

10/8/23 - 1 Tim. 3:1-7 - "Elders, the Archetype of Christ"

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[0 : 00] The text for today is 1 Timothy chapter 3. And it begins by saying, The saying is trustworthy.

If anyone aspires to the office of an overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not drunkard, not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, 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? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders so that he may not fall into disgrace and to a snare of the devil. This is the word of the Lord. Praise God for his word.

Praise God for the work of his word in this church and the fact that you guys take a moment to just show appreciation for elders and pastors.

[1 : 28] You might think that it's almost unthinkable not to, but it's not the case in every church. Your partnership in the gospel makes it an absolute joy to do what I do and to suffer the grief that I suffer and tears and everything.

I'm a little bit overly emotional this week. I didn't know that a cat, a little cat, could make me cry so much, but I had to put our cat down. But it has been just a tough week, and so that just hits me really hard this morning that you guys are acknowledging the behind-the-scenes work that we do, and it is worth it.

Everything that we do is worth it. And providentially speaking, Pastor Appreciation Day has fallen on the day that we preach the qualifications of an elder, and so I think that's pretty cool how that aligned.

Last week, we began to dive into the particularities of men and women distinctly thriving in the church together and how that looks and how one ought to behave in the household of God, and whereby Paul tied his explanation the distinction into God's design in creation, which was prior to the fall, even prior to Eve.

And you see, God created a complementarian design. That's God's creation. He created that. And because of that, God's design is good, because God is good.

[3 : 24] And deviating from God's design is disastrous. It's confusing to all around. And Paul is writing to the church how to be separate from the culture and how we ought to look.

And so today, Paul enters into the specific function of men within the household of God and ties it in uniquely with the family. Within the passage today is where we understand the practical exercise of authority that was touched on last week in the passage, where a woman is not to have authority over a man.

This is where that authority is practically exercised through the authority that was designated to not a woman but a man. But it's no ordinary man.

It was God at creation who entrusted His Word to Adam prior to Eve, prior to the fall. It was God at creation who confronted Adam and His disobedience in creation.

And yes, God continues to entrust authority to men. But what kind of men is God looking for to hold that authority?

[4 : 53] What qualifies a man to do that type of work? And most of all, for us as a gathered church, you might be checked out already and already on your Instagram feed.

But I don't want you to leave this teaching moment just yet. Because we are going to see why this matters to the gathered church.

Why it's vital to the church. Within the past several weeks of this series, we have been looking upon the constructs of the household of God and how to organize, how to assemble, and what we do in that assembling.

And from the importance of maintaining doctrinal purity in chapter 1 to prioritizing prayer in chapter 2, to the dynamics and distinct roles between men and women in the gathered church, today we will see the household of God is organized organized with two vital functioning offices.

That being of overseers, also known as elders, and deacons. Two offices, elders and deacons. And so, it's going to feel kind of like a practical sermon.

[6 : 12] You know what I mean? Just like a almost academic in nature. But I don't want you to just leave it there. I hope that you do see and take this further to understand where we as a church fit into that construct.

It's important that we just don't see the do's and the don'ts, but we see the why. Okay? I want you to see that today. So, the sermon titled is called Elders, the Archetype of Christ.

And let us pray before we go into this. And I hope to lay this out with simplicity, clarity, and by God's Holy Spirit, power. Let's pray for that.

Father, we come to you today knowing that we come as sinners into a perfect book, into no ordinary book, no ordinary written work.

And Father, you have preserved its meaning throughout the days and the decades, the centuries. It doesn't matter what the culture looked like back in Paul's day versus today.

[7 : 22] We know that we have the same corrupt hearts. It's a problem that is repackaged in new wrapping paper, but it's an old problem linking back to the fall.

And Father, we come to you today asking for us to set aside anything that may have imposed upon us submitting to your word before coming to our gathering today.

and help us to see the beauty in what you have desired within the office of elder. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. So the first section for you is seen in verse 1. I'm going to tie in some biblical theology into this to understand fully what this is saying.

It says the saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. It's interesting that the household of God needs an overseer.

[8 : 34] Ten to fifteen years after Paul writing this letter to Timothy, Paul addressed the Ephesian elders once again in Acts.

Just ten to fifteen years after this. And it provides a pretty good snapshot of what God's expectation of this role is. In Acts 20, verse 28, I'll read from there.

He says, Pay careful attention to yourselves and to the flock, to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers overseers, to care for the church of God, which was obtained with His own blood.

Verse 29, I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And verse 30, and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

Here we can clearly observe the central calling of an elder. It's to lead and to protect under the authority of Christ and to provide instructional care for the church body, the household of God.

[9 : 57] And the church, being a sheepfold tended by shepherds, is therefore not a petting zoo. It's not a consumeristic endeavor of our wants.

It's a sacrificial family where we count other needs greater than our own. This is the family of God. You see, a vital aim of the church is to stand for truth.

And God entrusted under shepherds to oversee that aim. This is a fine work in verse 1.

A noble task. For this reason, Paul states 10 to 15 years earlier than writing to those in Acts 20, that any man aspiring to this office of overseer is a fine work he desires to do.

Let me explain a little bit about this office because this office of overseer and bishop is kind of used interchangeably, overseer and bishop, episkopos, and it's synonymously exchanged with the word elder in Scripture, almost replaced like right after the very sentence with presbyteros.

[11 : 23] And in Acts 20, even if we go back in Acts 20 from verse 17 to verse 38 and take this big passage of Scripture, the word pastor, poimen, in Greek, is also used interchangeably with overseer, episkopos, and elder, presbyteros.

They're all used interchangeably, and so what I want you to see is that when you read Scripture and you see a reference to this office, it is an interchangeably designated office.

Pastor, elder, overseer being the same office. You could also see 1 Peter 5 and Titus 1. But not only that, I also want you to understand too is that this office is made and built upon a basis of plurality.

There isn't just the guy in the church. Elder is always referred to as plural.

Elders. It's not pastor appreciation as if we're patting me on the back. No, we've got that wrong. It's pastor's appreciation day.

[12 : 45] Indeed. And so there is no ranking or hierarchical structure in the forms of church government within the office of elder, pastor, and overseer.

Those usually came after the close of the New Testament, mind you, with Ignatius, and he was the bishop of Antioch. Those came after the close of Scripture. But what we're looking at is being duty-bound to the Word.

What does the Word say? And the Word uses that interchangeably with no hierarchical forms of government. This office contains essentially a brotherhood of rulers, of teachers, with balanced authority with one another, with various functions.

And this is a trustworthy saying, because I believe it's because of the extensive, rich tradition that God designed for the people of God.

If we turn back even to Exodus, the first elders were appointed by Moses to teach, to judge Israel in Exodus 18.

[13 : 59] And throughout the Old Testament, God's people were represented and governed by elders. These elders were involved in the public eye and teaching in the synagogues.

And that continued even into the New Testament church. Remember back in Acts 11, Paul and Barnabas distributed relief from Antioch. Remember all of that passage in Acts 11?

All those products and the materials that were distributed throughout the region was through the elders of the church.

And missionary journeys often involved appointing elders in all these churches, plural, Acts 14. I'm not trying to fill your head with a bunch of information.

I'm trying to fill your head with great conviction that how we do it is how it was meant to be done. Amen? Oversight of God's people is good work.

[15 : 11] Being ruled, being taught, being supervised is godly ambition for a church to desire. Doesn't that go against the grain of the culture?

Church, I understand that the culture finds great desire in self-rule, but the church is not a natural institution. This is a supernatural institution.

And unfortunately, this fact and eldership has unfortunately led many to misuse authority, leading to vile acts of abuse, which damages not only the flock, but the representation of the gospel.

It distorts everything that God desires to be proclaimed as truth. God has a trustworthy standard.

He has a trustworthy design, and it is good. None of us should blame Beethoven because somebody played Beethoven poorly.

[16 : 26] you don't come for Beethoven's head and dig up his casket and then beat him to death again and lay it to him.

No. The responsibility is in those who play the piece that Beethoven composed. Just because somebody's playing music from a wonderful composition doesn't mean you blame the composer, you blame the musician, and unfortunately this has happened in the church where people are blaming God for the misuse and the misorganization of his design in the church and have said, God, obviously that way is not working, so it's got to work this way now.

No. Don't allow bad experiences to undermine God's good design. And what we'll see then is that this is no ordinary office led by no ordinary men but exemplary men whose role of instructional care is qualified primarily by their character, both private and public.

And so for that, my second section, and we're going to be landing here for a majority of the rest of our time, is what I'm labeling for the sake of memory retention is the 515 of leadership and followership.

I'm glad that you're confused because that says you're still with me, and I'll explain what that means in just a moment. What I want to do is lay out Scripture and then look at it, stand back a moment, and see what Paul's saying, because such an office must have an attainable trajectory, which is found in a comprehensive list.

[18 : 23] And I say attainable trajectory because no man serving in the office of elder walks on water. No man serving in this role is perfect and sinless, but these marks ought to be observable within his life.

In other words, elders, no matter how wonderful they are, they've never arrived. And so, too often a church will expect perfection of their leaders and not progress.

And I believe the turnover statistics don't lie within pastoral ministry. I don't think the suicide rates lie within pastoral ministry.

Too often a church body will expect perfection from their leaders. Churches place an infallible expectation upon men that I don't even believe Paul put upon himself.

Remember in chapter 1, wretched Christians? He knows who he is and what he struggles with. It's all through his letters. He does what he ought not to do in Romans.

[19 : 40] He's wretched indeed, need. But instead, Paul reinforces that an elder must be above reproach. And obviously, it's impossible to be free of all reproach when you're in leadership.

You're the target of many things that people say. But when accusation does come, an elder's character will rise above that reproach.

To be above reproach, to rise above. And this is how we do it. And I'm going to borrow from the New American Standard Bible, the NASB, because I believe between the passage today and next week, going to the original Greek is most helpful to understand.

I will reject the ESV and some of the nuances in that, but it is clear within the closest translation to the original. And so, what we have here is a list of characteristics.

Let's lay them out of this exemplary man who serves as elder. It says, the husband of one wife. Obviously, that's nuanced today because we might argue can a single guy serve as an elder?

[20 : 56] Is he disqualified from an elder? Or maybe somebody whose spouse has passed away and he got remarried. Is he disqualified because now he has technically a second wife and remarried?

Well, I believe the nuance lies in the fact of what it's trying to reinforce because I believe Paul was concerned about the moral accountability for sexuality.

And you can observe that in the life of a single man or a remarried man. Obviously, there are some things within remarriage that may disqualify an elder and that's where the nuance comes from.

But we believe that this is a one-woman man. Or if you're a single, a God man. You don't need no woman. But you see, an elder must be above accusation then from sexual scandals, whether married or single, rise above the accusation of sexual scandals.

Not only that, but temperate in the NASB, someone vigilant in identifying spiritual needs and spiritual dangers without reacting in zeal or rashness.

[22 : 14] You see, an elder must be above accusation by conducting himself wisely. Must be prudent in the NASB, it says.

Wisely controlled in judgment. This gives a sense of controlling your appetite. That regardless of how hungry you are, you refrain from eating.

It's controlling your appetite in that sense. And an elder must be above accusation from being mentally unstable. Not only that, but respectable.

Holding a reputation of being orderly and well-mannered. Not a loose raging cannon or a bully. This was surely a problem in Ephesus.

We remember Hymenaeus and Alexander that Paul was addressing. That was a problem in this church. And so an elder must be above accusation from being disorderly.

[23 : 12] Also hospitable, welcoming, loving towards outsiders. It's the highest Christian virtue, hospitality. We're halfway through the list and we get to able to teach, which I believe is clearly the central role of an elder.

That distinguishes an elder from even just a deacon. This is the principal work of an elder which relates to the truth in the Word of God. Right?

He must be a man of truth. And you see, a man called to be an elder must be above accusation by being duty-bound to the Word. Not addicted to wine or pugnacious or but gentle in the NASB it says.

It combines the not addicted to wine and gentle in the same phrase. Spain's basically just not a drunken brawler. Remember last week, the men in the church ought to pray with holding their holy hands, raise their holy hands, not fighting fists.

Men have testosterone problems, right? We sometimes deal with things the wrong way. And so, an elder must be above accusation by not being abusive.

[24 : 43] Must be peaceable. A man whose aim is to attain peace and not nuke all the problems in the world just to attain that peace. Right? An elder, you see, must be above accusation by striving for peace.

You must also be free from the love of money. The only gain in the role of an elder is not in your wallet. Our gain is the glory of God as an elder.

Men have sought financial gain through ministry, and this is the trick that's old as the Bible, back to Genesis 3. So, an elder must be above accusation from being greedy, financially greedy.

Not only that, he must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity. But if a man, Paul says, does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?

this leadership role and ability is visibly testified through the work of husbandhood, but also fatherhood.

[26 : 01] You have the home being the first ministry of an elder. And you see, the elder must be above accusation from being a bad leader.

Little church comes first before big church. And then he begins to wrap things up. Not a new convert so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.

And now the actual age of an elder is kind of a mute point compared to the spiritual age of an elder. You might be new in the church and might be like that dude's an elder.

He doesn't have enough gray hair. Right? I'm often told when I share about what I do to older folks. Doesn't matter how old.

I tell them I'm the lead pastor of Steel Valley Church. I've been told once in Panera, people are wonderful, aren't they? Oh, son, you're too young to be a pastor.

[27 : 05] I'm like, I was literally in the middle of going to the bathroom in a pastoral meeting, and I'm like, well, thanks. Nice advice.

I guess I'll call the other guys and tell them I'm going to throw my resignation in there. It has nothing to do with actual age of being an elder.

It has everything to do with spiritual age. So new Christians, regardless of how gifted or called that they might be, they might be able to preach around circles by the regular preacher in the pulpit, but if they are a new convert, they are the target of the enemy because these men will grow so fast that they will look down in one day or another on others in pride as if they deserve to be there.

And what a danger that is. You see, an elder must be above accusation of being spiritually immature. Not only does Satan go after the weak, but also after the strong, and we see that in verse 7.

And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

[28 : 31] Similar to being above reproach or above accusation, those outside the church will attest to their exemplary character. And obviously, haters are going to hate.

I got lots of colorful nicknames, and that's certainly true. But haters will hate, but elders, their long-standing reputation will withstand and outlast their tenure, my tenure, and therefore they will rise above reproach.

What I want to show you is I want to make sense of the 515 of leadership. And so, in this graphic that I have for you, let's see if I can get this up.

It might look weird on the live stream. I didn't preface the sound people or the media people, so let it be what it's going to be. So, in here, you have a list that revolves around the primary work of an elder, teaching.

So, this graphic has on one side of the teaching aspect of the requirements and his character, it's preceded by 5, and it's followed by 5.

[29 : 48] But in the center of Paul's argument is the teaching role of an elder. And so, it starts out, remember, above reproach from within, but then it talks about being above reproach from outside as well.

And so, it's kind of sandwiched in this type of fashion, having above reproach and reputable underneath all of those qualifications.

And so, we can simply see and explain that inside the church, he's above reproach. Inside his heart, he's above reproach.

Outside the church, he's above reproach. church, I told you I wanted to talk about why this matters.

And this is why it matters. Because in the long run, an effective elder is not one who has all the gifts and all the knowledge, but one who has character, one whose heart is surrounded and expresses these characteristics deep within his being.

[31 : 11] Satan is lurking behind the scenes. Have you forgotten? He's waiting for the opportune moment to inflict harm upon the church.

church. And Satan is out to get elders. It is his oldest military strategy and the oldest trick within his book since Adam, as we saw last week.

You see, church, don't forget that this war is not between flesh and blood. this is not a natural institution, but a supernatural one.

And maybe now we can understand why there is so much contention around what was preached about last week.

I hope you can see now that maybe all of the tension between, well, you can't tell a woman what she can and can't do, well, we don't.

[32 : 21] God does. And his design is good. And we trust in his design and our obedience to it. And to God alone are the results.

Maybe that's why we can understand there's so much contention about the exclusive office of elder, pastor, and overseer being limited to men. God will do this.

I want to remind leaders, because obviously this pertains quite obviously to those in leadership.

And I don't want to just marginalize that so that I can just apply it generally to everyone sitting here, but I want to talk to those in leadership within the church.

You must be on guard. Satan doesn't take a day off. He's looking to divide a brotherhood.

[33 : 28] Watch out personally for temptation, to live above reproach, use good judgment, practice hospitality, be peaceable, defend sound doctrine, lead your family, and so doing, resisting the devil.

It sounds so easy, doesn't it? But it is hard. It is very hard. Maybe for others though, though, how might this apply and relate to the household of God?

You're not an elder. You're a guy and you're just like, I'm nowhere close to that list, to my own regret. How might this apply to the household of God?

And maybe not just the head of the household. Well, as we, a body of Christ, the household of God, as we survey this list, we should get a really good picture of not just a man in a cool coat on Sunday morning, not a guy who's a professor out at YSU.

you should see in that picture a picture of Jesus Christ.

[35 : 10] Jesus lived supremely as the chief shepherd, far greater than the most obedient pastor, elder, overseer on this earth.

He was the most obedient, superior to anyone, greater in character, greater in sacrifice, greater in love, greater in leadership, and greater, greatest in effectiveness.

His perfect essence was not only able to atone for our sin upon the cross where we are bestowed forgiveness on behalf of our faith in Him, but His perfect expression also served as an archetype for every single Christian to strive after Christlikeness.

You see, if Jesus Christ is the archetypal example for all Christians, then elders are the exemplary archetypal example for the church.

The household ought to desire to be imitators of such men, and especially their behavior. Don't believe me?

[36 : 36] How will Satan get to the elders, you might ask? Well, I'm glad that you asked, because what he will do is he will surround the elder with a scandalous wife, with harshness from people, hastiness from people, corruption from outside of them, meanness, argumentiveness, belligerence, greediness, chaotic, family life, pride, will completely surround.

Inside the church he will be condemned, outside the church he will be dishonored, and guess what church, that is the recipe of people not understanding what the gospel is.

When these characteristics and the calling of an elder are the striving and the example of every single person sitting in this church, we get it right.

We get God's design and the expression of that design good, we get that right, and there is no distortion. Satan will surround an elder's life in congregational turmoil, in hardship, in drama.

That's how Satan gets an elder. You see, the qualification of an elder is the attainable trajectory of all Christians to strive for, and for that, the power of a church's witness and usefulness not only rests in the leadership of elders, but also the followership of the church, you.

[38 : 26] And so, what would happen if the church imitates those types of leaders? What would happen? well, I'm excited to find out at Steel Valley Church as God brings all His work through us as a body, a household of God to completion.

Church, trust in God's good design and His good construct for His church. We are His church, after all. Let's pray.

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