

# The Character of a Leader

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1 Tim 3:1-13

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- These are my rough preaching notes shared with you for the purpose of helping those who were not at the service to get the gist of the sermon, and for those who were to have a reminder of what was said. They are not corrected and polished for printable publication.
- If not done so already an audio recording of the sermon in MP3 format, will be posted on the webpage shortly.
- Making these resources available in this way is a new venture. If you do make use of any of them I would value your feed back and comment.

## ***Introduction***

This is the fifth sermon in this series looking at Paul's first letter to his young protégé Timothy. In this pastoral letter we get a window of understanding into a matter that is of central importance to us at this time in our life as a church – namely discipleship.

And in chapter three Paul addresses the subject of the character that Timothy should look for in those who appoints as leaders. He uses two words which need a little explanation before we get into what he says about the character of a leader in the church.

## ***The first word is the Greek word episkopos.***

It comes in verse 1 and is translated in the NIV as *overseer*. Other translations have it as *bishop*, or *elder*.

The term episkopos is closely associated with another word that is used by New Testament writers to describe a leader in the church and that is the term presbuteros .

That is the word that comes up for example in 1 Tim 5:17 where it is also translated as *elder*.

***The elders (presbuteros) who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.***

But the two terms episkopos (overseer or bishop) and presbuteros (elder or presbyter) seem to be used interchangeably by the New Testament writers.

In Acts 20 verse 17 **Paul** sent for the elders (presbuteros) of the church in Ephesus and he then addresses them as the overseers (episkopos).

*Acts 20:17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders (presbuteros)** of the church.*

*Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers (episkopos)**.*

**Peter** (in 1 Peter 5:1-2) appealed to the elders to serve as overseers.

*5:1 To the elders (presbuteros) among you, I appeal as a fellow elder (sumpresbuteros), a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed:*

*2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers (episkopew) --*

### **Why the two titles?**

Well the word presbuteros was Jewish in origin (every synagogue had its elders) and indicated a seniority. It conveys a sense of dignity or seniority as the word elder suggests.

The word episkopos was Greek in origin and was used of municipal officials who supervised cities and their subjects. It denotes the function of the office – hence the translation “overseer” serves well.

But they are used for the same group of people who have a function of oversight and carry a certain dignity and seniority with the holding of this office.

***The second word is the Greek word diakonos***

It is the word that comes in verse 8 and 12 and is translated as *deacon* or *servant* or *church helper*.

The term *diakonos* carries the sense not only of being a servant or literally a waiter. It also carries the sense of being one who goes between, who acts as an agent on behalf of the church and its leadership.

Now while he addresses Overseers and Deacons separately he says very similar things to them. I don't want to look at how the Anglican Church or in deed any denomination uses these terms, I rather want to look at the general standards set out here for those who exercise leadership in the church.

The point that is obvious is that Paul sets the bar equally high for both overseers and deacons. Both will be representing the church. The general population in Ephesus will look at them and make conclusions about the church and the gospel of Christ. That is Paul's concern as he instructs Timothy in the task of raising up and appointing those who will be leaders in the church exercising a ministry of oversight and service.

We in a process of discerning whom God is raising up to be leaders of the Connect Groups, which we will be launching in the New Year. There are a number of people I have invited to explore this avenue of service with me as we launch this new initiative. So this passage and Paul's instructions to Timothy are particularly apposite.

The selection of a candidate for leadership in the church involves three things.

**First** there is the call of God.

It is a work of the Holy Spirit as Paul indicates in Acts 20:28

*<sup>28</sup>Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.*

**Second** there is the inner aspiration and conviction of the individual concerned. So here in verse 1 Paul recognises the aspiration of an individual to serve as an overseer in the church as something positive and good.

*Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.*

**Third** there is the conscious screening by the church as to whether they meet the requirements which the Apostle Paul now goes on to list.

He mentions a number of things that he considers are essential for those who aspire to these ministries. We can put them together under ten headings.

## ***1. Faithful in marriage***

Both overseers (verse 2) and deacons (verse 12) are required to be ...

*“the husband of but one wife”*

or as is better translated in the TNIV and NLT

*“He must be faithful to his wife.”*

There is no place for polygamy, or unfaithfulness in marriage.

Remember that in Ephesus at this time sexual looseness in society was endemic and had crept into the church in a destructive way.

It was vital that leaders in the church model an alternative way of life. There is nothing like the witness of a wholesome marriage and family life lived in front of the watching world. It conveys far more than we realise. It speaks more eloquently than any number of sermons or acts of mercy.

So - faithfulness in marriage.

## ***2. Self mastery***

Under this heading we can take the next three words mentioned in verse 2 ...

*“Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife,  
**temperate, self-controlled, respectable, ...***

A quick look at the words and their meanings:

- Temperate = sober, clear headed.
- Self-controlled = sensible, disciplined.
- Respectable = it is the outward expression of inward self control.

Leaders often work for considerable periods of time on their own. They are not always being supervised and watched. They need to have mastery of themselves.

This was one of the fruits of the spirit mentioned in Galatians (5:22).

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and **self-control**. Against such things there is no law.*

It is what Paul refers specifically to when he addresses Timothy in his second letter (2 Tim 1:6 & 7)

*6For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.  
7For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and **self-discipline**.*

So - self mastery.

### **3. Hospitality**

*2Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, **hospitable** ...*

Hospitable follows self controlled naturally since self-mastery makes self giving possible.

The word Paul uses here is literally “love of strangers”.

Exercising hospitality is not the same as entertaining. You don’t need a house to be hospitable. What you need is a heart that is able to enter into how some one else is feeling. It is the ability to move out of your world and preoccupations and engage with others in their worlds, with their concerns.

Pre-occupation with self and your own world would exclude some one from leadership in the church. Natural open hearted hospitality – a generous heart – that is what we are after.

So – hospitality.

#### 4. *Teaching ability*

*Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, **able to teach**,*

It seems strange to suddenly have a professional qualification in the middle of a series of moral qualities. Suddenly we have a function rather than a moral characteristic.

But to teach effectively means you must be teachable.

It is a subtle word change but a profound truth;

“Teaching ability” requires - presupposes “Teachability”.

In Hebrew there is only one root word for both teaching and learning = lamad. It has a broad meaning of to learn, teach, exercise in, be trained in.

The most important requirement of a teacher in the church is that they are teachable. And that is an attitude of the heart, not an academic qualification or a reservoir of knowledge.

To be teachable requires us to have a humble heart.

- It is a heart that asks God to show me my sin before I blame others.
- It is a heart that is quick to obey and does not procrastinate.
- It is a heart that is open to others who are older, younger, under, over...and says I am sure God will teach me something through you.
- It is a heart that takes initiative and intentionally takes action.
- It is a heart that is willing to risk getting things wrong but will take ownership of failures and not blame.

You see without a teachable heart we will simply be bringing people up to where we have got. As a leader I want to see people go way beyond where I have got to. That means I want to grow a teachable heart in them. To do that, I need to open to God growing that teachable heart in me.

So – teaching ability and Teachability.

## **5. Drinking habits**

*Verse 3 ... not given to drunkenness ...*

In Lev 10:9 It is required of priest in the Old Testament that they did not consume any alcohol or fermented drink before going into the tent of meeting.

In Proverbs 31:4 kings are required not to drink wine or they would forget the laws of the country and deprive the oppressed of their rights.

In Isaiah 5:22ff magistrates are required not to be “heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks” because it would lead them to acquit the guilty for a bribe and deny justice to the innocent.

We all approve of the requirement that airline pilots are not allowed to consume any alcohol for a number of hours before they assume control of an aircraft and while on duty.

The Christian leader (both the overseer and the deacon) needs to be self controlled and not drink alcohol on duty. Alcohol blunts and blurs our faculty of judgement. That can not serve those we lead.

This brings the church into disrepute and mars our witness. It is a no go area.

So – not given to drunkenness.

## **6. Temper and temperament**

*Verse 3 ... not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome...*

Three words – two negative and one positive.

The positive word used here means gentle or gracious. An abundance of gentle grace (which does not mean one is a push over) will ensure that the leader is not violent or quarrelsome.

Timothy had a church full of quarrelsome leaders. The work of proclaiming the gospel could not advance if Timothy had to spend his energies on sorting out internal quarrels and power struggles.

## **7. Attitude to money**

*Verse 3 ... not a lover of money.*

Leaders in it for the money was one of the issues Timothy faced in Ephesus. In chapter six he writes ...

*6:4ff They (false teachers) have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who **think that godliness is a means to financial gain.***

They were in it for the financial gain.

READ chapter 6:6-10

That is what he was up against. So it is understandable that leaders in the church must not be lovers of money. That is what the false teachers were in Ephesus.

Obviously Paul does not expect those Timothy appoints as elders to be exploited and not paid, he says ...

*1 Tim 5:17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 18 For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and "Workers deserve their wages."*

But there is a danger that every one of us faces, and those who are supported financially by the church are particularly prone to this danger, we can land up doing the work for the money and not for the Lord.

Jesus said ... (Matthew 6:24)

*24 "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."*

So this is a matter that needs constant scrutiny to ensure we do not take our eyes of the one we serve because we love him, not because we are paid to.

So – attitude to money.

## **8. Family life matters**

Paul's instructions to Timothy are very specific about the family life of the overseer.

*4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. 5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)*

And of Deacons he says ....

*12 A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well.*

Paul draws an analogy between the leader's family and God's church. He uses the word *oikos* to describe both the household of the leader (4,5) and the household of God (15).

The way some one leads in their families will be a good test and indicator of how they will lead in church.

So – what is happening back home? A good question to ask.

## **9. Spiritual maturity**

*6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.*

Well obviously leaders in the church need to be converted people. They need to be those who have come to repentance and faith and who evidence of that in their lives and life styles.

But they also need to be people who can take knocks and know how to role with the punches and pick themselves up again.

Leaders will be criticized, misunderstood, misinterpreted, will be disappointed, let down and will take all sorts of knocks. That is not because they bad leaders or because the people they are leading are bad, unloving and unkind. That is just what happens to leaders.

You have got to be able to roll with the punches, pick yourself up when you have been knocked down, and press on when the going gets tough. That you only learn with experience and turning each experience tough as it is into a learning growing moment, and being teachable.

Paul adds this telling warning ...

*He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.*

Pride comes before a fall. Proverbs 11:2

*When pride comes, then comes disgrace,  
but with humility comes wisdom.*

The test of leader is what happens when things are tough?

Where do they turn for comfort when they have had a set back?

The bottle, self pity, defensive anger, passivity – call it opting out, throwing in the towel, fear, ....

Have they learned to regroup and start again? That is what I want to know.

So – spiritual maturity.

## **10. Reputation with outsiders**

*7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.*

By outsiders Paul means the non-Christian public. He wants Timothy to remember that the world is watching the church and church leaders in particular and they need to be wise in their behaviour towards outsiders and to win their respect.

He began by saying that leaders must be above reproach. That was referring to how people inside the church saw them. This is now saying the same applies to those outside.

There is a sober note of warning in that verse. The enemy is out to disgrace leaders. He is out to trip them up and make them fall into disgrace. He has been using the same tactic for centuries. Why? Because it works so effectively.

So ten requirements of those aspiring to the noble task of leadership in the church as overseers and servants.

1. Faithful in marriage
2. Self mastery - self-controlled
3. Hospitable – generous hearted
4. Teaching ability and teachability
5. Drinking habits – sober
6. Temper and temperament - not quarrelsome, not violent but gentle
7. Attitude to money – remember “No one can serve two masters”
8. Domestic matters – a well ordered family life
9. Spiritual maturity - knows how to learn from failure and start again
10. Reputation with outsiders - don't give the enemy a foothold

## **Now what do we do with this?**

### ***Aspire to it!***

Don't give in to defeat. Don't say I could never qualify. Don't say I could not risk it.

You don't do it in your own strength. You do it with others. We support and encourage each other.

### ***Lead where you are***

Who are the people who look to you for leadership – in your family, neighbourhood, at school, at work, .... lead them to best of your ability. They are your opportunity to grow in this vital ministry.

***Pray for your leaders!***

Pray for those in leadership in the church. You get the leaders you pray for!

**Small group discussion and prayer:**

How do you want to be lead?

Pray for those who lead you.