

I. Leadership in Biblical Perspective
Leadership - Thoughts, Observations and Biblical Principles
From The Life of Leadership of Dr. Frank Barker, Jr.
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We will be looking at II Timothy 3 as a text for this ordination sermon as I share some thoughts on leadership. I enjoy this time because I get to talk about some things that I don't normally get to preach on although I do reference from time to time and that is the matter of one of the very important doctrines in the Scripture – the doctrine of the church also known as ecclesiology, or how Christ who is the head of the church govern His church. We acknowledge that the doctrine of church government is not a primary doctrine. In other words, every single Bible doctrine is important. There is nothing superficial in Scripture.

II Timothy 3:16 says *[16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* That is also why the Bible tells us that in discipleship we are to teach all that Jesus commanded because all of it is important but the Bible is also clear that some things are more important than other things. In other words, some doctrines are primary, some secondary and some tertiary and it's important to keep that proportionality in mind when you teach and preach the Word of God.

For instance, in I Corinthians 15:3-4 Paul says, *[3] For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.* Here we see that the Gospel is of first importance. When you see a statement like this you immediately know a couple of things.

Number one, the Gospel is important and that's obvious. It's not just important but we might even say it's the first of the first things. This is absolutely crucial in the life and ministry of Christ's church. When we see something that says it's of first importance it doesn't mean that other doctrines are unimportant but it does say that particular doctrine is more important, which means the other doctrines might be of secondary importance. A good rule of thumb to use with that is doctrines with primary importance are those that if you get those wrong then you can't be saved. Those are primary doctrines.

Secondary doctrines are those that are important, good for the Christian life, good for the life of the church and God has them to make us equip for every good work, but not all of them are as important in that if you get it wrong you can still be saved. One of those secondary doctrines is church government and there are three forms of church government. One is congregational church government where the authority by concept rests in the congregation. Second there is the bishopric system whereby the authority concept rests at the level of bishopric oversight. Churches that have this system are the Episcopal denomination, the Lutheran church and the Roman church. Think of this like a pyramid. In the congregational system you would turn the pyramid upside down where the ultimate authority is in the congregation. I have my critiques of those two forms of church government but I also recognize these are my brothers and sisters in the Lord. I have been in debates as to whether they are faithful to Biblical principles in overall church government or not but we are in a system of governance in Christ's church that we identify as Presbyterian, a third form of church government.

Presbyterian comes from the Greek word *presbuteros* which means elder. It is elder oversight of Christ's church. There are a number of titles for the office of elder in the Bible. Sometimes elders in the Bible are called overseers or bishops. Sometimes they are called stewards and other times they are called shepherds. Sometimes they are called pastors. The reason there are multiple titles for the office of elder is because the office is multi-faceted in its oversight of Christ's church.

The office of elder has two categories. There is the teaching elder, that is the minister of the Word and there are the ruling elders which is the shepherding elders of the flock. Shepherding elders can teach and teaching elders which are pastors, ministers shepherd but they have a primary responsibility. I Timothy 5:17 says [17] *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.* Some elders not only have the honor and responsibility of the office but they get a double honor, a second honor and that is support in the office, not because the teaching elder is over the ruling elder but because of the task given to him – that is the preaching of the Word of God. We know that faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17) and the preaching of the Word is so important, there are some elders we remove from normal support mechanisms in life and give them support from the church, in order that they can give their time to the proper, faithful, effective preaching of the Word – those who work hard (labor) at preaching and teaching.

We also have deacons. We can see the reflection from the Old Testament, for what were the three offices in the Old Testament? They were prophet, priest and king. In the church we have the reflections of those offices in the New Covenant in the new Israel that are drawn from those circumcised of heart, born again from every tribe and nation. There are those who preach, prophesy, proclaim God's revealed Word – the elder/ministers. There are those who rule over the church and shepherd over it which are the ruling elders of the church. Then the deacons who intercede for the people even as the priests did so we see prophet, priest and king reflected in the governance of the church.

In the Reformation, we have reclaimed the Gospel, worship and the sacraments, but what about church government? There were great debates about this and so these three forms of church government began to develop – the congregational system, the bishopric system and the Presbyterian system. I'm going to make a generalization that I will gladly defend – in those countries who were blessed by the Reformation, if they were dominated by the political system of a monarchy, almost all of those developed the bishopric system of church government, because it is monarchical in its structure, where you see this top down that has tended to develop in state churches that reflected the preference of political oversight. The countries that were embracing the democratic concept they tended to embrace the congregational system of church government in their churches.

Here is something very interesting. The Presbyterian system had no political predecessors but it created political successors. It was under the influence of men like James Madison who studied under John Witherspoon and others such as Benjamin Rush and other who were involved in the formation of this country (US). When they began to put together a constitutional federal republic, how was this country to be governed? They said 'no' to a monarchical system because they said the law was king. They said 'no' to a pure democracy and the reason why is because they believed the Reformation doctrine of total depravity – where men have, even saved men have an inner corruption that they have to deal with. And whenever you govern you have to have authority and whenever you have authority you have to have power and whenever you have power there is the tendency of that power to corrupt that principle of

corruption. So, they didn't want to trust the majority or a mob rule nor one individual of a monarchical rule, but wanted to create a system of accountability and plurality of leadership whereby the law is that which is supreme.

It's no accident that they basically copied what is known as Presbyterian government. We have a local church that is governed by a session. Then our church sends representatives to the Presbytery where our church is accountable to a Presbytery which is a regional church. Then we have General Assembly whereby all of our churches send their commissioners to the General Assembly. Does that sound familiar to you where it concerns our current government system? We have a local government, then a state government and then a federal government. The greater power is supposed to be in the constitutions that are closer to the people because they have access to them. There is the executive situation and then there is the Judicial system where we have local courts, where you can appeal to appeals courts (state) and then you can appeal to a supreme court. Our government system was borrowed from the Presbyterian government. Then we see the legislative as well and all of that is drawn from those Old Testament principles of legislation, judicial and executive (oversight). James Madison quoted those three branches from the book of Jeremiah and none of them were to be hierarchical but interdependent. Everyone who was elected didn't take vows to another human being or even to the people who elected them but their vows were taken to the constitution itself.

Today in this local church that is what we are about to do where elders and deacons take vows to uphold the constitution of the Presbyterian Church of America, the book of church order and the Westminster standards. The book of church order has its Biblical principles of government, worship and conduct. The Westminster standards has the confession of faith along with the larger and shorter catechism. You might be thinking, 'the Bible is not the constitution of the Presbyterian Church of America and Briarwood?' I will tell you 'no, the Bible is not our constitution.' Constitutions by definition can be amended. Have you heard of the Bill of Rights? They can be amended or changed. Can you amend your Bible? No. Our church constitution is a governing document whose authority rests in the inerrant, infallibility and anytime you change the constitution the body of the church has to appeal to the Scriptures.

I believe this is crucial. I did not grow up in the Presbyterian church although we were involved in an independent Presbyterian church which is actually a misnomer but I came to the Presbyterian church by conviction. One of those things was that every time I looked in the Bible and saw the word 'church' and 'elder,' church was always singular and elder was always plural. No one church in the Bible was ever ruled by one elder. On the contrary as we see in James 5:14 it says [14] *Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the **elders of the church**, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.* Paul appointed elders in every church as he sent Titus to put elders in the cities of every church throughout Crete.

After Paul ministered three years at Ephesus it says in Acts 20:17, [17] *Now from Miletus he (Paul) sent to Ephesus and called the elders (plural) of the church (singular) to come to him (Paul).* First of all, we see plurality in Presbyterian government. How do you work with plurality in leadership? It is because we have a head of the church and it's not the pastor or any one elder or any one deacon, but it's Jesus. Jesus has given gifts to men to shepherd, rule, guide and serve the church and He has given the congregation the responsibility to "select from among yourselves men who are of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom" who meet those qualifications in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1, (Acts 6:3).

There is not only plurality but there is also parity. I have had the privilege to serve as pastor at Briarwood Presbyterian church for 23 years now and I can point out a number of votes

in the session where I lost. The senior pastor doesn't get five votes. He gets one and that's it. He can be on the losing side although as moderator I seldom vote but there have been times I have been asked to vote. That is because there is a body and when the body votes we act as one to own that vote together before the Lord. We also submit ourselves to one another.

I also saw diversity in the Presbyterian church government. There are the ruling/teaching elders, the shepherding elders and the deacons that are there to maintain the administration, the mercy ministry and the stewardship of the church.

The thing that clinched it for me was the fact that it was the one system that I saw where everybody is accountable to somebody. Every church is accountable to a Presbytery, every Presbytery is accountable in a General Assembly, every member is accountable in a local church, every elder and deacon is accountable. In a bishopric system eventually, you get to the top dog but not in a Presbyterian system. It's three concentric circles of the local church in the Presbytery and in the General Assembly.

We see the General Assembly in Acts 15 and the Presbytery in various other passages, such as the seven churches in the book of Revelation where Christ is in the middle of the seven churches. The seven churches in the book of Revelation are called lampstands. Jesus is pictured in the middle of the seven churches represented by lampstands and the configuration is a circle or He couldn't be in the middle. This tells me that each church has access to Jesus and each church has a relationship that is non-hierarchical with each other and each church together can relate to Jesus. So, I love this system of government, but it always comes down to the leaders that God has provided that the members of the congregation have selected.

I have a couple of last thoughts and I'd like to anecdotally give some illustrations from the life of a friend, a father in the faith, a mentor and the founding pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Dr. Frank Barker, II. I want to look at II Timothy 3 where Paul is about to die and he is giving direction to a man who is about to fill his position of leadership after Paul departs, who is now the pastor at the church at Ephesus and his name is Timothy.

II Timothy 3:10-15 says [10] *You (Timothy), however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, [11] my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. [12] Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, [13] while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. [14] **But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*** The verses in bold are what I give to those elders and deacons going through the ordination at this time.

After Frank pastored this church for 40 years, he stepped down to then serve faithfully for 23 years manifesting God as pastor emeritus. I wrote a book on 3D leadership and in it I encouraged every leader to get three to five models for life from church history, three to five mentors and three to five brothers in life and in ministry to learn from. I would say the same thing to women as you develop your Christian life and in areas of leadership for God has called you to the same thing, for we learn by imitation. Select your three to five models carefully and get them from history because the last chapter has been written in their life. Then three to five women mentors and three to five circle of sisters to learn and grow from, challenge you and hold you accountable.

I have had the great privilege in God's providence, I did not deserve this, but because of where God had placed me in life and ministry I had some extraordinary mentors and not all of them but two are with Jesus. I had the great privilege to have Jim Boice, R.C. Sproul, Jim Baird, and Frank Barker as mentors. I didn't say they were disciplers to me for they didn't live on life discipleship with me but they were mentors. I was able to call upon them and have them available to me. Those four I mentioned are with the Lord, one is getting close and the other is still going strong, who are Dr. Henry Krabbendam and Al Martin.

Here is how you get your mentor. I will tell you how I got Frank Barker as a mentor. I heard him speak at Covenant College on evangelism and small group discipleship and I thought 'I have to find a way to get more from that man.' I was at Covenant College in the 1970s. Then when I was called into the ministry and I was asked to go plant a Presbytery in Charlotte, North Carolina, in God's providence the church that was going to pay my salary for three years was Briarwood Presbyterian in which Frank was the senior pastor at the time. That was 1983 to 1985. That was where I got to meet Frank up front and tell him that I'd like for it to be more than just an arrangement for three years and if he would be a mentor in my life. I asked him if I could call him just four times a year if necessary and any phone call will not go over 15 minutes. Then I asked him if I could meet with him face to face twice a year, once in January and once at General Assembly where I would buy his lunch at each meeting time and have ten questions to ask you and for him to answer however he wanted to and I'd keep it all confidential. In other words, here's the principle I'm getting at, when you go get a mentor, likely other people are going to want to get that mentor so you make it as easy as possible for them, just so you can get that access from time to time.

That was life changing for me. When Frank and I were sitting there talking, I remember two things after I made my proposal for him to be my mentor. He looked at me and said 'Praise the Lord, that sounds good' in his Frank sort of way and that's when I started my lifelong mentoring with Frank. The next thing was that after we had talked a while, he then fell asleep while we were still talking. Because of the long hours he spent in study and prayer at night, he would fall asleep sometimes during the day. People have asked me since that was the first time I had talked with him, if I was offended by that and I wasn't because he didn't fall asleep while I was talking, he fell asleep while he was talking. But that was one of the most important things I ever did in my life – was to be able to have access to him, to ask him questions and then by the providence of God 17 to 18 years later I was called here to Briarwood Presbyterian and would have access to him even more than I did. Frank called me because he could see I was struggling with why God would call me from where I was to Briarwood. He said to me 'if it would help you make your decision my wife and I will move out of Birmingham for you to come here' and I said 'oh no Frank, if God was to lead me there, I would plead with you to stay and would you consider being paster emeritus?' He was one of the most humble men I have ever met.

As I came and started as moderator of the session, we had our first staff meeting in September of 1999 and then we had our first session meeting. Frank was sitting right there in that meeting. Tom Harris told me he would ask Frank not to attend the session meeting because Frank didn't realize how much influence he has but he only saw himself as another staff person and not as senior pastor. He was one of the most humble, unassuming men and he never demeaned an activity by his conduct, his dress or anything and neither did he build up any pretensions about himself. It is so important to get people like that in your life so that you can learn from them.

Secondly, continue in the things that you have learned, is that leaders are learners. I can't tell you how often I would walk up to Frank and he would be doing one of three things. He would either be sleeping, reading a book or praying. Then he would say to me 'Harry, do you know of any books that you think my help me?' He was the one who would review the books that went into the Briarwood bookstore and what wouldn't go in. He just ate up knowledge. Frank was a learner. All great leaders are learners. Once you quit learning, please leave leadership. Leadership is not filled with know-it-alls. Leadership is filled with people who love Jesus with all their heart, soul and mind and want to know it all. I am grateful to have had Frank's example in my life.

Thirdly, to continue in the things that you have learned means that you have to be intentional. Leaders are intentional. They don't live life serendipity. Do you know why Frank could respond to emergencies so well, which he did time and time again? It is because he had already laid out his life. Most of us can't say 'no' when we need to say 'no' but the key to saying 'no' is to have a bigger 'yes.' Frank had found the big 'yeses' in life – his time with the Lord in the morning, his time with his wife, Barbara, in the Word, family worship, his sermon study time. When you have those things in place then you can respond to the challenges of life. Frank had already put in place the framework because he had the right 'yeses' in life. Make what is important in life the framework so that gives you the function in life.

Number four, is you have to be ready and that means you can't be subject to self-pity. I hear this a lot from people; 'If people leave the church don't take it personal.' That's just stupid. Pastors give their persons to the ministry so it's going to be personal, but here is what they need to learn – you have to have a thick skin to keep a thin heart. If you don't have a thick skin then you will get a thick heart. You don't want a thick heart and thin skin. I happen to be privy to some of the things that hurt deeply in Frank's life, but I know he found his solace in Christ and Christ was his Defender. Frank never developed a thick heart. He had a thin heart and asked God for the thick skin. You never get a testimony until you get a test and when the test comes that is when God does His work to develop the testimony in our life.

Fifthly, you have to care about who gets credit. I said this on purpose because I have had many people say to me that one of the reasons Frank was so effective in ministry is that he didn't care who received the credit and I understand what they were saying when they said that and I agree with you. We wouldn't have had Campus Outreach without Tom Carradine and Curtis Tanner or YBL without Phil Reddick or a Christian Medical Ministry without Earl Carpenter or the Briarwood Ballet without Barbara Barker and many others, but it wasn't that Frank sat down and figured them all out, it was that Frank made disciples. And these disciples grabbed their burdens, gifts and opportunities and these ministries began to explode. Yes, Frank didn't care in that sense who got the credit but Frank really did care who got the credit for he wanted Jesus to get it all – to God be the glory, great things He has done.

Here is the last thing which is my biggest conviction. Frank and I would go to the Westminster Seminary Board meeting together and I would get so tired. We'd fly up and back together and try to get a seat on the plane in between us for our books as I would sit at the window and he the aisle seat. We'd usually have a couple of things to talk about. Right before we were boarding the plane, I asked him if I could talk to him about this big thing that was going on and if we could talk about it before boarding and he said 'sure, but let's pray about it first.' He wanted to pray about it first, then talk about it and then pray about it afterwards. Then I'll never forget the prayer. He prayed 'Lord, Harry has a big problem here and I don't think he is capable of handling this so could You come help us?' This wasn't exactly your lengthy pastoral

prayer but boy was it a pastoral prayer. I loved the way Frank prayed for it was to the point. He was always ready to talk to Jesus. He didn't need to go through a lot of preliminaries – he was ready to talk to Jesus.

Another time we got on that plane I was worn out. I was at the window and Frank was in the aisle seat and the biggest human being I have seen in my life came and sat between us. It doesn't take much for me to sleep on a plane and I was ready to go to sleep. As a preacher, here is how you do it when you don't want to talk to anybody but you don't want to not talk to anybody, when they ask you what you do for a living, you tell them you're a preacher because they will not say another word to you the rest of the trip. Now, if you want to witness to them then you say 'I speak at conferences' for then you are off and running in a conversation. When this man sat between us, I immediately said 'I'm a preacher' and he said 'Oh okay' but within two minutes Frank had his coat open to the pocket he had about 382 Gospel tracks in and already pulled it out. Frank has shared the Gospel with him within three minutes and then Frank turned to me and said 'Harry why don't you talk to him about Jesus for a while?' I cannot tell you the conviction that came over my soul. When I got home, I prayed, 'God, would You help me arrange my life so that when those moments come, I'll not only be ready spiritually but I'll be ready physically and emotionally. Help me put my life together that way so that I can be ready.' Frank was just one mentor in my life.

Those who have been at Briarwood Presbyterian here have had the privilege to witness Frank's life also. Get your mentors and models in life and keep growing as a leader because leadership counts. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Father for the privilege to share these basic thoughts of Your grace and mercy at work in the lives of men and women. Bless these men who we are about to ordain, whom You have called and fill them with You Spirit that they would lead this church so that we might serve You effectively, in Jesus' Name, Amen.