

1 TIMOTHY 3:2-7

INTRODUCTION

Field Marshall Montgomery was perhaps Britain's greatest military leader during World War II and was therefore qualified to list the qualities of a good leader. This is what he said, "a leader should see the big picture and not become bogged down in details. He must not be petty. He must choose men well. He should trust those under him and let them get on with their jobs without interference. He must have the ability to make clear decisions. He should inspire confidence. Finally he must have a proper sense of religious truth and acknowledge it to his troops."

I'm sure all those qualities listed are good but it is interesting that when Paul lists the qualities that ought to be looked for when considering leadership in the church, he goes beyond gifts of leadership, but looks for certain qualities in one's character.

It is possible to be a good leader in the army or any other sphere of leadership and yet have major flaws within one's character. But when it comes to leadership within in God's church, character is just as important as doctrine and gifting. In fact as we noticed last week there is only one gift mentioned here, all the other qualities are ones of character. So let's look at these qualities and remember that this is the sort of person who ought to be Pastor or Elder in the church. But as we point the figure at the eldership let us not forget that these qualities are the sort of things that every Christian is expected to display. The reason why they are listed here is because the current eldership at Ephesus were not people like this, and so Paul is saying to the church don't look for leaders like that (like the existing elders) but look for men like this.

1. THE OVERARCHING REQUIREMENT OF ELDERS (v 2)

An elder must be 'above reproach.' This is really a summary of all that follows; Paul is going to list ways in which the elder is to be above reproach. The word 'must' emphasises that this requirement is an absolute necessity for people who are going to serve as Pastors or elders. Obviously it does not mean that he is perfect or sinless for that would be impossible. But what it does mean is that as one examines his life there is no obvious sinful defect in his character. An elder is to set a godly example; he is to be a role model for the church and society, he must not give the enemies of the church a reason to attack his reputation but more importantly the reputation of the church.

Now 'above reproach' is talking about his observable behaviour as far as it is possible to observe one's life, an elder ought not to have any flaws that stand out. If his name was to be put on a notice board before his appointment would anyone be able to bring a sustainable charge against him? It is important that elders are above reproach for a number of reasons:

i) They are special targets of Satan who will assault them with most severe temptations. Therefore if an elder has any serious flaws in his conduct, Satan will attack that area of weakness and seek to expose it and seek to bring the elder and church into disrepute.

ii) If Satan causes Elders to fall because of their conduct then their fall potentially can cause greater harm than the fall of other Christians. Satan knows that when the shepherd falls it has a devastating effect upon the church and often it can take the church literally years to recover. During which time the church is mainly ineffective within its own community.

iii) Because leaders have greater responsibility they are judged more strictly (James 1:3), therefore only men who are above reproach will be able to handle such responsibility.

These are just some of the reasons that the church should only seek to appoint elders who are above reproach?

2. ABOVE REPROACH IN MORALS CHARACTER AND PRACTICAL LIVING (vs.2-3)

If an elder is going to be a godly influence upon the church and a man who is above reproach then it is important that he is above reproach in the following areas.

i) He must be above reproach when it come to women (v 2) Paul says he must be the husband of but one wife. It literally reads he is a 'one-woman man.' There has been much that is written about this; about whether Paul is talking about polygamy or a divorced person who has remarried or a widower who has remarried or whether someone who is not married is barred from this role within the church. But for me the best way to understand it; is to do so morally. He is not thinking about the married status of an elder but his morality. An elder is to be a one-woman man, faithful to his wife; he is not to be a womaniser but is to be above reproach in this area.

Some have rightly asked why Paul put this quality first on his list. I think he does so because he knows that that is in this area probably above all other areas that leaders in the church are prone to fall. In our own day how many incidents do you know of that the Pastor or some elder has fallen into sexual sin? In the small group of churches that I know, I can think of two cases where people have had to leave the ministry because they have failed in this area to be a one-woman man. A one-woman man is a man who is devoted in his heart and mind to his wife. He refuses to be tempted by any one else, even though because of his role in the church he may be given opportunities to fall in this area. That is why elders must be very careful in how they deal with those of the opposite sex, we must behave in ways that is above reproach and does not give the Devil a foothold. This quality was needed in Ephesus just as much as in our own day, for in Ephesus sexual sin was rampant, and temptation in this area was rife.

ii) He must be above reproach when it comes to temperance, self control and respectability (v 2) I have grouped these three together for they are all dealing with similar things. The word "temperate" means "sober" or "clear headed." Self-controlled carries the idea of discipline and respectable which has the idea of an outward expression of an inner self-control. We could use the words "mastery over self" to sum up these three characteristics. A Pastor or elder must master himself, he must be highly disciplined, clear headed so that he can make appropriate judgements and the outworking of that will be that he will live a respectable life. No aspect of his life will be out of control.

This is important within leadership, especially within the pastorate. A pastor will often work unsupervised, if he wants to be lazy he could be, this is why he must be self-disciplined. If he is going to be clear minded then he has to avoid any excess that could impinge upon his judgment. This means that he has to be disciplined enough to make sure he gets enough sleep, disciplined in his eating habits, and disciplined in getting enough exercise. All of those things are important if one is going to be clear minded. The Pastor and Elder must take control of themselves, so that they have the right priorities in life, give themselves to serious study of the word and prayer and live a life of order.

The eldership is no place for a man who is undisciplined in his habits and life. Someone who is disorganised and goes with the flow rather than being disciplined in planning and using one's time is not the sort of person that you want to be organising the affairs of the church. The whole point is this; if an elder cannot discipline and order his own life in such a way that he lives a life of self-control then how is he going to bring order to the church.

iii) Above reproach in hospitality (v 2) - The Greek word literally means 'to love strangers.' It is frequently commanded of Christians in general throughout the New Testament but it was

especially expected of Christian leaders. Persecution, poverty, orphans, widows and travelling preachers made hospitality essential in New Testament times. Of course they had no hotels and the Inns were not very savoury places to stay as they were often used as brothels, and travellers were often robbed or beaten. The door of the Christian leader's home should be always open to those in need of hospitality. An elder is not elevated to a position where he is unapproachable, but he should be always available to those in need. His home should always be warm and welcoming to all who come under its roof. The elders should excel in this area and should be setting the example for the rest of the church.

iv) Above Reproach with alcohol (v 3) – The Scriptures nowhere teach that a Christian leader should not drink alcohol, he may choose not to do so for reasons of not wishing to put a barrier in anyone's way. However the Bible is clear in condemning drunkenness; for drunkenness is the very opposite of being in control, those who are drunk are out of control, they are not sober and do not do respectable things. Is this really necessary to mention, surely no Christian would ever get himself drunk? These instructions are given because this is a very real danger for the Christian leader.

v) Above reproach in Temper and Temperament (v 3) – An elder is not to be violent but gentle. Such a person will not strike back when he is riled, he will not be quick tempered but patient with people especially the awkward ones who you would just love to give a good shaking because of their wayward living. Instead an elder will be considerate, tolerant, friendly and gracious to such people. He is to pardon human failure and returns good for evil. Such a person will not keep a list of wrongs committed against him and will not hold grudges. Likewise an elder will not be quarrelsome; the Greek word means 'reluctant to fight.' A quarrelsome elder will cause disunity and disharmony among the eldership and within the church in general. Therefore such a person would seriously hinder the effectiveness of the leadership team.

vi) Above reproach in his attitude to money (v 3) – This is exactly what the false teachers were guilty of (6:5 and 2 Timothy 3:2). If one loves money then a paid elder may only be doing his task for money instead of love for the Lord and church. There have always been people throughout the history of the church who have tried to make money out of ministry and all they end up doing is compromising their beliefs or practise in order to enhance their stipend.

vii) Above reproach in family affairs (vs. 4-5) – An elder must be able to manage his own household for if he can't how can he manage the affairs of the church? The word 'manage' is one that carries the idea of 'rule' and 'care.' It's the exact same thing that an elder is to do in the church (5:17; 3:5). He is to bring discipline into his house so that his children will respect him because he is fair and always obey him because he is firm but also loving and gracious. Again it's the same skills that he will need in the church, he will never get people to respect him or obey him in the church if he can't even get that from home. If he can't even care for his own family how will he ever be able to take care of God's household.

viii) Above reproach in spiritual maturity (v 6) since one of the dangers facing an overseer is pride, an elder therefore should not be a recent convert. A new convert could easily become conceited as a result of his position of responsibility, a position that carries with it a certain amount of authority. Actually the Greek word for 'conceited' means to puff up like smoke or clouds. We would say that he has his head in the clouds. If the church appointed such a person then they would be placing him in danger, for he could fall into the same kind of judgment that God pronounced on Satan. Remember he was thrown out of heaven because of pride.

ix) Above reproach in Reputation with unbelievers (v 7) – By the term "outsiders" Paul is thinking about those outside the church, the unbelievers. The world watches the church; they know whether the church's choice of elders is one that is right or wrong. They know how a Christian behaves outside of church, in the community or at their place of work and therefore they know if

that Christian is consistent or not. They might not agree with his Christian beliefs but they at least can respect him for they know he is a good man. Otherwise if the church appoints someone who does not have a good reputation with unbelievers they might be placing him in a position where he could fall into the trap set for him by Satan. Satan does his best to trap Christian leaders; therefore the church ought to do its best to make sure they choose the right people, ones who have a good reputation with unbelievers

Let me finish by giving some application for us to think about.

A) We ought to think about the reputation of the church in appointing elders – Paul gives this list of standards that the church are to look and expect of their elders because the reputation of the church is at stake. If the world does not respect those in leadership within our churches then they simply will not listen to us. They will think we have nothing to say if we do not choose people of real calibre. Therefore our choice of Pastors and elders is vital, if the church today is going to gain a hearing for the gospel.

B) We ought to be concerned for the care of the church in appointing elders. That is why Paul sets out these qualities he wants the church to appoint mature men who will be able to care for the church. You cannot do so if you are uncontrolled or violent or quarrelsome. The care of God's people is at stake that's why care must be taken in choosing the right leaders. Many a church has been uncared for because of leaders who are selfish and immature.

C) We ought to realise that the task of the elder requires someone of real strength. It takes real mental strength to have these qualities. It takes mental strength to master our impulses, drives and ourselves. It takes strength to say no to sexual temptation and to remain a one-woman man. It takes strength not to retaliate when you are being provoked. It takes real strength to bring discipline into ones home and then to bring discipline into the church. It takes real strength to avoid falling into all the traps set for us by Satan. Therefore the man who is to be an elder must be a man with no serious Christian weaknesses.

Therefore as I close, we ought to pray for Pastors and elders in our churches. It is a noble task but it is also a very difficult task. We ought to pray that God will raise up men of this sort of calibre, so that the churches can be cared for. Where are the future Pastors and elders going to come from within our own church? Men, are we seeking to be men like this?

What about the women? Although as we saw a few weeks ago the role of elder is not open to you, are you going to be content with qualities that are less than the ones laid down here? I trust not.

Therefore may God help us all to be men and women of real calibre? People who have a good reputation both inside and outside the church?

Amen