

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- Sunday 13th OCTOBER 2024 am

TITLE: "A NOBLE CALLING" TEXT: 1 Timothy 3 v 1-7

SERIES: "Guarding the deposit" Pt 8 Scripture references from the ESV

1 Timothy 3:1-7 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer^[a] must be above reproach, the husband of one wife,^[b] 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.

Where church leaders go, the church will go

A church will inevitably be affected by the direction of the life, teaching and character of the men who lead it. Bethlehem Baptist Church reflected a leader (John Piper) whose mission was to glorify God by delighting in God, and to help others to do the same. The mission statement of the church reflected this: *We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things, for the joy of all peoples, through Jesus Christ.*

Bryan Chappell wrote: *It is generally true that if the eldership is Word-centred, the church will be Word-centred. If the leadership is mission-minded, the church will be mission-minded. If the leadership is sincere, the people will be sincere. If the leadership is kind, the church will be kind.*

This is also true negatively and exponentially! Unloving, narrow, stingy leaders beget an unloving, narrow stingy church.

Where church leaders go, the church will go.

Consequently, the character of church leaders is a matter of great importance.

Earlier in the letter, (see previous sermons in this series) we had seen that ungodly leaders had started to creep into the church and were teaching wrong doctrine.

Timothy's task was to silence them, because the message of the gospel was being undermined. God desires all people to be saved, coming to a knowledge of the truth that, through Jesus, sinners can be put right with a holy God and have eternal life in

God's presence. For this to happen, the church needs to live out the gospel we preach.

Therefore:

- The church needs to be led by men who are themselves living gospel lives, and who have the character that Paul describes.
- The church needs to be supported by men and women who are living gospel lives

When Paul speaks about overseers (**vv1-2**), he is speaking about those who are to lead the church (the elders). When someone aspires to this office, it is an aspiration that:

- Is motivated by love for Christ and his people
- Comes from being called by God and having that calling recognised by the church

It is a **noble task** to which some men are called. Paul shows the office of elder to be a work in the church that shines with beauty. It is a role that has great value for the church, and, when exercised properly, is good. We underestimate the role of elders.

Elders are not just necessary for the church, they are good for the church.

The work of elders is noble work

Hence, we need to take notice of what Christ requires elders to be. Paul links **vv1,2, and 7** to point us to this:

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² **Therefore** an overseer^[a] must be above reproach; **Moreover** (v7), he must be well thought of by outsiders,

This noble work requires men with a noble character

This noble character needs to be seen both within the church (**vv2-6**) and outside the church (v7). Both are important.

1. **An elder is to have a good reputation in the church.** To be above reproach does not mean to be perfect. Rather this speaks of a man whose character, life and teaching are not open to justified rebuke or criticism.

In every area of life, leaders are subjected to criticism because the sinful human heart does not want to submit to the authority figures God places over us. That includes in home and family, work, education, socially and even in church life.

- In our pride we resent being led, thinking we can do better and so we try to usurp authority.

This results in leaders often having to deal with unjustified criticism and rebuke. That is not what Paul has in mind.

He is talking about justified or proved criticism. The church leader is to be a man whose life, character and teaching are so exemplary that no one can bring such justified criticism or rebuke against him.

- This is a man whose life, character and leadership measure up to the noble task before him

What kind of qualities does this man need to have to fulfil such a noble task, and what standard are we to measure our elders against?

- a) **This noble task requires a noble character (vv2-3).** The ten qualities mentioned speak into the three things (money, sex and power) that derail leaders when used wrongly.

It is the wrong use of money, sex and power that cause leaders to fail

These are all good gifts of God that can be used to serve others for their good, but they become deadly because our hearts are so disordered by sin that we use them wrongly by using them to serve ourselves and undermine others.

- Money (v3) must not be an elder's god, the thing he lives his life for and his motivation to serve. Instead (v2) he is to be hospitable, using the gifts God has given him to serve and bless others, especially strangers.
- Sex (v2) If he is married, he is to be faithful to his wife, and not misuse God's good gift of sex in an affair or by looking at pornography.
- Power (v3). An elder is not to be violent or quarrelsome. This is about both physical and verbal attacks. Some men will turn any discussion into a quarrel, or undermine others through sarcasm. They do this because they crave power, and they use the power they have to get their own way. A man like that has no place on the eldership. Eldership does carry authority within the church, and we need to recognise that, but that authority is to be exercised with gentleness and self control, demonstrating a respectable character (v2).

We are often very different in public to what we are in private. A man may:

- give every impression that money does not control him, yet have a heart that covets what others have

- have been married for many years and give the impression he is being faithful, yet be carrying on an affair or secretly indulging in sexual fantasies.
- be able to keep the lid on his power-driven anger in church yet be inwardly seething because he cannot get his own way.

Men in the role of elder need to have been observed close up and under pressure. Pressure in life reveals what is going on in our hearts. When a man is under pressure, is he:

- Clear-headed so that he is able to make wise decisions for the good of those he is serving?
- Self-controlled so that he does not explode in violent verbal abuse?

When you look at his life under pressure, is there a respectableness?

That is the kind of man who is qualified to lead Christ's church

b) This noble task requires a proven capability. We are not given a job description but a profile of the person. There is an important principle here.

In leading God's family, character is far more important than ability

Many very capable people are full of pride, driven by power or motivated by status. Those men are not fit to lead, no matter how capable they are. However, there are tasks that overseers need to do and

they need to have proved that they are up to the task.

- They must be **able to teach (v2)**. The primary task for elders is prayer and the ministry of the word. They are to pray for the church and to study the Bible so that they can teach it in the whole church context (preaching) but also in small groups and one-to-one. Others (Sunday School teachers for example) will also teach the word, but it is primarily the task of the elders.
- They must be **able to manage**. Paul describes the church as the **household of God (3:15)**. In his wisdom and mercy, God has entrusted the care and management of his household to the elders. We can see if a man is capable of this by looking at his home life (**vv4-5**). If he is harsh and demanding to his family, or weak and afraid to confront, he is likely to lead the church in that way. If he is dignified and respected by his family, then he is likely to be self-controlled, respectable and gentle in the church.

c) **This noble task requires a humble maturity (v6).** A young Christian may well think he has all the answers to the trials of life, but the pride of youthful faith needs to be dealt with. As a newly planted tree, he is very fragile and needs to grow deeper roots so that he survives storms and drought and produces fruit each year. An aspiring elder needs to learn from the trials he finds confronting him and seek to apply scripture to his life.

This is the kind of leader the church needs

2. An elder is to have a good reputation outside the church (v7). His reputation outside the church could well be more important than it is within the church!

- **Inside** the church, he appears to be godly, knowing his Bible inside out, praying eloquently and being patient with all

So, he is given the office of elder.

- **Outside** church, he might never speak of Christ, drink alcohol to excess, demean his wife behind her back, lie and cheat to gain wealth and endlessly get into arguments.

Then his non-Christian friends will say that the church is just a bunch of hypocrites, and no different from the rest of the world. The witness of the church is brought into disrepute, the power of the gospel is weakened and Christ is dishonoured.

Those who lead us are to be men who are the same inside the church and outside the church.

Why does all of this matter to all of the congregation, and not just to those aspiring to be elders?

- We need to know who to follow.

The elders are to have these kinds of qualities

so that the church has a living example of what it is to be like.

This is the kind of quality of character that God, by his grace, is at work to form in all his people. These qualities reflect the fruit of the Spirit, which he is forming in all believers: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control** (Gal 5:22-23).

The elders are to be like this so that they will lead us to be what God is making us to be.

We are to look at this passage and say:

- This is what God wants me to be and this is what I need to aspire to be
- I am glad that I have a living example of this in the elders of this church

We are to go even further and say:

I'm so glad this church is being led by men who are becoming more and more like this because where the church leaders go is where I will go as I follow them.

As we are reminded what we are to be like and who we need to follow to get there,
we recognise that we all need the help of Christ

This quality of character is describing the quality and character of Jesus, whose life was marked by perfect beauty, perfect capability and perfect humility. It is only as the elders follow Jesus, and the church follows Jesus, that the beauty of his life will be seen.

What the church needs is men who:

- Love Jesus and spend time with him
- Come from their studies with the aroma of Christ on them
- Display Jesus' noble character
- Trust in his ability to enable them to fulfil their task
- Have been humbled by him in the heat of life's trials and tests and are bearing fruit for him

The church needs men who may not be perfect, but who know that Christ loves and forgives them, as a result of which

- They daily confess their failure to live up to the standard
- They are resting in Christ to change them by his Spirit

**When we have leaders like that, they become safe men to follow because they will lead us to love Christ more,
to spend time with Christ,
to become like Christ and
to rest in the grace of Christ.**