose, Not a Personal Appetite

Titus 1:10–13 contains strong language concerning unruly and vain talkers, particularly those associated with the circumcision, who were subverting whole houses and teaching things they ought not for filthy lucre's sake. Paul directed Titus to confront the problem and declared in verse 13, "Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." Notice the purpose stated immediately after the command. The objective was soundness in the faith. Paul was not instructing Titus to indulge his temper or demonstrate how effectively he could humiliate an opponent. The rebuke was sharp because the error was serious and destructive. False doctrine was affecting households, and covetous men were exploiting the situation. The passage belongs to Paul's instructions concerning establishing sound church leadership in Crete. It authorizes doctrinal firmness against identified error, not indiscriminate harshness toward every person who happens to disagree with a preacher. **A sharp rebuke is a biblical instrument for confronting dangerous error, not a toy given to an angry man who enjoys watching people bleed.**

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself delivered severe rebukes during His earthly ministry. Matthew 23 records His denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees, including repeated declarations of woe against hypocrisy and religious corruption. The historical setting concerns Israel's religious leadership, and the chapter includes matters associated with that nation's condition and coming judgment. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that genuine righteousness is not always expressed through gentle words. Christ exposed hypocrisy because it was hypocrisy. He condemned religious corruption because it was corrupt. Yet the Saviour's perfect knowledge and sinless authority must not be confused with the limited understanding of an ordinary preacher. A pastor who quotes Christ's rebukes as permission to insult people indiscriminately has overlooked a rather important difference between himself and the Son of God. Jesus Christ knew the hearts of men. A modern minister sometimes cannot even remember who ordered the new hymnbooks. The proper lesson is fidelity to truth, not imitation of divine omniscience.

Galatians 2:11 provides another example when Paul declared concerning Peter, "I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." Peter's conduct concerning

fellowship with Gentile believers had compromised the truth of the gospel and influenced others, including Barnabas. Paul confronted the matter openly because the wrongdoing had public doctrinal consequences. Peter's apostolic prominence did not place him beyond correction. Yet the confrontation was not a personal contest over status, personality, or ministry influence. Paul identified conduct that contradicted the truth. That distinction is essential. A preacher must be willing to confront influential wrongdoing, but he must also recognize that not every disagreement constitutes apostasy. The seriousness of the rebuke should correspond to the seriousness of the offense and the evidence supporting it. **When Scripture requires a sharp rebuke, softness becomes cowardice. When Scripture calls for patient instruction, unnecessary severity becomes cruelty. Wisdom knows the difference.**

5. Restoration Is the Goal, Not the Destruction of the Offender

Galatians 6:1 establishes a governing principle for dealing with a fallen believer: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." The instruction is addressed to brethren during the present dispensation of grace and concerns the responsibility of spiritually minded believers toward someone overtaken in a fault. Notice the word "restore." The objective is not to preserve an opportunity for lifelong humiliation or maintain a permanent collection of accusations against the fallen individual. Restoration involves addressing the wrong and seeking the person's return to faithful conduct. But Paul also identifies the spirit required of those participating. They must act with meekness and examine themselves. The man administering correction is not exempt from temptation. He is not standing above the human condition. **A Christian who corrects another man's sin while congratulating himself upon his own invincibility may be preparing for the very fall he presently enjoys discussing.**

Second Corinthians 2:6–8 provides an important example of restorative concern. Paul wrote, "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many." He continued by instructing the Corinthians to forgive and comfort the individual, lest he be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow, and urged them to confirm their love toward him. The identity of this individual has often been connected with the disciplinary situation described in 1 Corinthians 5, although the passage does not explicitly establish that identification. We should not build certainty where Scripture has not supplied it. What the text clearly establishes is that Paul recognized circumstances in which punishment had become sufficient and forgiveness, comfort, and reaffirmed love were appropriate. Discipline must not become a permanent instrument of destruction after its legitimate purpose has been accomplished. A congregation that refuses to recognize genuine

repentance may become as unbalanced in its severity as another congregation is in its refusal to confront sin.

Second Corinthians 7:10 distinguishes godly sorrow from the sorrow of the world: "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." The surrounding passage concerns the Corinthians' response to Paul's earlier correction and the repentance produced through godly sorrow. The principle is important because repentance is more than embarrassment over being discovered. A man may regret the loss of his reputation without genuinely turning from the wrongdoing that destroyed it. He may apologize because consequences have arrived while remaining unwilling to acknowledge the truth. Biblical restoration therefore requires discernment. Forgiveness does not mean pretending that sin never occurred, and repentance does not automatically restore every forfeited responsibility. A minister who has disqualified himself from oversight must still be measured by the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. **Grace can restore fellowship without requiring a church to hand every fallen leader his old office, microphone, and authority as though nothing happened.**

6. The Pulpit Must Never Become a Platform for Personal Revenge

First Timothy 3:2–3 requires a bishop to be sober, of good behaviour, patient, not a striker, and not a brawler. Those qualifications apply to the man administering correction as surely as they apply when his own conduct is examined. A preacher who constantly erupts in anger, humiliates people for entertainment, or threatens members who question his decisions cannot defend himself merely by claiming to be a strong leader. The Holy Ghost did not establish an exception permitting pastors to behave like bullies while condemning everybody else's bad temper. Second Timothy 2:24–25 declares that the servant of the Lord must be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, and capable of instructing opponents in meekness. These instructions do not eliminate sharp rebuke when Scripture requires it. They prohibit confusing personal anger with spiritual authority. **A man who cannot control his own temper should be very careful about announcing that God has appointed him to correct everybody else's conduct.**

The pulpit becomes especially dangerous when a preacher uses it to settle private grievances. Perhaps a member questioned an administrative decision, declined a proposed ministry responsibility, or disagreed with something the pastor said. Instead of addressing the matter honestly, the preacher constructs a sermon designed to embarrass the individual while carefully avoiding direct identification. Everyone familiar with the disagreement recognizes the target. The preacher then congratulates himself for being courageous enough to preach hard truth. But the question remains whether Scripture actually identifies wrongdoing or whether the sermon merely disguises wounded pride.

Second Corinthians 4:5 declares, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." The pulpit belongs to the proclamation of God's truth, not the protection of a minister's ego. **A preacher who uses the Bible to punish people for disagreeing with him is not necessarily defending the faith. He may simply be laundering personal revenge through religious vocabulary.**

The same principle applies when leadership confronts serious allegations of misconduct. First Timothy 5:19–20 requires proper evidence before receiving an accusation against an elder and establishes that elders who sin must be rebuked. Both safeguards are essential. A church must not destroy reputations through malicious rumors, but neither may it conceal proven wrongdoing because the offender possesses influence. Where abuse, violence, exploitation, or criminal acts are involved, appropriate protective measures and lawful reporting responsibilities must be honored. Romans 13:1–4 recognizes the authority of civil government in dealing with evildoers. Church discipline cannot replace civil justice, and forgiveness cannot be used to pressure harmed people into unsafe situations. A faithful pastor must defend the vulnerable rather than protect the powerful at their expense. The Bible does not authorize intimidation of witnesses, destruction of evidence, or the concealment of criminal conduct beneath religious language. **A church that sacrifices truth to preserve its reputation has already damaged the very testimony it claims to be protecting.**

7. Biblical Discipline Must Be Governed by Truth, Justice, and Love

Second Thessalonians 3:14–15 provides a remarkable balance concerning disciplinary separation. Paul instructs the congregation to note anyone who refuses to obey the apostolic instruction in the epistle and to have no company with him, "that he may be ashamed." Then he immediately adds, "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Notice the relationship between seriousness and purpose. The conduct required action, but the individual was not to be treated as an enemy. The aim was corrective shame and brotherly admonition, not permanent personal hostility. That distinction should govern responsible church discipline wherever the circumstances properly warrant its application. A believer's disobedience must not be excused merely because correction is uncomfortable. Yet the man being corrected should not become the object of hatred. **Biblical discipline is not the church declaring war upon a soul. It is the church refusing to call disobedience righteousness while still desiring the person's restoration.**

The authority to correct also carries accountability. Hebrews 13:17 instructs believers to obey those who have the rule over them because such leaders watch for souls "as they that must give account." First Peter 5:2–3 commands elders to feed God's flock without acting

as lords over God's heritage. The pastor must recognize that his responsibility comes from God and remains governed by Scripture. He may not invent offenses, establish arbitrary punishments, or demand unquestioning loyalty to his personal preferences. The congregation likewise must not use the possibility of abusive leadership as an excuse to reject legitimate correction. Christians remain responsible for their conduct, and the church retains its duty to address wrongdoing according to the word of God. Both leadership and membership stand beneath divine authority. A pastor cannot convert his office into personal ownership, and a member cannot convert Christian liberty into permission for rebellion. **The same Bible that commands the shepherd to correct the flock commands the shepherd to examine the manner in which he corrects it.**

The ultimate example of truth joined with love remains the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 4:15 instructs believers to speak the truth in love so that they may grow up into Him who is the Head, even Christ. The passage concerns the growth and maturity of the body through sound doctrine and faithful ministry. Truth and love are not competing authorities from which a preacher must choose. Biblical love does not require surrendering truth, and biblical truth does not authorize abandoning love. A faithful shepherd must be willing to confront serious error, administer appropriate discipline, and protect the congregation from destructive conduct. He must also remain patient with the weak, compassionate toward the repentant, and humble concerning his own accountability before God. His objective is not to become feared as the most severe man in the congregation. It is to remain faithful to the Chief Shepherd. **The measure of biblical correction is not how severely a preacher can strike, but how faithfully he can bring the authority of God's word to bear upon the actual wrong.**

There is no place in faithful Christian leadership for the cowardice that refuses to confront sin or the cruelty that delights in crushing sinners. Both attitudes distort the responsibility established by Scripture. The coward calls silence compassion because he fears the consequences of obedience. The bully calls cruelty conviction because he enjoys the influence produced by fear. Neither attitude reflects the character required of a qualified minister. The Bible commands reproof, rebuke, exhortation, patience, meekness, sound doctrine, and appropriate discipline. It requires protection of the congregation without permission for personal revenge. It commands believers to restore the fallen where genuine restoration is possible without pretending that every consequence disappears. A church should not become a place where serious wrongdoing receives automatic protection, nor should it become a religious courtroom where every personal offense becomes grounds for public destruction. **Correction must be strong enough to confront sin and godly enough to seek restoration.**

A pastor should therefore examine both his willingness to correct and his reasons for doing so. Is he remaining silent because Scripture permits patience, or because an influential offender threatens his position? Is he rebuking sharply because dangerous doctrine requires a firm answer, or because somebody wounded his pride? Is he seeking repentance, or merely demanding an admission that he personally was right? Does he protect the vulnerable, or does he protect those who contribute most generously to the offering? Does he allow the Bible to correct his own behavior, or does he reserve the right to rebuke everybody while placing himself beyond examination? These questions are not invitations to undermine legitimate pastoral authority. They are reminders that authority must remain faithful to the Lord who entrusted it. The preacher who trembles before God's word will approach discipline with greater seriousness than the man who merely enjoys exercising power. **A shepherd should never be afraid to use the staff when protection requires it, but he should never forget whose sheep are standing before him.**

The final verdict is unmistakable. Second Timothy 4:2 does not permit a preacher to abandon reproof, rebuke, or exhortation, but neither does it permit him to abandon longsuffering and doctrine. Galatians 6:1 commands restoration in meekness. Titus 1:13 establishes the necessity of sharp rebuke when serious error requires it. First Corinthians 5 demonstrates that tolerating established wickedness can corrupt an assembly, while 2 Corinthians 2:6–8 demonstrates the necessity of forgiveness and comfort when discipline has served its proper purpose. These truths belong together. **A preacher who never corrects anything is failing his responsibility, but a preacher who enjoys crushing people needs correction himself.** The church does not need a pulpit turned into an execution platform, and it certainly does not need a shepherd who watches the wolves devour the flock while explaining that confrontation would be unloving. It needs men who know the Book, fear God, confront sin, protect the innocent, and seek the restoration of the repentant. **Correction is not cruelty, and silence is not love. The shepherd's responsibility is to defend the flock with the truth of God's word, not to beat the sheep with the weight of his own pride.**

8 of 10 — Christian Leadership — When Nathan Walks Into the King’s Office

Key Passage — 2 Samuel 12:7

"And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;"

There is something terribly revealing about a preacher who believes everybody in the congregation needs accountability except the fellow standing behind the pulpit. He can preach against pride, rebuke dishonesty, denounce rebellion, and warn the entire church about the consequences of sin. But let somebody question his own conduct, and suddenly the atmosphere changes. The concerned believer becomes a troublemaker, the witness becomes an enemy, and the man asking for an explanation is accused of resisting God's appointed authority. Apparently, the preacher has discovered a remarkable spiritual arrangement in which every member must answer to somebody while he answers to nobody. He has confused ordination with exemption, leadership with ownership, and biblical submission with unconditional personal loyalty. But there is one inconvenient detail that keeps upsetting these religious monarchies: the King James Bible. God never surrendered His authority to the man holding the microphone. **A preacher who cannot be corrected by the Book has no business using that Book to correct everybody else.**

Second Samuel 12 records one of the most devastating confrontations in biblical history. David was not an ordinary man occupying an insignificant position. He was Israel's anointed king, a man who had defeated Goliath, survived Saul's hostility, established his kingdom, and experienced remarkable blessings from Almighty God. Yet David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged the death of her husband, Uriah. The king who had once demonstrated extraordinary courage now attempted to conceal extraordinary wickedness. But God sent Nathan the prophet into the royal presence with a message that no amount of political power could silence. After exposing David's conduct through a carefully constructed account, Nathan looked directly at Israel's king and declared, "Thou art the man." There was no trembling apology for disturbing the royal schedule, no request for permission to discuss the king's private affairs, and no suggestion that David's reputation should take precedence over righteousness. The throne did not make the king untouchable.

That account concerns Israel under the law and the historical responsibilities of its anointed king. David was not a New Testament bishop, Nathan was not a Church Age disciplinary committee, and the judgments announced in 2 Samuel 12 must not be carelessly transferred into the present dispensation of grace. Nevertheless, the moral principle is unmistakable and is reinforced by direct New Testament instruction concerning church leadership. No man becomes immune from God's word because he possesses spiritual responsibility. Peter could be corrected by Paul. Elders could be rebuked when they sinned. Ministers were required to maintain honest conduct before God and men. The qualifications for church leadership never included personal infallibility. A preacher may be respected, supported, and faithfully followed without becoming the final authority over his own behavior. **When Nathan walks into the king's office, the important question is not**

whether the king likes being confronted. The important question is whether the king has sinned against God.

1. Anointed Authority Never Made David an Untouchable King

First Samuel 16 records Samuel's anointing of David during the historical establishment of Israel's monarchy. David's appointment was not the product of a popularity contest, a successful advertising campaign, or a powerful political committee. God had chosen him for a particular responsibility in Israel's history. Yet that divine appointment never transformed David into a sinless man. His victories, spiritual experiences, and position within God's purposes did not grant permission to disregard commandments already revealed. This distinction destroys the excuse frequently employed by religious leaders who claim that their calling places them beyond ordinary accountability. David's anointing was genuine, but his adultery was still adultery. His throne was legitimate, but the murder of Uriah was still wickedness. **A man does not receive permission to violate the commandments simply because God previously entrusted him with an important assignment.** The appointment establishes responsibility before God; it does not cancel responsibility to obey Him.

Second Samuel 11 exposes how quickly unchecked authority can become an instrument of sin. David saw Bathsheba, learned that she was the wife of Uriah, and nevertheless sent messengers to take her. When the resulting pregnancy threatened exposure, David attempted to manipulate Uriah into returning home. When those efforts failed, he arranged for Uriah to be placed where the fighting was fiercest and abandoned to death. The chapter reveals more than an isolated moral failure. It demonstrates the danger of power employed to conceal wrongdoing. David used the resources and influence of his office in pursuit of a sinful objective. His position supplied opportunities to manipulate circumstances that an ordinary man might not have possessed. That is why accountability matters wherever authority exists. A leader who can command subordinates, control information, and influence reputations possesses opportunities for serious abuse. **The greater a man's authority, the more destructive his unrestrained sin can become.**

The final verse of 2 Samuel 11 delivers the verdict that destroys every attempt to confuse a successful cover-up with innocence: "But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD." David may have arranged the circumstances to satisfy the public appearance of respectability, but he had not escaped divine judgment. The narrative makes no suggestion that the Lord was impressed by David's ability to manage the crisis. The king possessed the power to influence human arrangements, but he could not rewrite what God knew. That is a warning for every religious leader who imagines secrecy establishes righteousness. A church may remain ignorant of misconduct for years. Admirers may defend the leader

because they cannot imagine him doing wrong. Financial supporters may possess strong reasons for protecting the institution. None of those circumstances changes the truth. God does not require public exposure before He recognizes private wickedness. **A sin concealed from the congregation is not a sin concealed from the Lord.**

2. Nathan Brought God's Accusation, Not a Personal Grudge

Nathan did not enter David's presence with a collection of rumors, an anonymous complaint, or an opportunity to settle some private disagreement. Second Samuel 12:1 begins, "And the LORD sent Nathan unto David." That historical detail establishes the divine authority behind the confrontation. Nathan then presented a situation involving a rich man with many flocks and a poor man possessing one beloved ewe lamb. When a traveler arrived, the rich man spared his own abundance and took the poor man's lamb. David became angry and declared that the offending man deserved judgment. Nathan had exposed the king's moral reasoning before revealing that David himself was the guilty party. The confrontation was direct, purposeful, and grounded in established wrongdoing. It was not a theatrical performance designed to embarrass David for Nathan's entertainment. **The prophet did not manufacture an accusation because he disliked the king. He confronted the king because the king had sinned.**

Then came the words that have echoed through centuries of biblical preaching: "Thou art the man." Nathan continued by rehearsing the blessings God had given David and identifying the wickedness he had committed. In 2 Samuel 12:9, the Lord asked, "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight?" That question reveals the true character of the offense. David had not merely disappointed public expectations or embarrassed the royal household. He had despised God's commandment. Religious leaders sometimes attempt to redirect attention from their wrongdoing toward the supposed disloyalty of those exposing it. They complain about timing, motives, publicity, and the damage done to their reputations. Those matters may require honest examination, but they cannot erase established sin. The first question must remain whether the accusation is true. **A preacher who spends more energy attacking the person who discovered his wrongdoing than addressing the wrongdoing itself has learned the wrong lesson from David.**

David's response in 2 Samuel 12:13 was remarkable: "I have sinned against the LORD." He did not accuse Nathan of disrespecting the monarchy. He did not announce that questioning the king constituted rebellion against God's anointed. He acknowledged his sin. Psalm 51 provides further insight into David's repentance and his appeal for mercy. Yet the account also establishes that forgiveness did not eliminate every earthly consequence. Nathan announced severe consequences that would follow David's actions. We must

preserve the historical distinction between David's circumstances under the law and the believer's standing in Christ during the present dispensation. Salvation today rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, received by grace through faith according to Ephesians 2:8–9. Nevertheless, forgiveness does not require pretending that wrongdoing never occurred. A minister may genuinely repent while remaining subject to consequences concerning his office. **Repentance can restore fellowship with God without automatically restoring every responsibility forfeited through misconduct.**

3. Peter Was an Apostle, but Paul Still Withstood Him to the Face

Galatians 2:11 provides one of the clearest New Testament demonstrations that spiritual authority does not establish personal infallibility. Paul wrote, "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." Consider the men involved. Peter had walked with the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. He had witnessed extraordinary miracles, preached at Pentecost, and occupied a prominent place among the apostles associated with Israel. Paul had received the revelation of the gospel committed to him by the risen Christ and was entrusted with a particular apostleship toward the Gentiles. These were not ordinary church members arguing about the Sunday morning schedule. They were apostles whose conduct involved the truth of the gospel. Yet Peter's prominence did not make his actions unquestionable. **If an apostle could be blamed when he was wrong, a modern preacher should not imagine his ordination certificate makes him incapable of error.**

The issue concerned Peter's conduct toward Gentile believers. Galatians 2:12 explains that Peter had eaten with Gentiles but withdrew when certain men came from James, fearing those of the circumcision. Other Jewish believers followed the same course, and even Barnabas became involved. Paul recognized that their behavior contradicted the truth being proclaimed concerning the gospel. Verse 14 declares that they "walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel." That statement identifies the standard governing the confrontation. Paul did not rebuke Peter because Peter had failed to honor Paul's personality. He rebuked conduct that compromised revealed truth. This distinction is essential. Accountability is not permission to humiliate leaders over every difference of opinion. It is the recognition that conduct violating Scripture must be confronted regardless of the position occupied by the offender. **The question is not which man possesses the greater reputation. The question is which position agrees with the word of God.**

Paul's confrontation was public because the offending conduct had public consequences. The inconsistency had influenced other believers and compromised a matter central to the gospel. That does not mean every private failure requires public exposure. Scripture distinguishes personal trespasses, established public misconduct, and serious

accusations requiring proper examination. Nevertheless, Galatians 2 destroys the notion that prominent leaders must be shielded from correction because their reputations are too important. Peter's position did not excuse him, and Paul's responsibility did not permit him to remain silent. The gospel of grace through faith was more important than preserving a comfortable relationship between influential men. A faithful preacher should recognize the same priority. He must neither attack another leader through jealousy nor conceal proven wrongdoing through misplaced loyalty. **When the truth of God's word stands on one side and a religious personality stands on the other, the Christian has no legitimate difficulty determining which side deserves allegiance.**

4. Accusations Against Elders Require Evidence, Not Rumors or Immunity

First Timothy 5:19–20 establishes the biblical standard concerning accusations against elders: "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." These verses must be read together. The first protects an elder from unsupported accusations. The second establishes the necessity of rebuking elders who sin. A church that honors the first instruction while ignoring the second has not obeyed the passage. Neither has a church that ignores the requirement for credible evidence and destroys a man's reputation through gossip. Paul was writing to Timothy concerning the ordering and oversight of the Church during the present dispensation of grace. The instructions address a genuine problem: leaders must be protected against malicious allegations without receiving immunity from accountability. **The Bible does not authorize a rumor mill, and it certainly does not authorize a pastoral protection racket.**

The requirement for witnesses must be handled with biblical honesty and sound judgment. It is not permission to dismiss every serious report simply because an offense occurred privately or because an accused leader claims no one else was present. A disclosure may require careful investigation, preservation of available evidence, protection of those at risk, and appropriate involvement of civil authorities. Multiple independent forms of corroboration may help establish the truth. Scripture's concern for credible testimony must never be converted into a rule that silences vulnerable people or demands that another person suffer the same wrong before anyone acts. At the same time, an accusation must not automatically be treated as proof of guilt. False witness remains a sin, and Proverbs 18:13 warns against answering a matter before hearing it. **Justice requires more than believing the loudest accusation, and righteousness requires more than accepting the most powerful man's denial.** Truth must govern both the investigation and its conclusions.

Paul reinforces impartiality in 1 Timothy 5:21: "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality." Notice the seriousness of that charge. Timothy was not permitted to apply different standards according to personal relationships, financial influence, or ecclesiastical importance. A popular preacher does not receive a separate Bible. A wealthy elder does not purchase immunity through generous contributions. A ministry founder does not become exempt because the organization depends upon his reputation. Equally, a disliked leader must not be condemned merely because influential people want him removed. Facts must be examined honestly. Evidence must be weighed fairly. Those making judgments must be willing to confront their own conflicts of interest. **When church justice depends upon who signs the largest checks or controls the most influential friendships, the congregation has traded biblical impartiality for religious favoritism.**

5. Financial Accountability Is Not an Insult to Spiritual Authority

Second Corinthians 8:20–21 establishes an important principle concerning financial administration. Paul wrote, "Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." The immediate context concerns the collection being administered for the benefit of needy saints and the arrangements made to ensure responsible handling of those resources. Paul recognized that honest conduct before God should be accompanied by arrangements that could withstand reasonable human examination. That is a powerful example for modern ministry. Church offerings, missionary support, benevolent contributions, and other entrusted resources require faithful stewardship. A pastor does not demonstrate superior spirituality by refusing ordinary financial accountability. **If the apostle Paul cared about avoiding blame in the administration of an offering, a modern preacher ought to survive having somebody examine the church accounts.**

Financial transparency does not require turning every private detail into public entertainment. It requires proper records, responsible administration, reasonable safeguards, and truthful explanations to those legitimately entrusted with oversight. A church should know who has authority to spend funds, how significant expenditures are approved, and whether financial reports accurately represent the organization's condition. Conflicts of interest deserve particular attention. A pastor may possess legitimate financial needs and may properly receive support according to 1 Corinthians 9:14 and 1 Timothy 5:17–18. But he should not secretly arrange transactions that benefit himself or his relatives while concealing material facts from those responsible for stewardship. Nor

should he treat designated contributions as personal spending money. A ministry is not the preacher's private bank account simply because he founded it. **The Lord's money does not become the pastor's personal property when it passes through the church offering plate.**

Covetousness becomes especially destructive when financial influence determines spiritual treatment. First Timothy 3:3 requires a bishop to be "not greedy of filthy lucre" and "not covetous." Titus 1:7 repeats the warning against filthy lucre. These qualifications exist because money can corrupt judgment. A pastor who corrects an ordinary member for conduct tolerated in a wealthy contributor has compromised his responsibility. A leader who appoints unqualified relatives to paid positions without appropriate oversight has created a conflict requiring examination. A preacher who refuses reasonable questions concerning church spending because he considers himself personally above scrutiny has misunderstood stewardship. These concerns do not authorize members to demand access to every confidential matter or accuse honest ministers without evidence. They establish that money entrusted for ministry must be handled with integrity. **A clean financial report will not guarantee a clean heart, but a man who fears reasonable financial examination should not be surprised when people begin wondering what he is afraid they will discover.**

6. A Room Full of Yes-Men Can Become a Dangerous Place

First Kings 22 records a sobering confrontation involving Ahab, king of Israel, and Micaiah, a prophet who refused to surrender the truth simply because the king preferred a more agreeable message. Ahab gathered prophets who encouraged his intended military campaign, while Micaiah delivered a contrary warning. The king had already complained that Micaiah did not prophesy good concerning him. When Micaiah spoke truthfully, Ahab ordered him imprisoned. The historical setting concerns Israel's monarchy under the law and God's dealings through the prophets. It is not a model for claiming new prophetic authority within a Church Age congregation. Nevertheless, the account reveals the danger of a leader who prefers agreement over truth. Ahab had access to plenty of encouraging voices. What he lacked was a willingness to receive correction. **Four hundred flattering voices cannot transform a lie into truth, and a leader who only listens to men who agree with him has not gathered counselors. He has assembled an audience.**

The same danger appears when a preacher surrounds himself with men whose positions depend upon keeping him satisfied. Every proposal receives enthusiastic approval. Every questionable decision receives a spiritual explanation. Every concern raised by the congregation becomes an attack upon the ministry. Men who know better remain silent because they fear losing their offices, salaries, influence, or access to the preacher.

Proverbs 27:6 declares, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." That proverb exposes the difference between faithful correction and flattering betrayal. A genuine friend may tell a leader something he does not want to hear because truth matters more than temporary comfort. A flatterer tells him what preserves the relationship regardless of the consequences. **A preacher surrounded by men who never disagree with him may not be exceptionally wise. He may simply have constructed an environment where honesty has become professionally hazardous.**

Third John 9–10 introduces Diotrephes, a man described as loving "to have the preeminence among them." John identifies conduct involving rejection of apostolic authority, malicious words, refusal to receive brethren, and the casting of others out of the church. The passage exposes religious ambition turned into domination. Diotrephes did not merely possess a strong personality. His desire for preeminence produced conduct contrary to proper spiritual fellowship and authority. The warning remains relevant wherever a leader treats personal loyalty as more important than biblical truth. A man who cannot tolerate correction may begin removing those who question him, surrounding himself with obedient admirers, and portraying every departure as evidence of rebellion. But a congregation is not strengthened when honest voices are systematically silenced. **When everybody around a preacher is afraid to tell him he is wrong, the problem is not that he has become too spiritual to need correction. The problem is that Diotrephes has found himself a comfortable chair.**

7. Accountability Protects Biblical Leadership Rather Than Destroying It

First Peter 5:2–3 commands elders to feed the flock of God, exercise oversight willingly, and avoid behaving "as being lords over God's heritage." Peter then directs them toward the appearing of the Chief Shepherd in verse 4. The ownership of the flock and the accountability of the overseer are established together. A pastor possesses legitimate authority, but that authority is entrusted rather than absolute. He must exercise oversight according to God's word and answer to the Lord for his service. Hebrews 13:17 likewise commands believers to obey those who have the rule over them because those leaders watch for souls "as they that must give account." Notice that biblical submission and pastoral accountability appear in the same instruction. The congregation must respect legitimate spiritual oversight, while the overseer must recognize that his responsibility is subject to divine judgment. **A shepherd who believes accountability undermines his authority has forgotten that his authority exists only because another Shepherd entrusted him with the flock.**

Accountability must not become an excuse for congregational anarchy. Some people are determined to oppose every decision a pastor makes, regardless of whether it agrees with

Scripture. Others use accusations as weapons in personal disputes, spread unsupported rumors, or demand that every administrative question become a public trial. Such conduct violates biblical principles concerning truthfulness, order, and proper judgment. Proverbs 18:17 warns, "He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him." Both sides of a dispute deserve careful examination. A congregation should protect faithful ministers against malicious attacks while maintaining appropriate procedures for investigating legitimate concerns. The existence of accountability does not mean the pastor loses his responsibility to lead. It means his leadership remains subject to Scripture and honest examination. **A church should neither crown the preacher king nor hand the government of the congregation to the loudest collection of perpetual complainers.**

Second Corinthians 5:10 establishes the coming examination of Christian service: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." This concerns believers in the present dispensation and the evaluation of their works, not the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20 or a second opportunity to earn salvation. The believer's eternal standing rests upon Jesus Christ and His finished work, received by grace through faith. Nevertheless, Christian service carries genuine accountability. First Corinthians 3:12–15 describes the testing of works and the possibility of reward or loss. A pastor may successfully defend his reputation before a committee, persuade supporters that every accusation is unfounded, and maintain a public appearance of righteousness. But no public relations campaign can alter what the Lord knows. The Judgment Seat of Christ will not require missing documents, reluctant witnesses, or carefully rehearsed explanations. **The preacher may manage the minutes of a church meeting, but he will not manage the evidence when he stands before the Lord Jesus Christ.**

The necessity of accountability is therefore not an attack upon faithful ministry. It is one of the safeguards that helps distinguish faithful ministry from religious domination. A qualified pastor should welcome reasonable structures that protect the congregation, establish honest stewardship, and ensure that serious concerns receive appropriate examination. Such accountability does not require constant suspicion or the assumption that every minister is secretly corrupt. It recognizes the biblical truth that every man remains capable of error and sin. David was anointed but not sinless. Peter was an apostle but not beyond correction. Elders possess responsibility but remain subject to discipline when they sin. Financial stewardship requires integrity, and accusations require evidence rather than favoritism. A ministry governed by Scripture has nothing to gain by placing its leaders beyond the reach of Scripture. **The strongest leadership is not leadership that cannot be questioned. It is leadership that can withstand honest examination because it has nothing to fear from the truth.**

There must also be a distinction between legitimate correction and the destruction of a man's reputation through careless accusations. Christians should not accept every rumor, reward malicious troublemakers, or permit personal disagreements to become campaigns of humiliation. First Timothy 5 protects elders against unsupported charges while requiring action against established wrongdoing. Those instructions are not competing suggestions. They are complementary responsibilities. The church must seek truth rather than predetermined outcomes. It must protect the innocent, confront the guilty, and refuse partiality. Where serious harm or criminal misconduct is involved, appropriate protection and civil responsibilities must not be sacrificed to preserve appearances. Where accusations prove false, the wrongly accused deserves justice. A congregation that automatically condemns its pastor is acting foolishly, but a congregation that automatically excuses him is acting no more wisely. **The Bible does not instruct Christians to believe every accusation against a preacher, and it certainly does not instruct them to disbelieve every accusation because the accused happens to be the preacher.**

The final lesson comes from Nathan's confrontation with David. The king possessed authority, but the authority did not make him innocent. The prophet possessed a message, but the message was not an excuse for personal ambition. The truth exposed the sin, and David was required to answer for his conduct. That principle reaches into every place where spiritual responsibility is exercised. No preacher, missionary, elder, teacher, evangelist, or ministry founder possesses authority to place himself above the written word of God. A man may be gifted, experienced, respected, and sincerely called, but none of those qualifications makes him infallible. **If a preacher cannot be questioned without threatening, humiliating, or exiling the questioner, he may have mistaken the shepherd's staff for a scepter.** When Nathan walks into the king's office, the faithful leader does not demand that Nathan bow before the furniture. He opens the Book, examines the truth, and remembers that the Lord Jesus Christ remains the final authority. **The church belongs to Christ, the truth belongs to God, and the man behind the pulpit is still just a man.**

9 of 10 — Christian Leadership — Raise Up Timothys Instead of Building Yourself a Throne

Key Passage — 2 Timothy 2:2

"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

There is something mighty suspicious about a preacher who has supposedly spent forty years building a ministry for Jesus Christ, yet nobody in the congregation knows what to do when he leaves the building. Every decision requires his approval, every ministry depends upon his personal supervision, every capable young man is treated like a potential rival, and every suggestion that somebody else might eventually assume responsibility is received like a declaration of war. The fellow claims he is protecting the work of God, but apparently the entire operation is held together by his personality, his preferences, and his determination to remain indispensable. If he misses a Sunday, the place practically needs an emergency management team. If somebody else preaches a good sermon, he becomes nervous. If a younger minister demonstrates unusual ability, he starts looking for faults. That is not Christian leadership. That is a man building a throne and calling the construction project a ministry. **A preacher who measures success by how helpless everybody becomes without him has fundamentally misunderstood why God called him to serve.**

The apostle Paul had an entirely different understanding of ministerial responsibility. In 2 Timothy 2:2, he instructed Timothy to commit the things he had received to faithful men who would be able to teach others also. Notice the direction of the work. Paul was not attempting to preserve his personal importance by making himself the only man capable of explaining the revelation God had entrusted to him. He was preparing Timothy to instruct other faithful men, who would then possess the ability to instruct still others. The truth was to continue beyond the immediate teacher. The ministry was not supposed to collapse when Paul departed from the scene. That is especially significant because Paul wrote his second epistle to Timothy with the end of his earthly course approaching. In 2 Timothy 4:6, he declared, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." A dying apostle was concerned about preparing living servants to continue the work.

There is a considerable difference between developing faithful workers and collecting personal disciples. A faithful pastor wants people established in the Lord Jesus Christ, grounded in the King James Bible, able to rightly divide the word of truth, and prepared to serve according to the qualifications and responsibilities God has established. A self-important religious personality wants people dependent upon his approval, attached to his reputation, and frightened of succeeding without him. The first man builds up the body of Christ. The second builds a monument to himself. The difference may not appear immediately because both men can organize classes, appoint assistants, and speak enthusiastically about training future leaders. But eventually their motives become visible.

The faithful shepherd rejoices when others grow capable. The insecure ruler begins protecting his territory. **God never called a preacher to manufacture a congregation of permanent spiritual infants so he could spend the rest of his life congratulating himself for being the only adult in the nursery.**

1. The Church Belongs to Christ, Not the Man Who Founded the Ministry

Colossians 1:18 declares concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." There is the proper foundation for every question concerning leadership, ministry development, and succession. Christ is the Head. His preeminence is not shared with a preacher, transferred to a denominational officer, or inherited by a founder's family. Ephesians 1:22–23 likewise identifies Christ as the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body. These are direct doctrinal truths concerning the Church in the present dispensation of grace. A pastor may establish a congregation, labor for decades, sacrifice financially, and faithfully serve its members, but his work does not purchase ownership of the people. Acts 20:28 declares that God purchased the Church with His own blood. **The preacher may have signed the church's incorporation documents, but Jesus Christ signed the purchase with His blood.**

Paul understood this distinction when addressing the divisions in Corinth. Some believers identified themselves with Paul, others with Apollos, and others with Cephas. Paul responded in 1 Corinthians 3:5, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" The following verses describe Paul planting, Apollos watering, and God giving the increase. The conclusion in verse 7 is unmistakable: "So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." Paul did not despise ministerial labor. He recognized its proper place. The servants performed different responsibilities, but God produced the increase. A preacher who believes the congregation cannot survive without him has begun assigning himself an importance Paul expressly refused. **The man planting the seed is not the sun, the rain, or the life inside the seed, no matter how impressive his gardening equipment may appear.**

First Corinthians 4:1–2 identifies ministers as stewards of the mysteries of God and declares that stewards must be found faithful. A steward manages something belonging to another. He is accountable for how he handles what has been entrusted to him, but he does not become the owner through long service. That principle carries serious consequences for succession. A pastor must never arrange the future of a congregation merely to protect his personal influence, preserve his family's position, or ensure that his name remains permanently attached to the ministry. The question is not who will continue

honoring the founder. The question is who is biblically qualified to carry forward the work under Jesus Christ. A faithful steward prepares for the day when his own service ends. **A church built upon Christ can survive the departure of its pastor. A church built upon the pastor's personality may discover that it had a celebrity instead of a foundation.**

2. Moses Prepared Joshua Instead of Pretending He Would Live Forever

Numbers 27:15–23 records an important moment in the leadership of Israel. Moses knew that his earthly responsibility would not continue indefinitely, and he appealed to the Lord concerning the future leadership of the congregation. In verses 16–17, he asked that God set a man over the people who could go before them and lead them, "that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd." Notice the concern. Moses was not attempting to preserve his personal reputation or establish a hereditary dynasty. He was concerned that God's people would possess faithful leadership when his own service ended. The historical setting concerns Israel under the law and the particular transition from Moses to Joshua. It is not a New Testament procedure for selecting bishops. Nevertheless, the principle is plain: a faithful leader should care about the people after his departure, not merely about his influence while he remains present.

The Lord identified Joshua the son of Nun as the man to receive responsibility. Numbers 27:18 records God's instruction: "Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him." Moses subsequently acted according to the command. Joshua was not simply a convenient relative or the fellow who had contributed the largest number of animals to the national treasury. He was a man already associated with Moses' service and prepared for the responsibilities before him. Exodus 24:13 identifies Joshua as Moses' minister, while Exodus 33:11 describes his continued presence at the tabernacle. Joshua's experience developed over time. The later transfer of responsibility was not an emergency appointment made because everybody suddenly realized Moses was getting old. **A wise leader begins preparing faithful workers long before the day arrives when somebody must decide who is going to hold the staff.**

Deuteronomy 31 records Moses publicly encouraging Joshua, declaring in verse 7, "Be strong and of a good courage." Deuteronomy 34:9 subsequently states that Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands upon him. These passages belong to Israel's unique historical and covenantal circumstances. Modern pastors should not pretend to transfer Joshua's specific divine commission or Israel's territorial promises through an ordination ceremony. Yet Moses' willingness to recognize and prepare another leader remains instructive. He did not sabotage Joshua because the younger man would eventually exercise responsibilities Moses could no longer perform. He did not demand that Israel remain emotionally dependent upon his personality. His concern was the

continuation of God's work. **A preacher who becomes jealous when a younger man demonstrates the ability to lead has forgotten that Moses did not receive his calling so Israel could spend eternity admiring Moses.**

3. Paul Gave Timothy the Truth So Timothy Could Give It to Others

Second Timothy 2:2 establishes a clear progression of ministerial teaching. Paul had received the revelation entrusted to him and faithfully proclaimed it. Timothy had heard those things among many witnesses. Timothy was then commanded to commit the same teaching to faithful men who would be able to teach others also. The instruction does not describe the manufacture of a personal religious following. It describes the faithful transmission of apostolic doctrine. The subject is the truth Timothy received, not Paul's personal habits, private preferences, or desire to preserve an impressive reputation. That distinction matters because some ministries teach younger workers to imitate the founder's personality more carefully than they study the doctrine he claims to preach. **A man can learn another preacher's gestures, volume, expressions, and mannerisms without learning enough Bible to explain how a sinner is saved. That is imitation, not ministerial preparation.**

Paul's concern for Timothy included both doctrine and conduct. First Timothy 4:13 instructs him to give attendance to reading, exhortation, and doctrine. Verse 15 commands him to meditate upon these things and give himself wholly to them so that his profiting might appear to all. Verse 16 adds, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them." That is a remarkable combination. Timothy must watch his personal conduct while remaining faithful to biblical teaching. A future minister does not become qualified simply by accumulating information, nor does personal sincerity compensate for ignorance of sound doctrine. He must learn the word of God, practice what he teaches, and develop the ability to instruct others responsibly. Paul's instruction was not to become an impressive religious personality. It was to become a faithful workman. **The Bible does not require a young preacher to become a carbon copy of his teacher. It requires him to become an approved workman who knows how to handle the Book.**

Second Timothy 2:15 completes the connection: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." The approval being sought is God's, not the permanent admiration of an older preacher. Rightly dividing requires recognizing the distinctions Scripture establishes concerning Israel and the Church, law and grace, the earthly ministry of Christ, the revelation committed to Paul, and the prophetic purposes still awaiting fulfillment. A minister must not simply collect impressive verses and arrange them into sermons without understanding their doctrinal setting. He must know who is speaking, who is addressed, and what God is revealing. Paul

prepared Timothy to handle divine truth faithfully, not to maintain a religious institution through unquestioning personal loyalty. **A preacher who trains a man to defend his reputation more fiercely than he defends the Scriptures has not produced another Timothy. He has produced a personal bodyguard carrying a Bible.**

4. Faithful Men Must Be Qualified, Not Merely Loyal to the Founder

Notice the precise requirement in 2 Timothy 2:2: "faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Paul establishes both character and ability. The men must be faithful, and they must possess the capacity to teach. A pastor should not appoint someone merely because the individual agrees with everything he says, praises every sermon, or demonstrates personal attachment to the ministry's founder. Loyalty to sound doctrine is essential. Loyalty to a man's ego is not a qualification for spiritual oversight. A younger worker may be remarkably agreeable while remaining dishonest, covetous, ignorant, or morally unqualified. Another may ask difficult but sincere questions while demonstrating genuine faithfulness and considerable ability. **The fellow who applauds every decision is not necessarily the man God has equipped to make responsible decisions himself. Sometimes he is merely the most enthusiastic echo in the building.**

First Timothy 3:1–7 establishes the qualifications of a bishop, beginning with the requirement that he be blameless. The passage addresses his marital faithfulness, vigilance, sobriety, behavior, hospitality, teaching ability, patience, financial integrity, household leadership, and reputation. Titus 1:5–9 reinforces these qualifications and requires the elder to hold fast the faithful word. These are direct Church Age instructions, not optional recommendations that may be set aside when a gifted young man becomes popular. A preacher must not confuse promise with present qualification. A man may demonstrate considerable potential while still needing years of growth before assuming certain responsibilities. There is no shame in preparation. There is considerable danger in placing an unqualified man into oversight because the congregation wants a familiar face behind the pulpit. **The office of bishop is not a graduation present handed to the most promising student. It is a responsibility requiring the qualifications established by the Holy Ghost.**

First Timothy 5:22 adds another necessary warning: "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure." The immediate concern involves responsible recognition and appointment, together with the danger of becoming implicated in another man's wrongdoing through careless action. A leader must examine the character and doctrine of those entrusted with responsibility. Enthusiasm is not sufficient evidence. A powerful testimony does not eliminate the need for demonstrated faithfulness. Neither should a pastor demand impossible perfection from developing

workers. The purpose is careful preparation and responsible judgment. Younger men need opportunities to learn, make appropriate decisions, receive correction, and demonstrate maturity. But those opportunities must not become an excuse for ignoring serious character defects. **A church should not ordain a man on Monday because he preached an exciting sermon Sunday and then spend the next ten years discovering whether he possesses the qualifications Scripture required before the ordination.**

5. Training Requires Real Work, Patient Instruction, and Room to Grow

A preacher cannot prepare another minister merely by telling him to sit quietly, take notes, and admire the instructor. Learning sound doctrine is essential, but faithful ministry also involves applying that doctrine through actual responsibilities. Paul gave Timothy assignments concerning teaching, correction, and the ordering of church affairs. In 1 Timothy 1:3, Paul refers to his instruction that Timothy remain at Ephesus and charge certain men to teach no other doctrine. Titus 1:5 likewise explains that Titus was left in Crete to set things in order and ordain elders in every city. These men were not merely decorative assistants occupying chairs beside their teacher. They were entrusted with meaningful responsibilities under apostolic instruction. **If a pastor never permits a capable worker to do anything except carry his briefcase and compliment his sermons, he is training an attendant, not developing a minister.**

Training requires patience because developing workers are not finished products. Second Timothy 2:24–25 instructs the servant of the Lord to be gentle, apt to teach, patient, and capable of instructing others in meekness. Those qualities are necessary when mentoring younger believers who have not yet acquired years of experience. A responsible pastor should correct mistakes without turning every error into a public humiliation. He should explain why a decision was unwise, demonstrate the relevant biblical principles, and provide opportunities for improvement. This does not mean tolerating rebellion or excusing disqualifying misconduct. It means recognizing the difference between an inexperienced worker learning through correction and a man deliberately rejecting sound instruction. **A shepherd who destroys every young man's confidence the first time he makes a mistake should not complain that nobody in the church ever develops enough courage to accept responsibility.**

First Timothy 4:12 records Paul's instruction to Timothy: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." Paul did not tell Timothy to demand respect through intimidation or manufacture an appearance of experience he did not possess. He instructed him to demonstrate godly character. That principle applies equally to those preparing younger workers. Age alone does not establish qualification, and youth alone does not establish disqualification. A

mature pastor should recognize genuine spiritual growth without becoming threatened by another man's ability. He should permit qualified workers to teach, serve, and develop judgment within appropriate boundaries. A young minister may eventually become an excellent preacher without sounding exactly like his teacher. **The object of training is not to produce a room full of identical voices repeating the founder's favorite expressions. It is to prepare faithful men capable of opening the Bible and teaching the truth.**

6. Succession Must Never Become a Religious Family Dynasty

There is nothing inherently wrong with a pastor's son entering the ministry. A father should rejoice when his children desire to serve Jesus Christ faithfully. But there is something seriously wrong when a church is treated like inherited property and pastoral leadership becomes a family entitlement. First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 establish qualifications for bishops and elders. Neither passage states that a man becomes qualified because his father occupied the pulpit before him. A son may be biblically qualified, properly recognized, and faithfully entrusted with responsibility. He may also be entirely unqualified. His family relationship cannot settle the matter. **The office of bishop is not transmitted through the family bloodstream, and a church is not a farm that must automatically pass to the oldest boy when his father retires.** Biblical qualifications remain the standard regardless of the surname printed on the church sign.

The historical record of Israel provides warnings concerning hereditary expectations, although the nation's monarchy and priesthood operated under covenant arrangements distinct from Church Age leadership. First Samuel 8:1–3 records that Samuel made his sons judges over Israel, but they did not walk in his ways. Scripture declares that they turned aside after lucre, took bribes, and perverted judgment. Samuel's faithfulness did not automatically establish the character of his sons. The passage belongs to Israel's historical circumstances and must not be treated as a direct New Testament procedure for pastoral succession. Nevertheless, its moral warning is unmistakable. A faithful father cannot transmit spiritual integrity merely by giving his children positions of responsibility. Every man must be examined according to his own conduct. A congregation that overlooks dishonesty, covetousness, or incompetence because the offender belongs to a respected family has replaced biblical judgment with favoritism.

First Timothy 5:21 commands Timothy to observe his responsibilities "without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality." That instruction destroys the legitimacy of selecting leaders through personal favoritism. A ministry founder may possess tremendous affection for his relatives, longtime assistants, or closest friends. Those relationships do not authorize him to disregard Scripture. Nor should succession become an arrangement in which the departing pastor retains unofficial control by appointing a successor who will

never question his preferences. A qualified successor must remain accountable to Jesus Christ and the word of God, not permanently subordinate to the founder's personal wishes. Respect for an older minister does not require preserving every administrative method he preferred. **A preacher who retires from the pulpit but insists upon controlling every future decision has not really surrendered the office. He has merely moved the throne into another room.**

7. A Faithful Leader Rejoices When the Work Continues Without Him

John the Baptist provides a remarkable example of proper humility when his disciples expressed concern over the growing attention directed toward Jesus Christ. In John 3:30, John declared, "He must increase, but I must decrease." The historical and doctrinal setting concerns John's forerunner ministry during Christ's earthly presentation to Israel. John was not describing the ordinary succession of pastors within a Church Age assembly. Nevertheless, his statement reveals an attitude that every minister should recognize: the prominence of Jesus Christ matters more than the prominence of His servant. A preacher should not treat the success of another faithful worker as a personal injury. He should rejoice when Christ is exalted and sound doctrine continues to be proclaimed. **The man who claims to be building the Lord's ministry but becomes miserable whenever the Lord uses somebody else has confused serving Christ with competing for attention.**

Second Timothy 4:6–8 brings us back to Paul's approaching departure. He declared, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." He looked toward the crown of righteousness associated with the Lord's appearing. Paul was not preparing to preserve an earthly throne or establish a permanent religious institution bearing his personal authority. He had completed the work entrusted to him and remained concerned for the continuation of faithful doctrine. The Christian's salvation rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, received by grace through faith, not upon successful ministerial performance. Nevertheless, faithful service will be examined at the Judgment Seat of Christ, as 2 Corinthians 5:10 establishes. A preacher should therefore evaluate his labor according to the Lord's approval rather than the durability of his personal fame. **The crown worth seeking is not the one a congregation places upon a preacher's head. It is the reward bestowed by the righteous Judge.**

The responsibility of preparing others must also remain connected to accountability. A pastor should not place someone in leadership and then disappear whenever difficulties arise. Neither should he continually interfere with every reasonable decision the successor makes. A qualified worker needs authority appropriate to his responsibility, along with continuing accountability to Scripture. The older minister may offer counsel, encouragement, and assistance when appropriate, but he must not undermine the man

entrusted with the work simply because the younger leader exercises independent judgment. First Corinthians 3:8 declares that the planter and the one who waters are one in their labor, while each receives his own reward according to his own labor. Their responsibilities may differ, but the ultimate work belongs to God. **A faithful pastor should be able to leave the building without fearing that the ministry will collapse or secretly hoping that it does so everybody will discover how important he was.**

The responsibility of Christian leadership extends beyond the lifetime, health, and personal influence of the individual minister. Moses eventually departed, but Joshua continued leading Israel according to the responsibility God had given him. Paul approached the end of his earthly course, but Timothy remained responsible for committing sound doctrine to faithful men. Titus was instructed to establish qualified elders rather than preserve every responsibility in his own hands. The body of Christ possesses many members, and Ephesians 4:11–16 establishes the importance of ministers equipping believers for the work of the ministry and the edifying of the body. These passages belong to their respective historical and doctrinal settings, but their practical instruction concerning faithful preparation cannot be ignored. A preacher who trains capable workers strengthens the congregation. A preacher who deliberately keeps everyone dependent upon himself weakens it. **The ministry should become stronger because a pastor faithfully served, not permanently helpless because he made himself indispensable.**

A congregation must also recognize the difference between honoring a faithful leader and worshipping his personality. Hebrews 13:7 instructs believers to remember those who have spoken the word of God and to follow their faith, considering the end of their conversation. That is proper respect for faithful ministry. It does not require treating every personal preference of a former pastor as an unchangeable commandment. Nor does it require rejecting a qualified successor because he possesses a different personality or handles practical matters differently. Sound doctrine must remain unchanged, but administrative methods may require adjustment. A church should be grateful for the labor of those who came before while recognizing that the work belongs to Jesus Christ. The faithful preacher should teach believers to examine everything according to Scripture rather than demanding permanent loyalty to his own reputation. **A congregation that cannot distinguish between the word of God and the preferences of its founder has inherited a personality cult instead of a healthy understanding of biblical authority.**

The final verdict is plain. God never called a man to build himself a throne and then surround it with admirers who cannot function without his permission. He called ministers to preach the word, maintain sound doctrine, oversee the flock, and prepare faithful people for service. A qualified pastor should rejoice when younger men grow in biblical knowledge,

develop spiritual maturity, demonstrate godly character, and become capable of carrying responsibility. He should correct them when necessary, encourage them when appropriate, and refuse to sabotage their growth because he fears losing personal importance. The church belongs to Jesus Christ, not to the man who happens to occupy its pulpit. **Raise up Timothys instead of building yourself a throne. A preacher's greatest legacy is not a building bearing his name, a congregation dependent upon his personality, or a portrait hanging in the hallway. It is faithful men who continue preaching the truth after his voice has fallen silent. The man who spends his ministry making disciples dependent upon himself has built a monument to his own importance. The man who prepares them to stand upon God's word has invested in a work that can continue long after his name has been forgotten.**

10 of 10 — Christian Leadership — Diotrephes in the Driver's Seat: When the Man Who Loves Preeminence Takes Over the Church

Key Passage — 3 John 9–10

"I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church."

There is something almost comical about a man who claims to be serving Jesus Christ while becoming furious whenever Jesus Christ receives more attention than he does. He wants the first word, the final decision, the largest chair, the loudest applause, and the unquestioning loyalty of everybody unfortunate enough to fall within his religious territory. He will preach humility from a polished pulpit while demanding privileges that would embarrass a medieval monarch. He will condemn rebellion while treating legitimate questions as treason. He will quote submission passages until the congregation knows them better than John 3:16, but somehow the verses concerning his own accountability never seem to make it into the sermon. He calls himself a servant, of course. That sounds better than announcing that he has appointed himself the unofficial emperor of the church basement. But the Holy Ghost has already exposed this particular arrangement. His name was Diotrephes, and he loved having the preeminence.

Third John is one of the shortest books in the King James Bible, but it contains enough spiritual dynamite to blow the roof off an entire religious dictatorship. John writes to Gaius, commends his faithfulness, addresses the receiving of brethren laboring in the truth,

exposes the conduct of Diotrephes, and commends the good testimony of Demetrius. Within those few verses stands a man whose appetite for prominence had become destructive to Christian fellowship. Diotrephes rejected John's communication, spoke maliciously against him, refused to receive the brethren, forbade others from receiving them, and cast people out of the church. This was not an ordinary disagreement concerning meeting times, building repairs, or the arrangement of the hymnbooks. It was religious ambition producing observable acts of opposition, exclusion, and control. John did not diagnose the man's personality or invent elaborate explanations for his behavior. He identified the driving sin and documented what the man actually did. **Diotrephes wanted the first place, and he was prepared to make other people suffer to keep it.**

This final examination brings the entire question of Christian leadership into focus. The Bible establishes genuine authority for qualified men entrusted with oversight of local churches. It commands sound doctrine, pastoral courage, discipline, accountability, faithfulness, and the preparation of future workers. It also forbids religious leaders from acting as lords over God's heritage. Both truths must be maintained. A congregation that refuses all biblical oversight is not demonstrating superior spirituality, and a pastor who demands unconditional personal obedience is not demonstrating superior authority. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, and the written word of God remains the final authority over every man who claims to serve Him. The issue with Diotrephes was not that he possessed too much legitimate responsibility. It was that he loved possessing the prominence that properly belongs to another. **The church does not need a miniature pope behind its pulpit, but neither does it need a mob running the congregation. It needs faithful shepherds who remember whose sheep they are tending.**

1. The Man Who Loved Preeminence More Than Truth

Third John 9 begins with a simple statement: "I wrote unto the church." John had communicated with the assembly, but something stood between that communication and its proper reception. The obstacle was a man named Diotrephes, "who loveth to have the preeminence among them." Notice the precision of the accusation. John does not merely say that Diotrephes happened to occupy an influential position. He identifies the man's love of preeminence. The desire for prominence had become an overriding characteristic of his conduct. Scripture does not tell us the exact office Diotrephes occupied, and it would be careless to insist that he was formally the pastor or bishop when the text does not establish that fact. What Scripture plainly reveals is that he exercised enough influence to resist John's communication, interfere with the reception of brethren, and remove people from church fellowship. **You do not need an official crown to behave like a king.**

Sometimes a man simply takes possession of the chair and dares everybody else to move him.

The word "preeminence" deserves particular attention because Scripture identifies the One to whom that distinction properly belongs. Colossians 1:18 declares concerning Jesus Christ, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." There is the doctrinal answer to the entire Diotrephes problem. The position is already occupied. Christ is the Head, and His preeminence is not subject to an election, ordination ceremony, pastoral anniversary, or congregational vote. Paul was writing concerning the Church in the present dispensation of grace, establishing the supremacy of the risen Lord over His body. Diotrephes wanted preeminence among the brethren, but the Lord Jesus Christ already possessed rightful preeminence over the Church. **The moment a religious leader begins treating Christ's position as an opening in the organizational chart, he has confused ministry with attempted spiritual promotion.**

Notice also that John did not condemn Diotrephes merely for possessing ability, exercising influence, or desiring to serve. First Timothy 3:1 declares that a man desiring the office of a bishop desires a good work. Legitimate spiritual responsibility is not inherently sinful. The issue is the motive and conduct governing that responsibility. A man may desire to preach because he loves the word of God and wants to feed the flock. Another may desire the same pulpit because he enjoys being admired, obeyed, and treated as indispensable. Outwardly, both may appear busy in ministry. The difference becomes visible when their authority is questioned, their preferences are challenged, or someone else receives recognition. The faithful servant rejoices when Christ is exalted. The ambitious ruler becomes disturbed when attention moves away from himself. **A preacher who cannot bear to be second in his own congregation has forgotten that he was never supposed to be first in the first place.**

2. When Personal Authority Begins Rejecting Apostolic Truth

John continues the indictment with four devastating words: "receiveth us not." Diotrephes was not merely declining a social invitation. The surrounding context identifies John as the writer communicating with the church, and Diotrephes refused to receive that communication and its authority. John was an apostle of Jesus Christ, writing during the apostolic period, when the Lord was completing the revelation entrusted to His chosen messengers. The modern Church possesses the completed written Scriptures as its final authority. No preacher today may claim John's apostolic position or manufacture equivalent revelation. Nevertheless, the principle remains unmistakable. A religious figure who places his personal importance above revealed truth has stepped outside the proper

bounds of Christian leadership. He may retain influence over people, but influence cannot convert resistance to God's word into righteousness. **When a man begins deciding which portions of biblical authority he will recognize according to whether they threaten his position, he has stopped submitting to the Book and started editing it with his ego.**

Second Corinthians 4:5 establishes the opposite spirit: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." Paul did not establish the ministry as a platform for personal exaltation. He preached Christ as Lord and described himself as a servant. That distinction should settle the ambitions of any preacher who believes the congregation exists to maintain his importance. A pastor may rightly exercise oversight, preach doctrine, correct sin, and organize church affairs. But he does so as a servant under the authority of Christ, not as a substitute for Christ. The authority of his preaching comes from the Scripture faithfully proclaimed, not from the force of his personality. The man who rejects biblical correction because it threatens his reputation has reversed Paul's arrangement. He is no longer preaching Christ and serving the people. He is using Christ's name while expecting the people to serve him.

Acts 17:11 provides a useful contrast through the conduct of the Bereans. During Paul's missionary ministry, they received the word with readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily to determine whether the things they heard were true. The immediate setting involved Jews examining the Old Testament Scriptures in connection with Paul's proclamation of Jesus Christ. They were not examining a completed New Testament bound in modern form, but their conduct established the importance of measuring religious claims against the written revelation available to them. Scripture commends their examination rather than condemning it as rebellion. A faithful preacher should welcome believers who study carefully and ask honest biblical questions. A Diotrephes-minded ruler fears such people because a congregation grounded in Scripture is harder to control through personality. **The preacher who needs his listeners to keep their Bibles closed while he speaks has already revealed something troubling about the authority he expects them to accept.**

3. Malicious Words, Closed Doors, and Religious Expulsions

Third John 10 moves from Diotrephes' desire for preeminence to the conduct flowing from it: "prating against us with malicious words." The word "prating" identifies foolish, empty, and malicious speech directed against John and his associates. This was not legitimate doctrinal disagreement supported by Scripture. John expressly identified the words as malicious. Religious ambition frequently reveals itself through attacks upon anyone perceived as threatening the ambitious man's influence. A faithful leader can answer objections from the Bible, explain decisions, and confront genuine false teaching. But

when a man substitutes personal accusations for biblical arguments, he exposes the weakness of his position. Proverbs 10:18 declares that the person uttering slander is a fool. That wisdom principle agrees with the New Testament's condemnation of corrupt speech. **When a preacher cannot defeat an argument from Scripture, attacking the person making it may become his favorite substitute.**

John then exposes another offense: "neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would." The context of Third John concerns traveling brethren who went forth for Christ's name and deserved faithful hospitality. Verses 5–8 commend Gaius for receiving brethren and strangers and identify the responsibility of becoming fellowhelpers to the truth. Diotrephes acted in the opposite manner. He personally refused to receive the brethren and interfered with others who desired to receive them. His conduct was therefore not confined to his own decision. He attempted to control the decisions of others. That is a crucial distinction. A leader may exercise legitimate judgment concerning whom a congregation supports, receives into ministry, or allows to teach. But Diotrephes was not commended for protecting sound doctrine. John condemned him for obstructing faithful brethren. **The man who loves preeminence eventually discovers that controlling his own conduct is not enough. He wants authority over everybody else's conscience as well.**

The final accusation is especially severe: Diotrephes "casteth them out of the church." John describes the exclusion of people associated with receiving the brethren. This was not a harmless disagreement over hospitality. It involved the use of church exclusion against people whose conduct John defended. Here religious ambition had become an instrument of punishment. The man who wanted prominence used his influence to remove those who would not cooperate with his restrictions. That should trouble any congregation where disagreeing with a leader's personal preferences can result in threats, humiliation, or exclusion. Yet we must not pretend that every instance of church discipline resembles Diotrephes. Scripture commands legitimate correction and separation in appropriate circumstances. The difference is whether discipline follows biblical truth or serves personal domination. **A church door should not become a trapdoor beneath the feet of everybody who refuses to bow before the man sitting in the largest chair.**

4. Biblical Discipline Is Not the Same Thing as Personal Retaliation

First Corinthians 5 establishes genuine authority and responsibility concerning church discipline. Paul confronted the Corinthian assembly over serious sexual immorality that had been tolerated among them. He instructed the congregation to address the wrongdoing and concluded in verse 13, "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." The issue was identifiable sin, apostolic instruction, and the assembly's

responsibility to maintain biblical order. That is entirely different from removing people because they refuse to flatter a leader or cooperate with an unbiblical restriction. Church discipline is not inherently oppressive. Refusing to exercise necessary discipline can itself constitute disobedience. But the authority to discipline must remain governed by Scripture, truthful evidence, proper responsibility, and the legitimate protection of the congregation. **The Bible gives the church authority to confront wickedness. It does not give a preacher permission to manufacture wickedness whenever somebody disagrees with him.**

Second Thessalonians 3:14–15 provides another important distinction. Paul instructed believers to note those who refused the apostolic instruction in his epistle and to withdraw ordinary company so that the offender might be ashamed. Yet he immediately added, "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." The disciplinary purpose was correction, not personal destruction. Galatians 6:1 likewise commands spiritual believers to restore someone overtaken in a fault in the spirit of meekness. These passages demonstrate that biblical correction requires both seriousness concerning wrongdoing and concern for the person being corrected. Diotrephes' conduct was different. John condemned his malicious words, obstruction of faithful brethren, and exclusion of those receiving them. The distinction must not be blurred. **A shepherd disciplines because the sheep have wandered into danger. A religious dictator disciplines because the sheep have wandered beyond his personal control.**

The same standard applies to leadership today. If a member persists in established immorality, openly promotes destructive false doctrine, or engages in conduct requiring biblical discipline, the church must not refuse appropriate action merely to avoid controversy. But if a member asks for financial accountability, questions an unsupported accusation, or disagrees with an administrative preference, the preacher cannot automatically label that person rebellious. First Timothy 5:19–20 requires credible evidence concerning accusations against elders and establishes that elders who sin must be rebuked. Those instructions protect leaders against malicious charges while preventing their office from becoming a hiding place for wrongdoing. A church should neither accept every accusation nor reject every concern because the accused is influential. **Biblical discipline protects the flock from sin. Personal retaliation protects the leader from embarrassment. Confusing the two is how Diotrephes gets promoted from an inconvenience to a system of government.**

5. The Qualifications for Leadership Expose the Diotrephes Spirit

First Timothy 3:1–7 establishes the qualifications of a bishop, beginning with the requirement that he be blameless. Paul proceeds to address marital faithfulness, vigilance,

sobriety, good behavior, hospitality, teaching ability, patience, freedom from covetousness, responsible household leadership, and a good reputation. Titus 1:5–9 reinforces those requirements, declaring that a bishop must not be selfwilled or soon angry but must hold fast the faithful word. These instructions concern qualified leadership in the Church during the present dispensation. They establish something far more important than a man's ability to command attention. A preacher may possess extraordinary speaking ability and still be unqualified for oversight. He may organize impressive programs and remain morally corrupt. He may raise substantial funds while failing the requirements concerning covetousness. **A polished pulpit cannot transform a disqualified man into a qualified shepherd, regardless of how many people admire the furniture.**

The requirements concerning hospitality and self-will are particularly relevant to Diotrephes. First Timothy 3:2 requires a bishop to be "given to hospitality," while Titus 1:8 describes him as "a lover of hospitality." Diotrephes was condemned for refusing to receive faithful brethren and forbidding others from receiving them. Titus 1:7 also says a bishop must be "not selfwilled." Diotrephes' desire for preeminence and his interference with others reveal conduct sharply opposed to the character expected of qualified spiritual oversight. Scripture does not identify his precise office, so we must not pretend to know more than John recorded. Nevertheless, the contrast between his behavior and the qualifications for church leadership is obvious. A man who habitually insists upon his own importance, manipulates fellowship, and retaliates against faithful believers should not be defended merely because he possesses influence. **A religious title is not a coat of paint capable of covering every crack in a man's character.**

Second Timothy 4:2 requires the preacher to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. That command destroys both cowardly leadership and cruel domination. A pastor must have enough courage to confront false teaching, immorality, dishonesty, and destructive conduct. He must also possess enough patience to instruct sincere believers and enough humility to distinguish biblical commandments from personal preferences. Some men excuse their harshness by claiming that they are strong preachers. Others excuse their cowardice by claiming that they are loving shepherds. The Bible accepts neither counterfeit. A bully can raise his voice without possessing spiritual courage, and a coward can speak softly without possessing biblical love. The qualified minister must be faithful to truth while demonstrating the character required by Scripture. **God never called a jellyfish to defend the flock, but He never called a wolf to pastor it either. The shepherd must possess a backbone without acquiring fangs.**

6. Accountability Is Not Rebellion Against God's Appointed Authority

Hebrews 13:17 commands believers to obey those who have the rule over them and submit themselves, explaining that such leaders watch for souls "as they that must give account." That verse establishes genuine responsibility within Christian assemblies. It does not authorize congregational anarchy, contempt for qualified ministers, or endless disputes over every practical decision. A pastor must exercise oversight, establish reasonable arrangements, correct wrongdoing, and protect sound doctrine. But the same verse declares that spiritual leaders must give account. First Peter 5:2–3 reinforces the limitation by instructing elders to feed the flock without behaving "as being lords over God's heritage." The flock belongs to God. The shepherd exercises entrusted responsibility. **The man who quotes Hebrews 13:17 to demand submission while ignoring 1 Peter 5:3 has not discovered a superior doctrine of authority. He has simply learned how to read half a Bible when the other half becomes inconvenient.**

Accountability also requires fairness. A congregation should not become a courtroom where every rumor is treated as evidence and every disappointed member is permitted to manufacture accusations against the pastor. Proverbs 18:13 warns against answering a matter before hearing it, while Proverbs 18:17 emphasizes the importance of examining competing claims. Yet the same responsibility for truth forbids protecting a guilty leader because he possesses influence, financial resources, or a celebrated reputation. Second Corinthians 8:20–21 demonstrates Paul's concern for honest administration of financial gifts and avoiding legitimate blame. A church should welcome proper stewardship, reasonable safeguards, and appropriate examination of serious concerns. Where harm, exploitation, or criminal conduct is involved, necessary protection and lawful responsibilities must not be sacrificed to preserve appearances. **The preacher who considers every honest question an attempted overthrow may have forgotten that accountability is not a foreign invasion. It is part of faithful stewardship.**

David's confrontation by Nathan provides the Old Testament illustration of this principle. In 2 Samuel 12:7, Nathan declared, "Thou art the man." David was Israel's anointed king, but his position did not place him beyond God's commandments. The historical setting concerns Israel under the law and cannot be mechanically transferred into the Church Age. Nevertheless, the moral principle agrees with the New Testament's instructions concerning correction and accountability. Galatians 2:11 likewise records Paul's confrontation with Peter because he was to be blamed. Peter's apostolic prominence did not make his conduct unquestionable. These examples do not authorize personal vendettas against ministers. They demonstrate that genuine authority remains accountable to truth. **A preacher who cannot be questioned without threatening, humiliating, or exiling the questioner has not necessarily defended his calling. He may have revealed that his authority depends more upon intimidation than upon Scripture.**

7. Christ Must Increase While the Religious Throne Comes Down

John the Baptist declared in John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease." The original setting concerns John's ministry as the forerunner of Jesus Christ during the Lord's earthly presentation to Israel. John was not describing an ordinary pastoral succession within a Church Age assembly. Nevertheless, his willingness to direct attention away from himself toward Christ stands in striking contrast to Diotrephes' appetite for prominence. John understood that his responsibility was not to build a permanent following centered upon his own personality. His ministry pointed toward the Lord. A faithful Christian leader must likewise remember that the congregation belongs to Jesus Christ and that the minister is only a servant. A preacher may be appreciated, respected, and supported without becoming the object of spiritual devotion. **The man who sincerely wants Christ to increase will not become miserable whenever somebody else receives recognition for faithful service.**

Second Timothy 2:2 establishes the responsibility of preparing future workers. Paul instructed Timothy to commit the apostolic teaching to faithful men who would be able to teach others also. That is the opposite of manufacturing permanent dependence upon a religious personality. A pastor should desire to see believers mature in Scripture, capable men develop their responsibilities, and qualified workers become prepared to serve faithfully when he is no longer present. Titus 1:5 demonstrates the importance of establishing qualified elders, while Ephesians 4:11–16 describes the edifying of the body through proper ministry. A Diotrephes-minded leader considers developing workers a threat because their independence may diminish his importance. A faithful shepherd regards their maturity as evidence that the work is progressing. **The preacher who spends his ministry making everybody dependent upon himself has not built a strong congregation. He has built a religious wheelchair and appointed himself the only man permitted to push it.**

Third John itself provides a final contrast through Gaius and Demetrius. John commends Gaius for walking in the truth and faithfully receiving the brethren. In verse 12, he declares, "Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself." Then verse 11 establishes the moral instruction: "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good." John does not invite believers to admire Diotrephes because he possesses influence. He points toward truth, faithful conduct, and good testimony. The passage does not require us to speculate concerning Diotrephes' eternal salvation or assign him a psychological label. It supplies enough evidence to condemn the conduct John identified. The responsibility of the congregation is to recognize what agrees with Scripture and follow what is good. **A church does not become stronger by protecting the most controlling personality in the**

room. It becomes stronger when truth, character, and obedience to Jesus Christ govern its fellowship.

The tragedy of Diotrephes is not merely that one ambitious man caused trouble in an early Christian assembly. It is that his conduct reveals how religious authority can be corrupted when a man loves prominence more than truth. He rejected apostolic communication, spoke maliciously, refused faithful brethren, interfered with those who would receive them, and cast people out of the church. These were not harmless personality differences. They were observable acts that John considered worthy of direct confrontation. The same essential danger remains wherever a leader substitutes personal loyalty for biblical obedience, protects his reputation through intimidation, or treats the congregation as private property. Yet the answer is not to abolish pastoral authority or encourage rebellion against qualified leadership. Scripture commands genuine oversight, sound doctrine, discipline, and faithful administration. The answer is to restore every responsibility to its proper place beneath the authority of Jesus Christ and His written word. **The cure for a corrupt shepherd is not a flock without direction. It is leadership governed by the Chief Shepherd.**

Every Christian leader should therefore examine the character of his authority. Does he preach Christ Jesus the Lord or continually draw attention toward himself? Does he welcome the examination of Scripture or become offended when believers ask honest questions? Does he correct established sin or punish personal disagreement? Does he handle entrusted resources honestly, exercise judgment without partiality, and accept proper accountability? Does he train faithful workers capable of continuing the ministry, or does he quietly sabotage anyone whose abilities threaten his prominence? These questions are not invitations to replace doctrine with personal opinions. They arise from the responsibilities established in the New Testament. A pastor must possess courage without cruelty, conviction without arrogance, and authority without personal domination. The congregation must honor faithful oversight without surrendering the final authority of Scripture. **A man who cannot serve without being worshipped has mistaken the ministry for a throne, and a man who cannot lead without intimidating people has mistaken fear for respect.**

The final verdict is unmistakable. Diotrephes wanted the first place, but Jesus Christ already occupies it. The Lord never called a preacher to become a miniature pope, a religious dictator, or the personal owner of a congregation purchased with divine blood. Neither did He establish His Church so that every member could ignore sound doctrine and reject legitimate oversight whenever obedience becomes inconvenient. He established a body with Christ as its Head, qualified servants responsible for its care, and

the written Scriptures as the final authority by which doctrine and conduct must be judged. The shepherd's staff must guide rather than dominate. The pulpit must proclaim Christ rather than glorify its occupant. Correction must defend truth rather than settle grudges. Accountability must protect righteousness rather than manufacture rebellion. And faithful leadership must prepare others to continue serving when the present leader's work is finished. **The church does not need Diotrephes in the driver's seat. It needs Jesus Christ as its Head, the King James Bible as its final written authority, and shepherds who remember that they will answer to the Chief Shepherd. The throne is occupied, the Book is settled, and the preacher is still a servant. The moment he forgets that, he becomes the very danger he was called to protect the flock against.**

Conclusion — Christian Leadership: Authority Without Diotrephes in the Driver's Seat

There comes a time when every man who claims to be called into the ministry must answer a question considerably more important than how many people attend his services, how much money passes through the offering plate, or how many flattering introductions he receives at religious conferences. **Whose church is it?** That question cuts through the expensive suits, polished pulpits, impressive titles, and carefully arranged photographs that have become the decorations of modern religious leadership. If the church belongs to Jesus Christ, then the preacher is a servant. If the flock was purchased with the blood of God, then the pastor is a steward. If the King James Bible is the final written authority, then the man holding it remains subject to every commandment that applies to him. But if the congregation exists to preserve the preacher's importance, satisfy his ambitions, and protect his reputation regardless of his conduct, something has gone terribly wrong. The shepherd has traded his staff for a scepter, and the servant has begun imagining himself a king.

The tragedy is that this corruption does not always begin with an openly wicked man announcing his intention to dominate a congregation. Sometimes it begins with a sincere preacher who gradually becomes too impressed with his own importance. He starts believing that his judgment should never be questioned because he has been in the ministry longer than everybody else. He begins confusing loyalty to Jesus Christ with loyalty to his personal decisions. He receives legitimate appreciation and eventually develops an appetite for admiration. Before long, a disagreement over a church policy becomes rebellion, a request for financial accountability becomes an attack upon the ministry, and a capable younger worker becomes a potential threat to the preacher's position. He still

preaches about humility, naturally. Most men can preach sermons considerably better than they can live them. But the Bible never instructed a congregation to measure its pastor by the magnificence of his public performance while ignoring the condition of his private character. **A preacher can spend thirty years building a ministry and discover too late that the largest thing he constructed was his own ego.**

The Lord Jesus Christ established a different standard in Matthew 20:25–28 when He distinguished the rulers of the Gentiles, who exercised dominion over others, from the servant character expected of His disciples. His declaration was unmistakable: "But it shall not be so among you." Those words were spoken during His earthly ministry to Israel, but the principle of servant leadership is reinforced in the New Testament instructions governing Christian elders. First Peter 5:2–3 commands them to feed God's flock while refusing to behave "as being lords over God's heritage." That does not eliminate authority. It establishes the proper character of authority. A shepherd must lead, feed, protect, correct, and oversee. He must recognize danger and exercise judgment. But he must never imagine that the responsibilities entrusted to him have transformed the Lord's sheep into his personal possessions. **A shepherd's greatness is not measured by how many sheep tremble when he approaches, but by how faithfully he tends the flock belonging to the Chief Shepherd.**

The foundation beneath every legitimate exercise of Christian leadership remains the written word of God. Second Timothy 3:16–17 establishes that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. A preacher possesses authority only insofar as he faithfully ministers according to Scripture. His personality does not inspire additional commandments. His education does not grant him exemption from correction. His ordination does not transform personal preferences into the decrees of Almighty God. There is nothing wrong with a pastor establishing reasonable policies, determining practical arrangements, or making necessary administrative decisions. Those responsibilities belong to orderly leadership. But a decision concerning meeting times, ministry expenses, or building arrangements does not become infallible merely because it was announced from behind the pulpit. **The Bible outranks the preacher, and the preacher who becomes offended by that arrangement has forgotten who called him into the ministry.** When the Book corrects the man, the man ought to correct his conduct. That is not weakness. That is obedience.

Character must remain inseparable from the office. First Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9 establish qualifications that no amount of religious talent can cancel. A bishop must be blameless, sober, vigilant, faithful, patient, hospitable, capable of teaching, and free from

the covetousness, violence, and self-will that corrupt spiritual responsibility. A congregation should not be dazzled into overlooking those qualifications because a man possesses extraordinary speaking ability or an impressive record of financial accomplishments. The Corinthians came behind in no gift, according to 1 Corinthians 1:7, yet Paul rebuked their carnality in chapter 3. Gifts and maturity are not identical. A man can proclaim biblical truth while privately refusing to obey it. He can organize a successful ministry while establishing a disastrous example of personal conduct. **God does not examine the shine on the pulpit when determining whether the preacher is qualified. He examines the man standing behind it.** The church should never be required to overlook what Scripture condemns because the offender happens to be talented.

Courage is equally necessary, for the Lord never called a jellyfish to lead His people. Second Timothy 4:2 commands the preacher to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with longsuffering and doctrine. A faithful pastor must be willing to confront false teaching, immorality, destructive conduct, and corruption even when the offender possesses money or influence. He cannot surrender truth because the congregation might become smaller or the financial report might become less impressive. Yet courage must not become an excuse for cruelty. First Timothy 3 requires patience, and 2 Timothy 2:24–25 instructs the servant of the Lord to be gentle, patient, and capable of teaching. A bully can shout without possessing biblical courage, while a coward can speak softly without possessing biblical love. **The difference between a strong shepherd and a religious tyrant is not whether either possesses a backbone. It is whether that backbone remains beneath the authority of God's word.** The church needs men willing to stand for truth without standing upon the necks of the people they were appointed to serve.

Responsible leadership must also recognize that no single preacher possesses every ability necessary for the work. Moses discovered this in Exodus 18 when Jethro observed him attempting to judge Israel from morning until evening. The arrangement was exhausting both Moses and the people. Jethro's verdict was direct: "The thing that thou doest is not good." The solution involved assigning appropriate responsibilities to capable, trustworthy men. That historical arrangement concerned Israel's administration, but the principle of responsible delegation agrees with the New Testament's teaching concerning shared service. Acts 6 records the appointment of qualified men to address practical needs while the apostles continued in prayer and the ministry of the word. First Corinthians 12 describes the body of Christ as possessing many members with differing functions. **A church is not a one-man circus where the preacher performs every act while everybody else sits around admiring the show.** A wise pastor recognizes the abilities God has given others, develops faithful workers, and refuses to confuse personal indispensability with spiritual success.

The same humility must govern decisions. Proverbs 15:22 declares, "Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established." Joshua learned the danger of acting without seeking the Lord's counsel when the Gibeonites deceived Israel. Nehemiah demonstrated deliberate preparation before announcing the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. Paul made missionary plans while recognizing that circumstances and the Lord's direction could require adjustments. These accounts belong to their respective historical settings, but they illustrate principles of wisdom, preparation, and responsible judgment. A pastor should examine Scripture, investigate facts, seek trustworthy counsel, count the cost, and accept responsibility for the decisions entrusted to him. He should not manufacture claims of divine revelation to shield his personal preferences from examination. **The Holy Ghost never instructed a preacher to confuse an idea that crossed his mind with a commandment that came from heaven.** A leader who cannot admit uncertainty has not become omniscient. He has merely become unwilling to acknowledge that he is human.

Correction remains one of the most solemn responsibilities in Christian leadership. First Corinthians 5 demonstrates that a congregation must not tolerate established wickedness merely because confronting it would be uncomfortable. Galatians 6:1 directs spiritual believers to restore a fallen brother in the spirit of meekness. Second Corinthians 2:6–8 demonstrates the necessity of forgiveness and comfort when appropriate discipline has accomplished its purpose. These instructions belong together. A preacher who refuses to confront destructive behavior because he fears controversy has neglected his responsibility. A preacher who delights in publicly humiliating people has misunderstood it. Biblical discipline is not a religious execution platform for settling personal grudges. It must be grounded in Scripture, supported by truthful evidence, and directed toward righteousness, protection, repentance, and restoration. **A shepherd should never allow wolves to devour the flock, but neither should he become a wolf himself.** The staff was given for faithful oversight, not for beating the sheep whenever the preacher's pride becomes irritated.

Accountability must reach the man behind the pulpit as surely as it reaches everybody else. David was Israel's anointed king, yet Nathan stood before him in 2 Samuel 12:7 and declared, "Thou art the man." Peter was an apostle, yet Paul withstood him to the face in Galatians 2:11 because he was to be blamed. First Timothy 5:19–20 establishes that accusations against elders require proper evidence and that elders who sin must be rebuked. The Bible does not authorize malicious allegations, irresponsible gossip, or congregational mobs determined to destroy faithful ministers. Neither does it permit leaders to hide established wrongdoing beneath claims of spiritual authority. Financial integrity, impartial judgment, honest stewardship, and appropriate accountability are

necessary responsibilities, not personal insults. **If a preacher cannot be questioned without threatening the person who asks, he may have mistaken the shepherd's staff for a royal scepter.** No man becomes too important to answer to the Scriptures, and no ministry becomes so successful that truth must be sacrificed to preserve its reputation.

A faithful pastor must also recognize that his earthly ministry will eventually end. Second Timothy 2:2 instructed Timothy to commit sound teaching to faithful men who would be able to teach others also. Paul was not establishing a religious dynasty permanently dependent upon his personality. He was preparing others to carry forward the truth. Moses prepared Joshua for responsibility in Israel, while Paul entrusted Timothy and Titus with serious ministerial duties in the early Church. A preacher should rejoice when qualified younger men grow in biblical knowledge, develop godly character, and become capable of faithful service. He should not sabotage their progress because their abilities threaten his importance. The office of bishop is not a family inheritance, and a congregation is not property that automatically passes from father to son. Scriptural qualifications remain the governing standard. **A preacher who spends his ministry making everybody dependent upon himself has not built a strong congregation. He has built a religious wheelchair and appointed himself the only man allowed to push it.** The best evidence of faithful leadership may appear long after the leader himself has departed.

And then we arrive at Diotrephes, the man whose name stands as a permanent warning against the corruption of spiritual ambition. Third John 9 identifies him as one "who loveth to have the preeminence among them." Verse 10 exposes the conduct flowing from that desire. He rejected John's communication, spoke maliciously, refused faithful brethren, prevented others from receiving them, and cast people out of the church. Scripture does not identify his precise ecclesiastical office, but it reveals enough to condemn his actions. Diotrephes wanted prominence, and he was willing to interfere with faithful Christian fellowship to preserve it. His problem was not simply that he possessed a strong personality or disagreed with another man's administrative decisions. His desire for preeminence had become destructive. **When a man begins treating the congregation like personal property, the pulpit like a throne, and disagreement like treason, Diotrephes has climbed into the driver's seat.** The church may still possess religious activity, impressive programs, and beautifully polished furniture, but the spirit governing its leadership has become dangerously corrupt.

There is a remarkable contrast between Diotrephes and the apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 4:5, Paul declared, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." Diotrephes wanted others to recognize his prominence. Paul directed attention toward the lordship of Christ. Diotrephes interfered with faithful

brethren. Paul instructed Timothy to prepare faithful men who could teach others also. Diotrephes resisted apostolic authority. Paul continually directed believers toward the revelation of Jesus Christ. The difference is not difficult to understand. One approach builds personal dependence upon a religious personality. The other establishes believers in the truth. One treats authority as a means of preserving the leader's importance. The other treats authority as a responsibility for serving Christ and His people. **A preacher who must continually remind everybody how important he is has already begun competing with the very Lord he claims to represent.** The most faithful minister is not the man who attracts the greatest personal admiration, but the man who most faithfully directs others toward Jesus Christ.

None of this eliminates the congregation's responsibility to respect qualified spiritual oversight. Hebrews 13:17 commands believers to obey those who have the rule over them because such leaders watch for souls and must give account. First Thessalonians 5:12–13 instructs believers to know those who labor among them, are over them in the Lord, and admonish them, esteeming them highly in love for their work's sake. Those passages should not be discarded simply because abusive leaders exist. A church filled with people determined to challenge every reasonable decision and undermine every faithful pastor will eventually suffer from its own rebellion. But biblical submission is not permission to treat a preacher as infallible. The same Scriptures that establish pastoral authority also establish pastoral qualifications, accountability, and responsibility before God. **The answer to a dictator is not anarchy, and the answer to rebellion is not dictatorship. The answer is biblical authority exercised by qualified servants under the lordship of Jesus Christ.**

There is also a warning here for every ordinary believer who possesses influence within a congregation. The spirit of Diotrephes is not confined to the man occupying the pulpit. A wealthy contributor may attempt to purchase control over church decisions. A longtime member may consider his seniority a license to intimidate younger believers. A deacon may forget that service is not personal ownership. A family may treat the congregation as its private institution because its relatives helped establish the work decades earlier. A ministry worker may become jealous when somebody else receives recognition. The desire for preeminence can express itself wherever human pride seeks dominion. Third John 9 does not describe a problem that disappears when the title on the office door changes. It exposes a sinful appetite that must be confronted through biblical humility and obedience. **The man who wants to be first will not become righteous merely because somebody gives him a different chair.** Every believer must remember that Christ possesses the preeminence and that faithful service does not require personal glory.

The final authority concerning leadership is established in Colossians 1:18: "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." There is no vacancy in that position. Jesus Christ does not share His headship with a preacher, denominational authority, wealthy benefactor, or ambitious committee. Ephesians 1:22–23 likewise identifies Christ as Head over all things to the Church, which is His body. Acts 20:28 declares that God purchased the Church with His own blood. First Peter 5:4 directs elders toward the appearing of the Chief Shepherd. Those verses establish the ownership, authority, and accountability governing Christian ministry. The preacher may lead, but he does not own. He may correct, but he remains subject to correction. He may exercise judgment, but he cannot replace the Judge. **The throne is occupied, the Book is settled, and the preacher is still a servant.** That arrangement does not diminish faithful ministry. It gives faithful ministry its proper foundation.

Every man who stands behind a pulpit should therefore examine what kind of leader he is becoming. Does he love the word of God more than his own opinions? Does he desire the spiritual maturity of the congregation more than its admiration? Is he willing to confront false doctrine without becoming personally cruel? Can he receive legitimate correction without treating the person offering it as an enemy? Does he handle entrusted resources honestly? Does he exercise judgment without partiality? Does he develop faithful workers who can continue serving after he is gone? Does he rejoice when another qualified man accomplishes something worthwhile for Jesus Christ? These questions are not invitations to endless introspection or religious sentimentality. They concern obedience to the Scriptures governing spiritual leadership. A pastor who discovers deficiencies should not manufacture excuses. He should repent where repentance is required, correct what needs correcting, and return to the authority of God's word. **A man's willingness to be corrected reveals more about his spiritual maturity than his ability to correct everybody else.**

And every congregation should remember that faithful shepherds deserve encouragement rather than constant suspicion. There are men who labor quietly, study diligently, visit the sick, comfort the grieving, proclaim the gospel, confront sin, and carry responsibilities that many people never see. They do not seek celebrity status or demand personal worship. They simply desire to serve the Lord faithfully. Such men should be respected, supported, and prayed for. First Corinthians 4:2 declares, "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." That is the standard worth preserving. Not celebrity. Not personal domination. Not financial empire-building. Not the number of people who tremble when the pastor enters the room. Faithfulness. A church should value a man who opens the Bible and feeds the flock, even when his congregation is small and his name is unknown. **The**

Lord's measure of a faithful shepherd is not the length of his shadow across the religious landscape, but the truthfulness of his service beneath the eye of God.

So here is where the matter finally stands. The Christian church does not need another generation of religious dictators demanding obedience to their personalities, nor does it need another generation of spineless leaders surrendering biblical truth whenever somebody threatens to leave. It needs men with open Bibles, clean hands, courageous hearts, sound doctrine, responsible judgment, and a genuine burden for the souls entrusted to their care. It needs shepherds willing to feed the flock rather than fleece it, correct sin rather than conceal it, develop workers rather than suppress them, and remain accountable rather than appoint themselves beyond examination. It needs congregations that respect legitimate authority without surrendering the right and responsibility to test everything by Scripture. **Authority without humility becomes domination. Humility without courage becomes cowardice. Biblical leadership requires both, governed by the word of God.** And neither the preacher nor the congregation possesses permission to replace the Lord Jesus Christ with an earthly personality.

The ultimate examination of Christian leadership will not take place at a pastoral anniversary, denominational convention, or church business meeting. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." The believer's salvation rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, received by grace through faith, and not upon the accumulation of ministerial accomplishments. Yet the works of Christian service will be examined. First Corinthians 3:12–15 describes the testing of what believers have built upon the foundation. A preacher may possess an impressive reputation, a large congregation, and a shelf filled with awards, but none of those things can substitute for faithfulness when he stands before the Lord. The Chief Shepherd will not require a committee to explain how His sheep were treated. He already knows. The man who labored faithfully will not need to manufacture applause, and the man who abused his authority will not be able to conceal his conduct behind religious credentials. **Earthly recognition may be purchased, manipulated, or exaggerated. The judgment of Jesus Christ will be perfectly righteous.**

And that brings us back to the question with which this entire series began: **Whose church is it?** If it belongs to Jesus Christ, then no preacher has the right to make himself its master. If the King James Bible is the final written authority, then no man's opinion can outrank it. If the flock belongs to God, then the shepherd must tend it according to the Owner's instructions. Diotrephes loved the preeminence, but Colossians 1:18 declares that Jesus Christ already possesses it. That settles the matter for every pastor, elder, teacher, missionary, ministry founder, and believer willing to submit to the Scriptures. **The**

shepherd's staff was never meant to be a scepter. The pulpit was never meant to become a throne. The congregation was never meant to become a personal kingdom. And the preacher was never meant to become the fourth person of the Godhead. The church does not need Diotrephes in the driver's seat. It needs Jesus Christ as its Head, the King James Bible as its final written authority, and faithful servants who remember that the Chief Shepherd is coming. When He appears, the question will not be how important the preacher made himself, but how faithfully he served the One who was important all along.

