

Leading God's Church: *Qualified Character* Part 3 1 Timothy 3:4-7

"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you"

Introduction: We've established or clarified a few principles over the last few weeks in our study of 1 Timothy 3 when it comes to leadership in God's church and by extension, the home. **The first**, reaching back to chapter 2 and before the New Year, has to do with the equality in value and personhood of men and women in God's church, but the unique roles and functions within genders. Men are given the responsibility to lead the home and church, and women are given the responsibility to come along and under that leadership and help care for both institutions. Each role is vital, important, and impossible to play out without regeneration and the strengthening of God's Word and Spirit. **Second**, we established that as goes leadership, so goes the church. We can easily substitute the "home" for church. If a leader is leading in a direction that pleases the Lord, lead by Biblical principles, played out through love, the church and home are in a position to thrive. **Third**, we saw that qualified **character is essential** for leadership in the church and home. God is interested in the **heart, motives, and make-up** of a leader rather than the external qualifications the world may deem necessary. These qualities are not wrong, but negated if godly character is not present. What we'll add as a **fourth** this week is this: *leadership is influence*. We agree with Dr. Mohler from Thursday night that the clearest definition of leadership is NOT positional but influential. Positional realities are absolutely **part** of leading, but the position should come *out of* influence. That is why **example** is essential to pair with teaching. Any person given a position of leadership who does not have anyone following him/her is by definition NOT a leader, but just someone out for a walk with a fancy title. This definition is essential as we will begin to talk about leaders in the church who are NOT elders but function under the authority of elders, who have a huge amount of influence in leading others in the church. **Influence is powerful.**

This is seen in a negative but vivid sense in 2 Samuel 15, where King David's disgraced son Absalom (fled Jerusalem after exacting revenge on his brother, killing Amnon) returned after Joab's counsel. After much time, he finally came into David's presence, but his heart was not for his dad, but set against him. Without a position of authority, Absalom positioned himself in a place of influence, beside the city gate where people would come into the city with their problems and proposals. For four years, he would say, "I wish your request could be answered, and *if I were judge of the land*, it would be, but its too bad I'm not". He would then shake hands and embrace every person coming to the city, setting himself as the champion of the people. **"Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel."** (2 Sam. 15:6) This led to him declaring himself king, chasing David out of Jerusalem and running for his life, and ultimately to the demise of his own life as he died in battle trying to actually defeat his own father. **Influence is powerful, both in positive and negative ways.**

Now, as we finish today our study of Biblical eldership, we want to clarify a couple of questions that have come up in the last few weeks. We remember that God gives guidelines and principles of eldership, but does NOT set up strict structures. That means that each church, in every area, for all time, needs to think deeply *how* elders function together, the process of how an elder becomes and elder, and many other practical implications. We'll try to answer two main ones briefly.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- **How are our elders/pastors structured?**

Structures can change. In fact, structures should change as needs and personnel change. Historically, we've had pastors and elders at our church, with some of our pastors who were also elders and others who were not. Where we are moving to is that those who are **pastors** here at the church will also be elders. Elders will all be pastors, but some will be **lay elders** and others **staff elders**, depending on whether they make their living from the ministry or not. That means that we will still have a pastoral staff that includes **directors and interns**, those who play out pastoral functions and are in training to do so, but the designation of **pastor** will only be for those who are also elders.

- **When does an elder stop being an elder?**

We have taught about a **lifetime appointment** as an elder, but that has to be qualified and explained. Lifetime appointment is NOT explicitly stated in Scripture, so here is what that means. An elder is to actively elder as long as he is qualified. We typically think of qualifications strictly in the **moral realm**, but there are clearly other qualifications. When does an elder stop being an elder?

1. **He dies** - we do not have any post-mortem duties or direct influence
2. **He moves away** - An elder shepherds in a local way, so moving away changes his qualification
3. **He morally disqualifies** - This is an unfortunate reality when an elder gets caught up in a habit of sin
4. **His desire changes** - If the desire or aspiration fades or changes, so does the ability to elder
5. **His life changes** - Whether its his own physical limitations, a change in family dynamics, or even work realities, an qualified elder may not be able to actively shepherd for a time (temporary or indefinite), and thus he will not have the function of an elder.

Its vitally important to remember that though elders have **responsibilities** in the church to have authority and teach, they have NOT arrived. They must consistently evaluate themselves individually and corporately to make sure they are growing in grace and knowledge of Jesus, staying on task, and not getting lax in the process of sanctification. When elders believe they are untouchable or simply fill a seat on a board the consequences are negatively palpable.

Tangible Qualification #1: A Desire for the Work

"The saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task."

Holy Aspiration
Hearty Perspiration

Tangible Qualification #2: Character to back up the Desire

Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

Moral Mastery
Interpersonal Interaction
Appropriate Ability
Controlled Contentment

Familial Flourishing (4-5)

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity, keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

As goes the leader, so goes the church. We could also say, "as goes the home, so goes the church". The home is not only a proving ground for leadership, but the way our homes operate should mirror the way our church operates, and the opposite is true as well. Note here that the word "**household**" is the same word (*oikos*) that is used of God's church in verse 15. Far too often we can think of the church in different terms or a different metaphor. It can feel like a business, organization, club, or special assembly. But the fact that Paul uses **family or household is profound**. We think about family differently than all other organizations. There is a different expectation, commitment, and even overlooking of quirks that we have with family than we do for a business or club. If you want to know if an man is qualified to be a pastor/elder, look no further than his home, or no further than interviewing his wife.

Notice that he must exercise dignified leadership over his house in the form of guidance and loving discipline. This is proven in **parenting of children**. A loving husband and father will have his children under control. Titus 1:6 says it this way, "*and his children are believers (or faithful) and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.*" Some believe this means that an elders children must have **saving faith** as a qualification for their dad to be an elder, but that IS NOT THE CASE. The point is that an elder and father lead with loving discipline and consistent modeling, but no dad/pastor can grant salvation, nor is a pastor on the hook for all the people to be saved in the church. The real issue is this: are your kids **under control, is their father active in discipline, and is he playing his role in that**. I remember a youth pastor I had whose kids were always out of control, and he not only did not discipline them, it seemed like he was oblivious to the issue. It hurt his credibility. He would be talking with a parent of a student while his kids were burning the place down behind him.

This means that if an **elders first pastoring priority is his home**. If for whatever reason he has a child who is out of control, he may step away from being an elder for a time to pursue that child. It also means that if something changes in the home, through illness or the necessity of helping other family, he may step aside for a time. It also means that **all fathers here** are pastors of their homes. We each are called to lead, care for, feed, and protect those in our home. Finally, if you want to be trained to be a leader in the church, the home is the place to start. *How are you leading your wife?* Are you involved in the training and discipline of your kids? Do you give them a model to follow and if they followed you, would they become more like Christ?

Timelessly Tested (6)

*He must not be a **recent convert**, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.*

Finally, an elder must be **mature**, meaning he is not a novice in life or faith. The idea behind a "new convert" (*neophutos*) is that of something being newly planted. It was used of planting trees, and a newly planted tree that has yet been able to grow deep roots. If we do this in Simi Valley, it will be assured that when the winds blow, that tree will get knocked down. But seasoned trees can stand the test, and will not fall when the winds come. An elder must be **tested**, one who has been put through the paces, has faced trials, hardships, and still stands up. Up until now, the list has not included a most important word.

One caveat to this: *sometimes the time it takes for the proving of an elder depends on the situation*. Here is what I mean. On the mission field, when a church is planted or started, the ones who will be qualified for elders may not qualify as elders of a larger or more established church, but are ready to lead a younger/smaller church. There are some churches that have been around for decades who have established criterion of theological training and experience that churches like Rancho or even ours

would not qualify for. This means there must be much **wisdom** and discernment in placing someone as an elder, since its always easier to make someone an elder than removing one.

Paul has not mentioned **pride or humility** yet, but that is the idea here. A seasoned believer is no longer looking for a **status symbol**, no longer looking for a resume builder, and no longer believes that influence only comes from position. But a new believer can easily get sucked into the vortex of positional leadership and fall into the same temptation as the Morning Star, the devil himself who saw himself as not only God's equal, but wanted His position. The word for **puffed up** means "*filled with smoke*" or having a "swollen head". A new convert will be prone to fall victim to thinking of himself more highly than he ought, and letting service revolve around himself. **Humility** is a characteristic that all leaders struggle with and can **ONLY** be proven over time. In fact, you could draw a pretty clear line from the fruit of failure of every leader back to the pride that would reside in his heart and mind. Pride sees oneself as more important, or more significant, or above others. In fact, true leadership from an elder sees himself as a greater servant, considering others as more important than themselves (Phil. 2:3).

Respectable Reputation (7)

*Moreover, he must be well thought of by **outsiders**, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into the **snare** of the devil.*

Finally, we come full circle with an elders proven character and how it plays out in every aspect of life. Reputations matter for all of us, and though the world around will NOT hold our same convictions or view of truth (which WILL put us at odds in multiple ways), they should see us as people of **integrity, conviction, and love**. Remember, all of us are **ambassadors of Christ** wherever He has placed us. We are to be a fragrance of Christ in our offices, with customers, neighbors, and clientele. They will either see Christ in us or confusion about what it means to actually follow Him. There are two important principles in this verse:

- **An elder must lead a life worthy to follow both *inside and outside the church*** - This means that an elder must lead by teaching but also a life that understands the mission of every believer, which is to **make disciples**. This is why Paul had to remind Timothy that he had to **do the work of an evangelist** (2 Tim. 4:5). Not only this, but an elders life will bring MORE disgrace on himself, church, and Christ if he fails.
- **An elder will have a larger target on his back** - There is an irony of all leadership and service: *you simply want to help people, and the more you try to do that, the more you will become a target for complaint and anger*. There is a reason for this. **Satan** would love to see every Christian as ineffective, walking in needless shame, loss of joy, or lacking assurance. He cannot take anything away from us in terms of our salvation, but he can sure make us think he can. Notice that the **snare** is set by the devil, not God. **He is looking for ways to trip us up, take us down, or tear us apart**. If he can take down a pastor, he'd be delighted since it would negatively affect so many. That is exactly why an elder should not be a novice but seasoned and tested, since the temptation to fall will only ramp up, not down, as one leads.

Concluding thoughts:

The church and home are intimately tied together, so as goes leadership, so goes these most important institutions. Not every man is called to lead in the church, but every husband and father is a leader and shepherd. This means we need more **growing, qualified, and maturing** leaders among our men and

women. The areas of maturation should be in these areas we looked at the last weeks. Our homes should be places of ministry, dignity, and care. Our lives should reflect a deepening of convictions, discipline, and humility. Our reputations as Christ followers should be consistent in all facets of life. *What commitments do we need to make to see that happen? What priorities would need to change? What would we need to say "no" to in order to make this happen?*