

1 Timothy 3:2b-7

We're talking here in 1 Timothy 3 about the qualifications for elders and deacons; in other words, those who are involved in a leadership role in the local church have certain criteria to meet. So often, in today's church, we have moved the goal posts, we have tried to be most accommodating; we see a brother with loads of potential, he has wonderful gifts and the ability to get along with people, he sees life on the sunny side up, he has a few dollars in the bank, and our natural instincts tell us: 'Wow, he's ideal leadership material. Let's get him on the first rung of the ladder ...'

Well, Paul doesn't quite approve of that mindset – if we go down that road, we're inviting trouble in the long term; in the short term, everything may be honky-dory, but I can tell you, further down the line, it will pose all kinds of problems. If we take a shortcut on this issue, we end up making a rod for our own back.

It's always best to stick to biblical principles – if we do, we can be sure of the Lord's blessing on our church and, especially, on our leadership team; if we don't, it's catastrophic, the end result doesn't bear thinking about for it spells disaster. It seems to me that's why things are the way they are in so many evangelical churches today! In verse 2 Paul has already enumerated a number of key factors that should be the hallmark of every godly leader – they are to be 'above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self controlled, respectable, [and] hospitable.' The last one on his list in that verse is perhaps one of the most challenging of all, and also one of the most important – an overseer, an elder, a pastor, is someone who is 'able to teach'.

Now, I know, and you probably do as well, a number of men in this role who can't teach the Word of God; they wouldn't know where to start, never mind stand up there and actually do it. In those circumstances, the big question is, what are they doing as elders in a local assembly of God's people? If they fall down at this hurdle, why on Earth are they elders in the first place?

The thought behind the phrase, 'able to teach', is that these men will have the spiritual insight and the spiritual gifting to open up and share the truth of Scripture with others. They will have the knack of applying biblical truth to those sitting in the pew on a Sunday morning. That assumes, of course, that these folks will spend quality time in the Word themselves – if they teach it, they have to be taught themselves. Their hearts must always be open and responsive to the promptings of the Spirit of God, he is the great illuminator of sacred truth. A pastor who is lazy in his study is a disgrace in the pulpit.

We don't expect them to be renowned, headline preachers or Bible teachers, but we do expect them to be equipped for the task in hand. We're not talking here about someone passing on a short devotional thought on one of the Psalms, we're referring to someone who can expound the truth in a way that others can be enriched and encouraged in their walk with the Lord. Such a person will have a close walk with the Lord as well as a good solid grasp of Scripture. They will be very much aware of the big picture of redemption, the panorama of the Bible message, stretching from Genesis through to the Revelation.

It's interesting to note that Paul included this qualification in the middle of a list of moral qualities. Is there a link? Is there a connection? Well, yes, there most certainly is! What a man is cannot be divorced from what he says. The Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter, put it well when he said: 'He that means as he speaks will surely do as he speaks.'

John MacArthur has helpfully outlined seven marks of a skilled teacher of the Word. Before we pause for a short music break, let me leave them with you without any words of explanation: one, he must have the gift of teaching; two, he must have a deep understanding of doctrine; three, he must have an attitude of humility; four, his life is marked by holiness; five, he must be a diligent student of Scripture; six, he must avoid error; and, seven, he must have strong courage and consistent convictions. At the close

of his ministry, he should be able to say with Paul, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.'

MUSIC BREAK

Paul leaves us in no doubt whatsoever as to the kind of person who should be in leadership in the local church – right here, in verse 3, he elaborates further by giving us four absolute no's in a person's lifestyle and character. There are clearly defined parameters detailed by Paul, there is a line drawn in the sand, as it were. If these guys don't measure up, they should never be recognised as elders or pastors.

Paul continues by saying that an elder must not be 'given to drunkenness.' He must not be addicted to the booze; there's no way such a person should be seen staggering out of a pub on a Friday or Saturday night, then be found in a pulpit teaching the Word on a Sunday morning. This man's reputation must not be tarnished by his love of the devil's liquor. The Bible points out the tragic consequences when leaders are hooked on the drug of alcohol – Isaiah blasted them for this very sin in Isaiah 28:7 and also in 56:9-12.

The baseline is that a leader is someone whose conduct should be exemplary – if he's into alcohol abuse, then he's not much of an example to others. In actual fact he's more of a stumbling block. He, therefore, disqualifies himself from the position of an elder in the local church. Our culture tends to romanticise drinking – but the real truth is, alcohol is a destroyer of truth, and its abuse is a spiritual flamethrower.

Next, says Paul, he must not be 'violent but gentle'. The kind of person we're talking about here is someone who is looking for a fight, he'll end up throwing a punch or two, or he's only happy when he is engaging in verbal fisticuffs. There's no way that an elder should ever resort to violence in the local church; he must not settle disputes with flows, he must react to all kinds of situations calmly, coolly, and gently.

If you're an elder, you should be a true gentle-man. Just like the Lord Jesus! This was the Master's leadership style, he was 'gentle and humble in heart' according to Matthew 11:29. This is also a fruit of the Spirit – one of that cluster of nine that Paul refers to in Galatians 5:22-23.

He is considerate and genial, forbearing and gracious, he easily pardons human failure. Such a man remembers good, not evil. He doesn't keep a list of all the wrongs that people have done to him, he doesn't walk around with a chip on his shoulder. He is not the kind of person who retaliates. A good leader knows how to take heat without spreading the flames.

An elder is someone who is 'not quarrelsome'. That means he is not contentious, he's not the kind of person who would start a fight with himself! He's not trigger-happy in his relationships with others. Mr Spurgeon used to say to his students training for the pastoral ministry: 'Don't go about the world with your fist doubled up for fighting, carrying a theological revolver in the leg of your trousers.' Take it from me, folks, if you have a guy like this on your leadership team, you're in for a rough ride, they are a real pain in the neck. No matter what happens, they will take the opposite view, they'll end up banging the table, they will seriously undermine the unity of the group, and they'll spend their time sowing seeds of disharmony. I reckon it's almost impossible to work with such individuals. By their temperament, they are barred from being elders in the local church, understandably so! Paul was no fool! There's no point in having a fifth column in the eldership. The boardroom is for making spiritual decisions, not for sparring practice.

The last one in verse 3, he must not be 'a lover of money'. The godly leader will not be in it to line his own pockets, he's not in it for the money, nor is he in it for any financial gain for him or his family.

Paul was speaking from experience, he had already shared in Acts 20 with the elders at Ephesus something of his own commitment as a tentmaker – he was happy to work by day and preach by night, as it were.

In the last century Orestes Brownson spoke of ministers who pay more attention 'to the fleece than to the flock' and that is true enough. But Os Guinness is more to the point when he says: 'If a man is drunk on wine, you'll throw him out; but if he is drunk on money, you'll make him a deacon.'

A leader, therefore, must not be greedy, stingy, or financially ambitious. G B Wilson is on the ball when he writes that 'the earth-bound desires of a covetous spirit always clip the wings of faith and love.' Let's be clear, money itself isn't the issue, it's our attitude to it. Rich man, poor man are both ok for the role of overseer; you see, a godly leader loves the Lord and uses money wisely, not the other way around.

We'll take a break there and when we come back we'll take a look at what else Paul has to say about church leadership. If it does nothing else, it shows us the kind of people God wants in place to run his church here on earth.

MUSIC BREAK

I think it is highly significant that Paul's only reference to management in this section concerns the home, not the business world! Paul's focus is on the home and family. So, we read in verses 4 and 5: 'He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)'

Here's the straight scoop: It doesn't matter if a man succeeds at everything else in life. If he's not leading his family well, he's disqualified from leading the church. Far too many men are up to their eyes in business, church work, and other endeavours – and, it has to be said, often enjoying success in all these areas. But their homes are in a state of disarray. They're like a bomb site! When you walk in through the front door, you can sense the tension in the air. It's mayhem, verging on anarchy!

If you want to know how a man is going to lead the church, look at his home life. If a guy can't run his own family, how can he run the

church family? A church leader must not be like Talkative in Pilgrim's Progress – remember him, he was a saint abroad and a devil at home. That tells me that the family is the proving ground for leadership skills.

The word 'manage' means 'presides' or 'has authority over'; in fact, the same word is used in 5:17 where it is translated 'rule'. There is, therefore, a connecting link between leading the home and leading the church, that's what I said a few moments ago. I say it one more time: in the home, as in the church, it is God's plan for men to assume the leadership role.

Paul used the word 'well' in relation to managing the family – it could be translated 'excellence'. In other words, an elder is a husband and father whose leadership in the home is not only good, but seen to be good – there is something admirable and beautiful about it. It catches the eye, for all the right reasons. This person models godliness in the home – he leads from the front with an attitude of Christ-likeness. He's a joy to be with and is someone who brings out the best in those who live under his roof.

That is clearly evident in how he handles his children; it is also seen in their attitude to him. The children are to respect their father, they should bring honour to their parents. The obvious implication is that an overseer's family is one that is disciplined and not rebellious. It is hoped that his family would also be in the family of God, having exercised faith in the Lord Jesus. It is a tough one, and never more so than when our children are in their teenage years. That's when those in leadership often face the most severe testing of their call – but it's nothing that they and the Lord can't handle together.

In verse 6 Paul goes on to talk about the spiritual maturity of a godly leader. He writes: 'He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.' There's no doubt about it, Paul is straight down the line on this one – a church leader can't be a brand new convert. The word is someone 'newly planted'.

He has to show signs of spiritual maturity and that, invariably, takes time and experience. He has to be someone who has his roots down deep in the Lord, someone who knows what life is all about – someone who has been seasoned by life's triumphs, failures, joys, and disappointments.

The language Paul used is so expressive. To be 'conceited' is to be 'filled with smoke', that is, full of hot air. A brand new believer can so easily fall victim to discouragement or, on the other hand, pride. That's what brought the devil down – he was consumed with pride, he was determined to be one better than God.

For a relatively new convert, his heart could be in his hands and his head up in the clouds. Only the growing pains of maturity produce stability and a humble heart. It is grossly unwise for churches to appoint men who have no track record, men who have not been tried and tested on the anvil of life. I realise so many assemblies are looking for younger men to emerge into leadership roles and the temptation is to push them forward on a kind of fast-track; please, please, folks, don't throw caution to the wind – there's no mileage in a church lifting up those whom the Lord will later have to cut down.

Paul's final qualification is outlined in verse 7 where he says, an overseer 'must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.' We have gone full circle – we're back to a man's reputation. 'A good reputation' is literally 'a beautiful witness' – such a life will have a beautiful symmetry that adorns the gospel of grace. There is a sense of balance, a well-rounded believer. This individual is looked up to by those in the community, by those with whom he rubs shoulders every day – he has a good testimony wherever he goes.

Yes, it's important in matters like these that a potential leader is seen as kosher by those who are as yet unconverted. Sinners will not necessarily agree with his theology, but they will value his friendship and admire him for his consistent manner of life. They

will not be turned off by his behaviour; there's something about him that is attractive – his reputation is impeccable.

If he's made of the right material and checks all the right boxes, then he will avoid the snare of the devil. He'll not fall headfirst into the devil's trap! It's worth remembering that God does not set traps for his people – Satan is hyperactive in this area, he is fanatically keen to see potential and current leaders discredited and disgraced.

Leaders face many temptations from the very nature of their position, without unnecessarily adding others. Failing to live up to the high standards they set for themselves can often bring discouragement. Leaders are tempted to indifference and can so quickly become aloof and unapproachable. There is the real threat of what might be called busy laziness, that happens when they take the path of least resistance and do what they want to do, not what they need to do. They are tempted to compromise and avoid saying what ought to be said for the sake of pleasing men. They are no different to the rest of us – they face all the same temptations we face and, they, more than anyone, need to keep the armour of God on at all times.

See what I mean, leadership is vitally important – it's essential that we have round pegs in round holes, rather than round pegs in square holes. We want leaders that are gifted, godly men – those whose confidence is in the Lord, and those who fulfil the criteria set down by Paul, that is, men of God's choosing.