

1 Timothy – The Household of God

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare (1 Timothy 1:18 ESV)

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:14-15 ESV)

Qualifications for Elders

January 15th, 2022

1 Timothy 3:1-7

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Introduction:

Good morning!

Please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 3. In our text this morning, Paul gives a clear description of the qualities and character that must be evident in the elders of the church.

So, here's a question off the top: Do we all need to study this list? Couldn't I simply dismiss everyone else a little early today and ask Harry, Gary, Keith and Clyde to hold back? Why do we need to unpack this?

There are a few things we could say in response to that question, but the most compelling answer is found in 2 John where he writes to a local church and warns them:

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting,¹¹ **for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.** (2 John 10-11 ESV)

Do you understand what he's saying here? You are going to be held RESPONSIBLE for the Bible teachers that you listen to. You are going to be held ACCOUNTABLE for the leadership that you welcome into this church. The church in Ephesus was teetering on the edge of ruin because of the wicked leaders that had taken hold of the steering wheel. But, while it is true that the Ephesian

Christians were in once sense the *victims* of this development, it is also true that they were in another sense *culpable* for what had transpired.

We need to learn this lesson from the crisis in Ephesus so as not to repeat it: An unhealthy eldership will RUIN this church. And WE ALL will be held accountable if that ever occurs.

Therefore, this passage is hugely important for all of us! What kind of leaders does God bless? When we elect a new elder or bring in a new pastor, what attributes are non-negotiable? And, what are the qualities that we can and should be praying for in our current spiritual leaders? The answer to these questions is right in front of us in our passage for this morning. So, let's listen as if the future health of our congregation was at stake. Because it is. We're going to read this morning from verses 1-7. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:1-7 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The title of "overseer" that we find in verse 1 is another way of referring to the elders and pastors. In the New Testament those titles are synonymous¹ and they refer to one office. Today we will simply refer to that office with the term "elder" because that is the title that we use for the office in our context. So, let's make our way through this list of qualifications and ensure that we understand them. Afterwards, I will propose three prayer requests for our congregation moving forward. So, what are the qualifications of an elder?

The Qualifications Of An Elder

¹ See, for example, Acts 20:17,28.

The first qualification is listed both at the beginning, and the end of this list.

1. **He should be above reproach**

The list begins:

Therefore an overseer must be **above reproach** (1 Timothy 3:2a ESV)

And then it ends in verse 7 on the same note:

Moreover, he must be **well thought of** by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:7 ESV)

You could argue that this first qualification sums up the entire list and I want you to notice something about these qualifications: An elder is not called to be superhuman. There is nothing here describing his I.Q., his financial status, or any other standard that we might expect to find. With the exception of his ability to teach, everything else on this list describes the elder simply as an earnest and authentic Christian who – at home and in the community – lives a life that is above reproach. That’s it! It can be summed up with one question: Does this brother walk the walk?

Before we move on, I want to make sure that we notice how this qualification has a particular impact on our witness OUTSIDE of the church. If you want to ruin your witness in the city, one of the quickest ways to do that is to appoint immature or insincere elders into roles of spiritual leadership.² “You go to THAT church? How can you sit there and watch Bobby pass around the communion plate when you know full well that he rips off his customers?” “You go to THAT church? I just saw a video of one of your pastors screaming at a police officer for violating his rights. THAT’s where you go to learn about Jesus?” When leaders fall, the impact on the congregation is devastating. An elder should be above reproach. Second:

2. **He should be a “one woman man”**

That is a literal translation of the qualification in verse 2, where we are told that he should be “the husband of one wife.”

² See Ralph Earle, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Ephesians - Philemon)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 11, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 365.

Now, this can't mean that the office of elder is off-limits for single men, because Paul wrote to the church in Corinth and commended those who were called to a single life. So, *having a wife* is not the requirement. And, while polygamy would certainly disqualify a man, it wasn't really a live issue at the time that Paul wrote this letter to Timothy. So, what is this qualification about?

Most commentators agree that it means monogamy – only one wife at one time – and that the overseer must be completely faithful to his wife.³

This qualification is about *faithfulness* and *fidelity*. We should never appoint a man into a role of spiritual leadership without first taking a thorough and honest look at his marriage. In our context, that means that we have all potential elders undergo a thorough review process. If they are married, we have their wives fill out a detailed questionnaire and then we work through an interview process. We will always ask an elder and their wife if the husband has a problem with pornography. The elder is to be a man who only has eyes for his wife. He is called to minister to a church filled with men and women and no one should feel uncomfortable coming to their elder. Unfortunately, as we have seen over the last five years in North America, this qualification is often assumed or neglected, and a tremendous amount of damage has been dealt to the church's witness as a result.

We need to move quicker now, and we're going to consider the next three qualifications under one heading:

3. He should be self-controlled

Look again at verse 2:

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, **sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable** (1 Timothy 3:2a ESV)

To be sober-minded is to demonstrate the ability to think clearly and to make sound decisions. An elder should demonstrate a track-record of wisdom, and it should be observable that they do not make rash decisions under impairment – and that includes the impairment of anger.

³ Ralph Earle, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Ephesians - Philemon)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 11, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 364.

The elder is also to be self-controlled. His life should give evidence of discipline. The elder should be exemplary in his prayer life, and in his Bible reading, and in his daily habits and disciplines. It has been said:

How shall I be able to rule over others if I have not full power and command of myself?⁴

The elder should be fairly described as “respectable.” The word that Paul uses here refers to a person’s outward deportment or outward appearance.⁵ God’s word speaks to our work, our eating, our family life and even to our dress. Therefore, the elders should present themselves in such a way that would commend the gospel to the community. If Clyde made it a habit to wander around town in his pjs, or if Gary was late for work at the hospital three times a week or if I made a habit of offending seniors in our community by preaching with a backwards ball cap, that would negatively impact our witness in the city. An elder should be respectable – an observable overflow of his self-control. Next:

4. He should be hospitable

In the Graeco-Roman world, a person couldn’t take for granted that they would find accommodations when they travelled to a new city. Mary and Joseph found this out the hard way. In the first century, if you saw a new face in the corporate worship gathering, it was very possible that they would have no place to spend the night. Therefore, hospitality was a non-negotiable in the church. You could not be an elder if you did not display a willingness to open your home and to share your food with God’s people.

This qualification needs to be recaptured in the modern church. How many times has a visitor joined us for worship on a Sunday morning without ever receiving an invitation into someone’s home? We have become a very private people and we need to confront that mindset actively and intentionally. If you see someone that you haven’t seen before, why not invite them to join you for pizza after the service for a quick visit? We need men who can set an example for us in hospitality. As one commentator notes:

⁴ Francois Rabelais as quoted by John Stott, *Guard the Truth – The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 83.

⁵ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles – World Biblical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 173.

He who must teach others and take care of and exercise oversight over them must be open and loving to them.⁶

Leadership in Christ's church is not a private affair. Good shepherds should smell like their sheep. Cold, distant leadership does not cultivate change. You cannot shepherd well unless you enter the lives of God's people and invite them into yours. That kind of relationship is often built around the dinner table and, therefore, an elder should be hospitable. Next:

5. He should be able to teach

This is the only qualification on the list that requires any degree of technical skill. Everything else speaks solely to the man's integrity and character, but even the most noble man is unfit for the office if he is not able to teach. I think it is safe to say that there are thousands of churches in Canada that are presently unhealthy because they selected elders who knew their way around spreadsheets but who rarely opened the word of God. The specific task of the office of eldership is to teach and exercise authority over the church, therefore an elder *must* possess the ability to teach.

However, the *avenue* and the *extent* of that teaching will differ from elder to elder. We know this because, in chapter 5 Paul commands:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, **especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.** (1 Timothy 5:17 ESV)

The clear implication of this verse is that some of the elders *did not* labour in preaching and teaching. So, they were all required to be *able*, but in practice, there was a limited group within the eldership that carried the bulk of the responsibility in teaching.

Putting that together, some elders will teach in the Sunday morning gathering, while other elders will teach in small group settings, while other elders will only teach in one-on-one discussions as

⁶ G.W. Knight III as quoted by William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles – World Biblical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 174.

they provide counsel and correction to church members. Nevertheless, in large groups or small, an elder must be able to teach. Moving on now, we will again consider the next three as a unit⁷:

6. He should possess a right temperament

Look with me at verse 3:

not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome (1 Timothy 3:3a ESV)

An elder cannot be a man who is prone to drunkenness. Some people escape to their vice when the pressure is turned up. An elder cannot succumb to that temperament. That is a disqualifying behaviour defect.

And an elder is not to be violent. The Greek word literally means, “not a striker.” Spiritual victories are not won with the sword. Heart change cannot be brought about with brute force. A man who has displayed a pattern of hurting others in his anger is disqualified from shepherding the blood-bought church of Christ.

Instead, he is to be gentle. This word could also be translated as “gracious.” The best definition I’ve found for the word is “sweet reasonableness.”⁸ It is the exact opposite of a violent, quarrelsome spirit. Generally, as an elder, you should expect to receive more than your fair share of friendly fire. Hurt people hurt people, and elders are called to enter into the mess. Christian leadership is servant leadership. We’re called to resemble Christ who:

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:23 ESV)

It is often the task of the elder to jump into the middle of a fight between two believers and to take a shot on the chin from both directions. If you have displayed a tendency to “punch back harder” – if you always need to get in the final word – then you are unfit. Elders must be peacemakers.

⁷ John Stott arranged these three qualifications under the heading of “temper and temperament” in John Stott, *Guard the Truth – The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 96.

⁸ Suggested by G.F. Hawthorne as quoted by William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles – World Biblical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 176.

Is a man fit to serve as an elder? Here is a practical test: What is he like when he doesn't get his own way? Is he characterized by a "sweet reasonableness"? Or does he fight and quarrel to the bitter end? On a serious and practical note, if you had appointed quarrelsome elders here at Redeemer, we would not have survived the last two years. How many churches and elder boards imploded as quarrelsome men fought each other to the death over mask restrictions and political opinions? After the pressure cooker we just endured, I would sooner put an uncaged lion in my office than a quarrelsome elder at the elder table. Next:

7. He should not be a lover of money

We see this at the end of verse 3. Ministry should never be pursued for the sake of monetary gain. Peter warned against this mindset. He wrote:

shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; **not for shameful gain**, but eagerly (1 Peter 5:2 ESV)

Any elder – any pastor – who treats the church like a 9-5 job that he plugs away at in order to pay the bills is unworthy of the office.

This qualification also protects against the pitfall of dishonesty and embezzlement. Even in the early church, the elders were the ones who handled the finances. When the offering was taken up to assist the church in Jerusalem, the offering was submitted to the elders of the various congregations and then it was delivered to the elders of the church in Jerusalem. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the church elders are men who have demonstrated that they are not lovers of money.

One of the common graces of living here in Canada is that we are required by law to undergo an audit every year. An expert from the outside world comes in and studies our process for collecting, storing, and distributing the offering. They read through the receipts and make sure that every dollar went exactly where we said it would go. As I understand from speaking with Kathleen, that is not a fun process. But it's a good process. It helps to protect us in case we unwittingly appoint men who are lovers of money. It keeps us above reproach. Next:

8. He should manage his household well

Look again at verses 4-5:

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? (1 Timothy 3:4-5 ESV)

Notice again that this list of qualifications is weighted heavily towards everyday faithfulness. This suggests to me that when we are considering a man for the eldership, we should spend less time sitting around an interview table and more time sitting at the candidate's dinner table.

How does he speak to his wife? How does he speak to his kids? How do they listen to him? Do they cower in fear because they've seen his temper flare up? Do they ignore him because they know he never follows through? Do they roll their eyes because they think he's a hypocrite? As one commentator summarizes:

An indication of a person's managerial ability is the general posture of his children.⁹

Serving as a spiritual leader is not primarily about budget meetings and annual reports. Those things are part of it, but they represent a sliver of the role. An elder is a shepherd. He builds relationships. He examines for strengths and weaknesses. He equips and encourages. He challenges and even disciplines when necessary.

The best indication of whether a man will succeed in this role is by examining the fruit in his home. These are the people he has been leading for a lifetime. How is it going? Are they growing in Christlikeness? Is he a good encourager? Did he have the hard talks when necessary? Does he avoid discipline? Do they follow his lead?

Now, eventually a child moves out of the home, and they are responsible for their own decisions. To be clear: An adult child that has walked away from the faith does not disqualify a man from the

⁹ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles – World Biblical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 179.

office of elder. Salvation is a miracle, and many godly, faithful parents currently have wayward children. Nevertheless, a man should not be appointed to the eldership until his home life has been carefully observed. Finally:

9. He should not be a recent convert

We see this in verse 6:

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:6 ESV)

The warning here implies that the role of eldership can easily go to a man's head. If a new believer is quickly promoted to the position of elder, he will face a very real temptation towards pride. My dad always said: "Be careful that your position never exceeds your character." That's what Paul seems to be warning against here.

Interestingly enough, he doesn't include this warning in his letter to Titus. The church in Crete was a younger church and they didn't have the luxury of older, more mature Christians to choose from. The principle then seems to be that, when given the option between two qualified elder candidates, choose the man who has a longer track record in the faith. However, if the only qualified man is a younger man – as was the case in Crete – choose the qualified man, and pray earnestly that God would guard his heart from the pitfall of pride.

That concludes the list and now, with the little time that we have left, I want to suggest three prayer requests for us as we move forward.

Three Prayer Requests

First,

1. Pray for the elders that God will send

In Ephesians 4, we learn that good leaders are a gift from God.

And **he gave** the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12 ESV)

If good leaders are part of the blueprint for developing a healthy church, and if good leaders are a gift from God, then we need to earnestly and frequently ask Him to give us that good gift! Can I ask you, when is the last time you did that? When is the last time you knelt down and prayed that God would raise up faithful, qualified men to serve as elders here at Redeemer?

If this is your church, then write this down on your weekly prayer list and pray without ceasing. George Whitefield once said:

As God can send a nation or people no greater blessing than to give them faithful, sincere, and upright ministers, so the greatest curse that God can possibly send upon a people in this world is to give them over to blind, unregenerate, carnal, lukewarm, and unskilful guides.¹⁰

Leadership matters. Therefore, if we would be healthy as a church – if we would do our best to secure a bright future for the next generation and ensure that the greatest spiritual help and equipping is available to them – then we must prayerfully search out, set apart, instate, and submit ourselves to godly leaders. The puritan Martin Bucer wrote:

The greatest fear of God and the most earnest diligence are to be employed in the choice and installation of such men.¹¹

The elders of this church are the ones who are called to speak grace into marriages on the brink of divorce. They are called to counsel the young person who is spiraling in their unbelief. They are called to lovingly have the hard talks with people who are doing their very best to hide. They are called to teach, and to pray, and to equip the church so that everyone can flourish in their particular ministry. They will be called to give an account for the church in the final reckoning. We need the gift of good leaders, and we must ask for that gift earnestly and without ceasing. This list teaches us what we are to pray for. Sometimes we have not because we ask not.

¹⁰ George Whitefield as quoted in Warren Wiersbe, *Treasury of the World's Great Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1979), 637.

¹¹ Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 41.

Second:

2. Pray for the elders that God has sent

As we pray for future elders, let's make sure that we don't forget to pray for our current elders. Why was the church in Ephesus going off the rails in the first place? Do you remember? In Acts 20, the Apostle Paul gathered the Ephesian elders and he warned them:

²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ **and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things**, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:29-30 ESV)

The Ephesian church was at risk of falling apart – not simply because of threats from OUTSIDE the church – but because some of the original elders were beginning to go off the rails! Do you see that? Therefore, we should pray earnestly that God would protect and preserve the elders that we have today. When an elder swerves into theological error or into sinful behaviour, the whole church suffers as a result. That's why the enemy takes a particular interest in the elders of the church. Paul said that in verse 7. Look there again:

Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, **into a snare of the devil**. (1 Timothy 3:7 ESV)

The devil is real, and our text this morning tells us that he is setting snares for the elders in the church! The devil knows where Harry, Gary, Clyde, Keith and Levi are weak. He is actively putting traps before us because he wants to ruin our gospel witness in this city. That's his strategy. Therefore, whenever we set someone apart for leadership in this church, let's resolve to be just as active in our prayer support for these men as the enemy is in his spiritual assault.

Finally:

3. Pray for a right attitude toward leadership

It feels weird to spend so much time talking about leaders, doesn't it? Leaders aren't everything, and we must be careful not to put the office of elder up on a pedestal, but we should also be careful not to UNDERVALUE something that God has called us to pay attention to.

If you are reading the Pastoral Epistles carefully, then you will come away with the conviction that leadership matters. It really, really does. Paul begins this list by stating:

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, **he desires a noble task.** (1 Timothy 3:1 ESV)

Eldership in God's church is a NOBLE thing. It is noble because it is hard. It is noble because it is costly. It is noble because it is the stewardship of God's MOST VALUABLE possession. In Acts 20:28, Paul warned the elders in Ephesus:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, **which he obtained with his own blood.** (Acts 20:28 ESV)

Be careful, elders. Guard your tongue at that board table. Pray earnestly before preaching that sermon. Check your heart before giving that correction. Jesus bought this church WITH HIS BLOOD. He describes this church as his BRIDE. The stakes literally COULD NOT BE HIGHER.

Therefore, anyone who willingly comes under that weight – anyone who counts the cost and aspires to this office – desires a noble task. God's word says that. So, as a church, let's pray that God would give us a right attitude toward leadership. The author to the Hebrews wrote:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. **Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.** (Hebrews 13:17 ESV)

Do you see that? Even in the first century, a right attitude towards the spiritual leaders in the church was not natural. Even in the first century, Christians were inclined to buck against those whom God had placed over them.

We struggle with leadership in the church because, quite frankly, we struggle with leadership ANYWHERE! I would go so far as to argue that this subtle, self-righteous, resentment of every form of leadership is one of the most widespread and DANGEROUS sins in the church today.

We submit to the leadership of our parents – until they tell us not to take another cookie.

We submit to the leadership of our government – until they tell us to wear a mask in the store.

We submit to the leadership of the elders – until they make a decision that we don't like.

We submit – but in reality, we're simply submitting to ourselves. We don't really believe that leadership is from God. We don't really believe that He meant what He said when He called us to submit to our parents, our government, and our elders.

Am I misreading the last two years? Because it seems to me that this sin has been exposed in a shocking way. We don't trust the leadership that God has provided and we are unapologetic in our disobedience of those whom He has clearly called us to obey. That should frighten us.

Listen: You need to be led.

I need to be led!

We need to be led by those whom God has put in authority over us in every sphere and today's text reminds us that we need to be led – and led well – within the church.

We need to be challenged on our sin. We need to be encouraged in our walk. We need a REAL, committed relationship with a local church that goes beyond a Sunday morning soundbite. At risk of offence, I'll come right out and say it: If you haven't already, you need to intentionally position yourself under the spiritual leadership of a church – leadership that follows the qualifications that we see here in 1 Timothy 3.

Leadership matters. He has written it right here into the blueprints of the household of God.

So, let's pray for the elders that God would send, and let's pray for the elders whom God has sent, and let's pray for our attitude toward leadership in general. If it is a gift from God – and His word teaches us that it is – then we should receive it, and we should do so with gladness. To that end, let's pray together.