

The Call to Lead the Church--Elders, Part 5

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:3

Code: 54-22

INTRODUCTION

A. The Priorities of Ministry

In 1 Timothy 3:1-7 the apostle Paul lists the qualifications for elders. Once a man becomes an elder, his responsibilities include teaching, leading, praying, and ordaining other elders. In addition, Scripture gives several priorities for elders to uphold.

1. Evangelizing the lost

Elders are to seek the salvation of unbelievers. The various functions, programs, and ministries of their churches are to focus on that ultimate goal. In Acts 26:18 Paul says he was called "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them who are sanctified." All spiritual leaders share in that aspect of God's call. You may be gifted in program development, administration, or some other area of ministry, but evangelism must not be forgotten. No matter what else may be left undone, we must present Christ to the unsaved.

2. Edifying believers

Another priority for elders is edifying believers stimulating their spiritual growth so they become increasingly useful to the Lord. That includes warning the unruly, encouraging the fainthearted, supporting the weak, and being patient with everyone (1 Thess. 5:14). Ephesians 4:12 says to equip "the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ." The context has primary reference to teaching sound doctrine. Edification also involves confronting and restoring believers who fall into sin (Gal. 6:1), encouraging those who lose their zeal for ministry (2 Tim. 1:6-7), admonishing those who neglect their love for Christ (Rev. 2:4), and challenging faithful believers toward greater perseverance and strength (1 Thess. 4:1).

3. Teaching God's Word

Spiritual shepherds must faithfully feed their flock with the Word of God (Acts 20:28). A steady diet of divine truth is the core of church life.

4. Praying for God's people

Paul's concern for the spiritual maturity of the Galatians was so intense, he referred to it as birth pangs (Gal. 4:19). Agonizing over God's people is a mark of true spiritual leadership and should motivate us to intercede in prayer on their behalf.

5. Strengthening families

Our families must be taught what their biblical roles are, how to love and serve each other, and how to combat influences that tend to tear families apart. Family members need to be taught how to devote themselves to one another, to God, to His Word, to the church, and to personal ministry.

6. Attending to special needs

We must reach out in love and sympathy to those in distress, whether they be facing death, illness, divorce, or some other disappointment or disaster. Such caring is a great tradition in Christian ministry, and rightly so Jesus Himself set the example when He responded with compassion to the special needs of those around Him. Quite often a spiritual leader will be called away from the normal course of his ministry to attend to a special need that arises in someone's life. That's part of the ministry. Sad to say, some people see such things as an intrusion into their schedule when in reality

they are divinely appointed opportunities to demonstrate Christ's love. We need to see them in that light and respond accordingly.

7. Having Communion and baptism

I believe it is the responsibility of spiritual leaders to remind the congregation of Christ's death and resurrection through the ordinances of Communion and baptism. Communion reminds us of His death; baptism reminds us of His resurrection.

8. Promoting holy living

When God's people are holy in character and conduct, they are like salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13-14). Only then can the church penetrate this evil generation with the light of God's truth.

Spiritual leaders must exemplify holiness and encourage their people to pursue it in their own lives. Those priorities indicate the serious nature of spiritual leadership: it's a high, holy, and sacred calling. In addition it's very demanding.

B. The Demands of Ministry

Several demands are placed upon spiritual leaders.

1. Discipline

Discipline has been defined as training that develops self control and character or orderliness and efficiency. That's an overarching requirement for effective ministry because it affects every area of one's life.

2. Self Denial

A spiritual leader's life is not his own: he has been called to a task beyond himself. Contrary to the protagonist of Henley's *Invictus*, he is not the master of his own fate, the captain of his own soul, or the determiner of his own destiny. He moves at the bidding of God's Spirit. Therefore he must practice self denial.

3. Hard work

Rescuing the unsaved from the hand of Satan is not an easy task. Instructing the saints and working toward their maturity is equally as demanding. Hard work is required in every aspect of the ministry.

4. Organizational skills

An elder must focus on what really matters, not on peripheral issues or distractions. He must have the ability to establish priorities and get things done.

5. Proper attitudes

His attitude must be gentle and humble while maintaining zeal, intensity, and seriousness. He must be confrontive, direct, and authoritative, while maintaining warmth, love, and compassion. That may seem like an impossible balance to maintain, but God gives us grace and a divine perspective that helps to overcome our inabilities.

6. Patience

The Puritan minister Richard Baxter understood the need for a pastor to have patience. He wrote, "We must bear with many abuses and injuries from those to whom we seek to do good. When we have studied for them, and prayed for them, and exhorted them, and beseeched them with all earnestness and condescension, and given them what we are able, and tended them as if they had been our children, we must look that many of them will requite us with scorn and hatred and contempt, and account us their enemies, because we 'tell them the truth.'" Now, we must endure all this patiently, and we must unweariedly hold on in doing good, 'in meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves, if God, peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.' We have to deal with distracted men who will fly in the face of their physician, but we must not, therefore, neglect their cure. He is unworthy to be a physician, who will be driven away from a phrenetic patient by foul words" (*The Reformed Pastor* [Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth, 1974], p. 119). It takes a special man to understand the priorities and meet the demands of ministry. He must be empowered by the Holy Spirit, called by God, and qualified for leadership according to the standards in 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

REVIEW

The overarching qualification for elders is blamelessness (1 Tim. 3:2). There are four categories in which an elder must be blameless: his moral character, family life, spiritual maturity, and public reputation.

I. AN ELDER MUST BE BLAMELESS IN HIS MORAL CHARACTER (vv. 2b-3)

A. "The Husband of One Wife" Sexually Pure (v. 2b)

B. "Temperate" Not Given to Excess (v. 2c)

C. "Sober Minded" Self Disciplined (v. 2d)

D. "Good Behavior" Well Organized (v. 2e)

E. "Given to Hospitality" Hospitable (v. 2f)

F. "Apt to Teach" Skilled in Teaching (v. 2g)

1. Its definition
2. Its delineation
3. Its limitation

LESSON

4. Its identification

Several qualities are common to all skilled Bible teachers. They also serve as criteria to measure prospective teachers by. a) He has credibility The most powerful impetus to effective teaching is credibility. A skilled teacher will practice what he preaches. If you teach one thing and live another, you are contradicting and undermining your teaching. Paul said to Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example [to] the believers" (1 Tim. 4:12). He wanted Timothy to be a model others could follow a prototype of his own teaching. Paul went on to list the areas of life in which Timothy should be an example: "in word [what you say], in conduct [what you do], in love [what you feel], in spirit [what you think], in faith, [what you believe], in purity [what motivates you]" (v. 12b). That's exemplary behavior in every dimension of life, and is the first and foremost factor in skilled teaching. In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul says, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." You are not a skilled teacher unless you can call on people to follow your example. b) He has the gift of teaching The Holy Spirit gives the gift of teaching to those called to teach the church (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). It is not a natural ability but a Spirit-given endowment that enables one to teach the Word of God effectively. In 1 Timothy 4:14-16 Paul admonishes Timothy, saying, "Do not neglect the spiritual gift [of teaching] within you. . . . Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things" (NASB). In 2 Timothy 1:6 he says, "I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee." Paul wanted Timothy to exercise his gift faithfully.

Do You Have the Gift of Teaching?

Though all believers are gifted by the Holy Spirit to minister to the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7), not all have the gift of teaching (Rom. 12:7). How can you know if you have that gift? Ask yourself two questions:

1. Do you have a strong desire to teach?

2. Do your students affirm your giftedness?

Those are important considerations. Some people who think they're gifted teachers might have students who disagree. Remember, the gift of teaching is more than the natural ability to communicate information; it's a spiritual endowment given to those who are called by God to teach His Word. If you have the gift of teaching, be faithful to use it. If you don't, know that the gifts you have are equally as important. So be a good steward of your gifts. c) He has a reservoir of doctrinal understanding First Timothy 4:6 describes a good minister as being "nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine." Even though Timothy was that kind of minister, Paul encouraged him to guard carefully the sound doctrine he had been taught. In 1 Timothy 6:20 Paul says, "O Timothy,

keep that which is committed to thy trust." In 2 Timothy 1:13-14 he says, "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me. . . . Guard, through the Holy Spirit . . . the treasure which has been entrusted to you" (NASB).

How Deep Is Your Doctrinal Reservoir?

Paul reminded Timothy that from childhood he had known the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15). Even as a child, Timothy was being equipped for teaching. That reservoir of biblical knowledge was a crucial element in his ministry.

Generally speaking, the more doctrinal knowledge a teacher has the more skilled his teaching will be. That doesn't mean a new Christian can't be a skilled teacher, but he will have to work hard to make up for his lack of knowledge.

Recently I met with other Christian leaders to consider six candidates for a significant ministry position. During our deliberations I noticed that the father of each of the candidates was a prominent pastor. Each candidate had grown up in a family that taught him biblical truth and exemplified it in their daily living.

That's a tremendous commentary on the richness and depth a Christian heritage adds to a spiritual leader. It also illustrates that a skilled teacher must first be a skilled pupil. Each candidate faithfully learned and applied what his father taught him.

Are you a skilled learner? Even if you don't have a rich spiritual heritage, it can begin with you.

d) He is humble A teacher's attitude is as important as his content. If you teach God's truth with arrogance, you will undermine what you say. That's why humility is so essential to skilled teaching. Paul said, "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose him" (2 Tim. 2:24-25). e) He lives a holy life His life is marked by holiness not sinless perfection, but a commitment to true spirituality and the pursuit of righteousness. He focuses on things of eternal significance. (1) 1 Timothy 4:7 8, 15-16 Paul said, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness . . . godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them. . . . Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching . . . for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you" (NASB). (2) 1 Timothy 6:11 Paul encouraged Timothy to "follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." (3) 2 Timothy 2:20-22 Paul said, "In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor." Most homes are like that: you have good dishes and everyday dishes. When company comes you use the good dishes. The servant of God seeks to be "a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and fit for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (v. 21). To do so you must "flee . . . youthful lusts, [and] follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (v. 22). f) He is diligent in Bible study No matter how deep his reservoir of doctrinal knowledge, or how gifted in teaching, a skilled teacher must also be committed to the discipline of study. (1) First Timothy 5:17 Paul said that elders who rule well are worthy of double pay, "especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." The Greek word translated "labor" speaks of working to the point of weariness. (2) 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul said, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." You must be a diligent student to avoid being ashamed of your work. You can preach and teach with confidence because you know your study has been thorough and accurate. g) He avoids false doctrine Many gifted young men who are called into the ministry attend secular or religious schools that overtly attempt to undermine the Christian faith. In doing so they often lose the courage of their convictions. (1) 1 Timothy 1:4 Paul said, "[Don't] give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying." (2) 1 Timothy 4:7 Paul said, "Refuse profane and old wives fables." The Greek word translated "refuse" means "to push away" or "don't listen." (3) 1 Timothy 6:20-21 Paul said to avoid "profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of knowledge falsely so called, which some, professing, have erred concerning the faith."

We must avoid false doctrine because it can confuse us and lead us away from biblical truth.(4) 2 Timothy 2:16-17 Paul said, "Shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a gangrene."If you expose yourself to such people, you are in danger of being victimized by their errors. That's what happened to those whose faith was overthrown by Hymenaeus and Philetus, who taught an unorthodox view of Christ's resurrection (vv. 17-18).h) He teaches God's WordThe skilled teacher not only avoids error but also teaches the truth. That's why Paul said to Timothy, "I charge thee, therefore, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ . . . preach the word; be diligent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:1 2).i) He has courage and conviction(1) 1 Timothy 1:18-20 Paul said, "This charge I commit unto thee . . . [hold] faith, and a good conscience, which some, having put away concerning faith, have made shipwreck; of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." The skilled teacher teaches with conviction, and doesn't waver from sound doctrine.(2) 1 Timothy 4:13, 15 Paul said, "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation [applying the text], to doctrine [explaining the text]. . . . Meditate upon these things."(3) 2 Timothy 4:6-7 Paul said, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." It wasn't easy for Paul, but he ended his spiritual journey with the same courage and convictions he started with.Contrast Paul's attitude with that of Demas, who forsook the faith because he loved this present world (v. 10).

G. "Not Given to Wine" Not a Drinker (v. 3a)

1. Defined

The Greek word translated "given to wine" (paroinos) means "one who drinks." It doesn't refer to a drunkard that's an obvious disqualification. The issue here is the man's reputation: Is he known as a drinker?We saw that the Greek word translated "temperate" (v. 3c) refers in its literal sense to one who is not intoxicated. Paroinos, on the other hand, refers to one's associations: Such a person doesn't frequent bars, taverns, and inns. He is not at home in the noisy scenes associated with drinking. His lifestyle is not that of a drinker.

2. Defended

The same qualification is required of deacons (v. 8). Proverbs 31:4 says, "It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink." Leviticus 10:9 forbids priests from drinking wine or strong drink while performing their sacred duties. Those in spiritual leadership must stay away from anything that distorts their judgment or distracts from their testimony. Their lifestyle must be exemplary.

H. "Not Violent" Not a Fighter (v. 3b)

1. Defined

You can't be an elder if you settle disputes with your fists or in other violent ways. The Greek word translated "violent" (pl[ma]ekt[ma]es) means "a giver of blows" or "a striker." An elder isn't quick tempered and doesn't resort to unnecessary physical violence.That qualification is closely related to "not given to wine" because such violence is usually connected with people who drink excessively.

2. Delineated

a) Physical violenceA spiritual leader must be able to handle things with a cool mind and a gentle spirit. Paul said, "The servant of the Lord must not strive" (2 Tim. 2:24).b) Verbal violenceThe tongue can be an instrument of violence. I believe pl[ma]ekt[ma]es in this context implies verbal as well as physical violence. In 1 Timothy 6:4-5 Paul says to beware of one who "has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction" (NASB). James 3:6 warns, "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity."A spiritual leader must not deal with difficulties through physical or verbal abuse.

I. "Patient" Easily Pardons Human Failure (v. 3c)

We skipped "not greedy of filthy lucre," which appears in the King James Version but does not appear in the better Greek manuscripts. That qualification is identical in meaning to "not covetous"

(v. 3e), which we will soon cover in our study .

1. Defined

The Greek word translated "patient" (epieik[ma]es) means "to be considerate, genial, forbearing, gracious, or gentle." Aristotle said it speaks of a person who easily pardons human failure (William Barclay, The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975], p. 83). It's also used in 2 Timothy 2:24: "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient."

2. Applied

In a practical sense, patience is the ability to remember good and forget evil. You don't keep a record of wrongs people have committed against you (cf. 1 Cor. 13:5). That's an important virtue for a spiritual leader. I know people who have left the ministry because they couldn't get over someone's criticizing or upsetting them. They carry a list of grievances that eventually robs them of the joy of serving others. Discipline yourself not to talk or even think about wrongs done against you because it serves no productive purpose. It simply rehearses the hurts and clouds your mind with anger. A patient person is able to pardon human failure and focus on the good done by others. He doesn't dwell on getting even because he doesn't hold grudges. That's the kind of person we need in spiritual leadership.

J. "Not a Brawler" Not Quarrelsome (v. 3d)

The Greek word translated "not a brawler" (amachos) is similar in meaning to pl[ma]jekt[ma]es ("violent," v. 3b). The difference is pl[ma]jekt[ma]es primarily refers to physical violence whereas amachos refers to being quarrelsome.

When you have a plurality of church leaders attempting to make decisions, you can't get very far if any of them are quarrelsome. That's why Paul said, "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men . . . patient" (2 Tim. 2:24). He must be a peacemaker.

K. "Not Covetous" Free from the Love of Money (v. 3e)

1. The definition

The Greek word translated "not covetous" (aphilarguros) is a negation of the Greek words for "love" and "silver." It speaks of someone who doesn't love money.

2. The danger

Love of money can corrupt a man's ministry because it tempts him to view people as a means by which he can get more money. Paul said, "Godliness with contentment is great gain; for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:6-10).

3. The defense

How do we keep from the love of money? Here's a simple principle I've used: don't place a price on your ministry. Sometimes people ask me how much I charge to teach or preach. I don't charge anything. If I'm paid, that's fine; if not, that's fine too. I leave that up to the Lord and those I minister to. I'll accept whatever He supplies, but I don't want my ministry to be influenced, distorted, or corrupted in any way by financial expectations. If someone gives you a financial gift you didn't seek, you can accept it from the Lord and be thankful for it. But if you pursue money, you'll never know if it came from Him or from your own efforts. That robs you of the joy of recognizing God's provision for your needs.

Conclusion

An elder must be morally qualified to lead the church. His desires must be focused on heavenly things. He can't allow earthbound desires cripple his faith, love, or spiritual power. He must not be greedy, indulgent, or ambitious for worldly gain or power.

I pray that God will raise up many such men for future spiritual leadership, and that He will make all of us who currently lead His church the kind of men He wants us to be. Be sure to pray for your leaders and for the church around the world. It's becoming increasingly difficult to find qualified spiritual leaders. But God still calls men to the ministry, and He will bless the church that doesn't compromise His standards for leadership.

Focusing on the Facts

1. According to Acts 26:18, what did Jesus instruct Paul to do?
2. What does edifying others involve?
3. A steady diet of _____ is the core of church life.
4. What is an elder's responsibility toward the families in his congregation?
5. How should an elder react to the special needs of his congregation.
6. What is the purpose of baptism and communion?
7. Define discipline.
8. Why must an elder practice self denial ?
9. What attitude must an elder have toward ministry?
10. The most powerful impetus to effective teaching is _____ .
11. What is the gift of teaching ?
12. How can you know if you have the gift of teaching?
13. How did Paul describe a good minister (1 Tim. 4:6)?
14. A skilled teacher must first be a skilled _____.
15. A teacher's _____ is as important as his content.
16. Define "labor" as used in 1 Timothy 5:17.
17. Why is it important to avoid false doctrine?
18. Define paroios (v. 3).
19. In what way does "not given to wine" differ from "temperate" (v. 3)?
20. A spiritual leader must not deal with difficulties through _____ or _____ .
21. Give a practical definition of patience (v. 3).
22. How does amachos differ from pl[ma]ekt[ma]es (v. 3)?
23. What danger does the love of money present to a spiritual leader?

Pondering the Principles

1. Before Jesus ascended into heaven He commanded His disciples to "go . . . make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19, NASB). In so doing He established evangelism as the number one priority for the church. But many Christians act as if the responsibility for evangelism belongs to the pastor or to a church evangelism committee. How about you? Are you concerned about the lost? When was the last time you spoke to an unbeliever about Christ? Are you currently praying for someone's salvation? Ask God to give you a concern for the lost. Cultivate friendships with unbelievers, and take every opportunity to speak to them about the Lord.
2. We have seen that credibility is the key to effective teaching: your life must model your lesson. That's true even if you aren't a preacher or teacher in the formal sense. We are all teaching something to those who watch us, and they often learn more from our actions than from our words. What are you teaching those who observe your life? Are they learning holiness or hypocrisy?
3. Timothy was a gifted teacher but he needed encouragement to minister under difficult circumstances (2 Tim. 1:6-7). Perhaps you are experiencing discouragement in your ministry. That happens when we lose sight of our calling, focus on our circumstances, or seek encouragement from the wrong sources. Review these basics and ask God to give you a renewed sense of purpose and direction for the task He has called you to do:

- To whom should I go for encouragement (Rom. 15:5, NASB)?
- Where should I go for encouragement (Rom. 15:4, NASB)?
- What should be the focus of my ministry (1 Cor. 4:1-2)?
- Should I attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of my ministry (1 Cor. 4:3-4)?
- What will be the result of my ministry (1 Cor. 4:5)?

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