Shepherding The Church – Part Four
How Good Is Your Reputation?
1 Timothy 3: 6-7,10
October 13, 2024
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[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.

The month of October should be a good reminder that we are all children of the Protestant Reformation. It was on October 31, 1517 that Martin Luther nailed his theses on the door of Castle church in Germany. Luther also translated the New Testament into the German language.
However, we owe much to William Tyndale for giving us the first complete New Testament in the English language.
Tyndale was burned at the stake. His crime – producing the Bible in English language. His desire was that everyone should have a copy of the Bible. And Tyndale held fast to his convictions until his death. What did Tyndale believe? That faith alone justifies a sinner and that the mercy and grace of God alone was enough for salvation. For this he was put to death in the year 1536. Before Tyndale was burned at the stake, these were his famous last words, "Open the King's eyes (of England), Lord, that he may see". Three years after his death, his prayer was answered. The church officially ordered copies of the New Testament be available.
William Tyndale's life is one of faith and a reputation for his Biblical convictions until his death. What would you want to be known for? What reputation do you want to pursue?

The elders of the church are to be people of godly character and competent in the Scriptures. In addition to having the character and competence required of an elder, Paul elders must have a respectable reputation. A noble standing. High integrity. A good name. And it is not just the elders but all believers are to pursue having a good reputation.

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold. Proverbs 22:1

A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth. Ecclesiastes 7:1

For the last three Sundays, we have been examining 1 Timothy chapter three and looking at qualifications for church leadership. We looked at requirements for elders and deacons. Elders are to *shepherd* the church. Deacons are to *serve* the church. Verse one through seven list the qualifications for elders. Verses eight through thirteen list the qualifications for deacons. And many of the qualifications for elders and deacons are similar. Today is the fourth session for the umbrella term we titled for this series 'Shepherding the Church'.

The passage we consider for this morning talks about not appointing a new believer to the office of elder. Verse seven is about the elder having a good reputation with outsiders. The two are related. Someone who is mature in the faith is likely to have a good reputation.

Look at verse six.
6 *He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.*

The words 'recent convert' is from the word *neophyte* in verse six. *Neophyte* means a beginner, a novice or a newbie. Paul tells Timothy that the elder must not be a newcomer to the faith. This is a good guard rail or a boundary for not putting someone into leadership too quickly. The motives, the intentions and the plans of the aspiring elder are not fully vetted out if they are new to the faith. Deacons have similar requirements too – 1 Timothy 3:10, "*And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless*". In the fifth chapter of this letter verse 22 Paul says, "*Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands*". Paul does not say that someone who is young should never aspire to be an elder, although age could be a factor. Given the context of this letter, Timothy is a younger man, probably in his thirties. So if age was the only factor, Timothy could be disqualified too. Rather, church leadership has to do with maturing in Christ and living out the doctrines of the faith. In the fourth chapter of this letter, Paul tells Timothy in verse twelve – "*Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity*".
The church needs men and women who excel in qualities like speech, conduct, love and faith and purity. Young men and women, begin early with the pursuit of these qualities.

An elder is someone who is seasoned in his speech, godly in his conduct, steadfast in his love for Christ and others, growing in his faith and chaste in his marriage.

In the second part of verse six, Paul warns about the fallout if recent converts are put into positions of leadership too quickly.

6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

The fallout is pride. Pride is lethal to the soul.
There are so many warnings about not giving into pride.
"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" Proverbs 16:18
"Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor" Proverbs 18:12
"*One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor"* Proverbs 29:23
When the prophet Obadiah prophesied against the people of Edom (a nickname for the descendants of Esau), God said it was their pride that would lead to their downfall.
"*The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, "Who will bring me down to the ground?" 4 Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the Lord*." Obadiah 1:3

You don't have to be rich, powerful or influential to be prideful. The Edomites were a simple people, perhaps living in caves. And yet they thought too highly of themselves because they thought were secure.
Pride is so deceptive that it blurs reality. You could take a small thing like a phone, a car, a gadget, a house, a position or a nice salary and turn it nto a thing of pride.

Do you know what happens when people are puffed up with pride? They are full of themselves.
The late preacher Adrian Rogers once said, "*Why doesn't God bless some? Because they are too big for God to work in them*". God gives favor to the humble.

So, if verse six is an injunction or a warning against appointing new converts, verse seven is in the positive. Elders are to have a good reputation with outsiders.

Look at verse *seven*.

[7] *Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

Another translation says "it is also necessary (for elders) to have a good witness from outsiders".

Who are these outsiders? It is those outside the church. Outsiders can be your unbelieving friends, family, neighbors, folks who pass by, those who observe, those who are curious. What would they say about the leaders?
Here are few reminders about our conduct towards outsiders.

"*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time*" Colossians 4:5

"But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, [11] *and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,* [12] *so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one*" 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

"*For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you*" 2 Corinthians 1:12

"*Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable*" 1 Peter 1:12

"*let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*" Matthew 5:16

The early church identified a team of seven deacons because of their good reputation. They knew them by the lives they led in community.
Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. Acts 6:3

Do the outsiders see the leaders (and by extension the church) as wise, honorable, hard-working and given to doing good?

Let me give an *illustration*:
Growing up, we lived across from a Bible college. And as kids we would play on the college campus grounds. And the some of the Bible teachers of the college lived on campus. One day, as I was going around the campus with a friend, I witnessed quite a heated argument between one of the Bible teachers and an outsider. I just could not believe what I heard. This man was very loud and cussed so frequently that others could hear it. And this man probably knew that we kids were watching him. And to my surprise, this man's wife joined him in the outburst. How awful!
Imagine what the leadership of the college has to put up with? This Bible teacher has become a liability for the college. His Gospel witness is tainted. He had become disgrace and had fallen into the prey of the devil's charms.
It might take a lifetime to build a good reputation but that reputation can be destroyed in a few moments.

In closing, consider the Lord Jesus and his reputation.
"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21

The Lord Jesus Christ had an impeccable reputation, a flawless character, lived a sinless life. Sinners, on the other hand, are cursed and deserve the just penalty of God for their sin. If anyone deserves to be eternally damned for their sin, it is unrepentant sinners. Sin is high crime before God. But here is the good news, the Lord Jesus Christ became a curse for us so that he could redeem us from the curse of sin. Jesus was treated as a common criminal. Why? Because Jesus Christ staked his reputation so that you could be forgiven and never be condemned. When you put your faith in the atoning death of Jesus for your sin, you have a right standing before God. When you die and face God, you can hide under the perfect reputation of Jesus Christ. And God will grant eternal life for all who are in Jesus Christ.
If you have never trusted in him, will you trust Jesus today? Jesus can wipe your slate clean when you repent and trust in him.

---------- Discipleship Questions----------

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **A Good Reputation**. 1 Timothy 3:6-7

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Why does Paul instruct Timothy to not appoint new converts to the office an elder or a deacon? Why is a good reputation with outsiders crucial for selecting an elder and for a believer? How are these two qualifications related?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Do you believe your Christian witness offers anything to this world? How?

Matthew 5: 16, 2 Corinthians 8:21, Ephesians 4:29, Philippians 2:15, 1 Peter 2:12

3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: According to these character qualities is there one thing that needs to change in your own soul or household? What will you do about it?