

Shepherding The Church – Part Three

Devoted To Family

1 Timothy 3: 3-7

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² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

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.

In September 2023, Pew Research center published a report titled ‘The Modern American Family’. The report said that in the year 1970, sixty-seventy percent of Americans between the ages of 25 to 49 were living with their spouse and had at least one child younger than 18. However, five decades later, by the year 2021, that percentage dropped to thirty-seven percent. A thirty percent drop. And the reasons – people were marrying later in life, cohabitation increased and more women had children without marriage. And there was one reason for the shrinking family size – improvement in contraception.

In today’s culture there are loud voices that encourage women to have as much bodily autonomy and pleasure as they desire. And if they get pregnant, they can get rid of the inconvenience with the least amount of guilt, remorse or compunction. The lie that some believe is that their wombs are the problem. You take such a beautiful gift from God and turn it into field of blood. How terrible!

So, in fifty years, since 1970, we have become a nation that once honored the family to a womb detesting, family scoffing and self-glorifying people it seems.

For Christian believers, we want to hear and submit to the voice of the Lord. At the heart of the family is the divinely sanctioned and ordained institution of marriage. Marriage is

the covenant of one man and one woman for life. The purpose of marriage is to glorify God. Marriage is to be held in honor (Hebrews 13:4).

Paul writes this letter so that the household of God – the church will have leaders who will pay attention to themselves to care for the flock, the family of God.

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care (shepherd) for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” Acts 20:28.

And the behaviors or character qualities of an elder or deacon stem from a life of discipline.

“a leader is a person who has learned to obey a discipline imposed from without, and has taken on a more rigorous discipline from within. Those who rebel against authority and scorn self-discipline – those who shirk the rigors and turn from sacrifices – do not qualify to lead”. - J. Oswald Sanders

Two of those top disciplines are personal devotions and prayer.

Last week we stopped at verse two. Let’s pick up from verse three and look at the next set of qualifications for an elder.

³ *not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.*

Paul tells Timothy how to apply filters when looking for aspiring leaders. Those who are look down on others, those who are arrogant, those who are prone to anger, drunkards, vengeful, violent or people greedy for gain are to be filtered out. If these negative qualities are consistent in the man seeking to be an elder or a deacon, they pre-qualify them for disqualification.

These filters apply for deacons as well. And the parallel is in 1 Timothy 3:8 – *“Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain”*. The phrase “addicted to much wine” is not a very accurate translation (at least in the ESV). The literal translation is “towards having much wine”.

So those who get drunk or have too much wine or alcohol simply have the wrong aspiration or role. Drunkenness or alcoholism has caused so much damage morally, financially, spiritually and has wrecked countless lives.

The next qualification is not *violent* but *gentle*. Violent implies someone who is ready to strike. Not violent also means not having an excessive inclination to quarrel, fight or

dispute. Other translations use the word pugnacious. It's similar to the word contentious. The elder must not be quarrelsome. What is the antidote for being contentious? Gentleness. Paul tells the Thessalonians that he, Silas and Timothy were *gentle* as a nursing mother and as a father with his children. We need a regular filling of the Holy Spirit and bear fruit.

The last qualification in verse *three* is that elder must not love money. We covered this when we began verse one. All these qualifications are there not just requirements for elders or deacons only but a reminder to all believers.

If anyone is caught in a cycle of giving into drink, anger, bitterness, quarrels, greed or any other vice, the Bible says, "*break off your sins by practicing righteousness*" (Daniel 4:27). This is what the prophet Daniel told the king Nebuchadnezzar. Stop sinning. Practice righteousness.

In Paul's letter to Titus, Paul tells us what the elder should love instead of being a lover of money.

"For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined" Titus 1:7-8

A "*lover of good*". This is a unique quality for everyone to aspire to have. Don't just *like* the idea of good. Don't just *appreciate* or *value* good things but be *lovers* of good. Elders *must* be lovers of good. "*Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God*" 3 John 1:11. Lovers of good are lovers of God.

And in verse four, Paul tells Timothy that the elder must be a man devoted to family. Verse four.

⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,

Paul does not say that the elder must be married or must have children. But if the Christian man is a married man devoted to his wife, and the Lord grants children to the couple, this man ought to be a man who manages his household well. This word *manage* is verse 4 in the original it is the word *proistemi* – translated "stand before". Meaning he is to take charge, to preside over, to engage, to lead. And as a father he is to keep his children in

submission. The man must conduct himself at home in such a way that is not of a tyrant nor of an absentee landlord. The parallel verse in Titus chapter 1 verse 6 puts the husband and the father's role together "*6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination*". This means the children are faithful and do not openly resist or rebel against the authority of the father. The NASB says the children "*who believe, not accused of indecent behavior or rebellion*". Negatively, the children are not known for wild and rebellious behavior. Positively, the children obey and respect the authority of the father. And not just the father, the fifth commandment tells us that children must honor both the father and mother. This qualification applies to deacons as well – "*Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well*" 1 Timothy 3:12

This is an important qualification because children can cause shame and disrepute to the family. In such a case, its best for the man to wait to set things right at home instead of aspiring to leadership. When you read about the adult children of the prophet Eli in 1 Samuel, everyone knew about the mis-deeds of the two sons. God warned Eli and eventually removed Eli from his prophetic office.

A word of encouragement to any parents struggling with children who are not following Christ: God is for you! Press into God everyday. He hears your cry. Keep loving and keep speaking truth. God is not unjust so as to overlook your labor of love.

Now, why does Paul list the role of a *husband* and a *father* in the list of requirements for an elder?

Look at the verse *five*

5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

The church is the household of God. It is the family of brothers and sisters who have been adopted into the family of God. We were all once orphans born into sin. But when you repented and trusted in Jesus' death and resurrection, God adopted you. Jesus Christ took your sin and gave you his righteousness. Since then you are part of God's household. And your home is the template and model for how you conduct yourself in the church.

So Paul's argument goes this way: if spiritual leaders are to lead in God's house - the church they must have already led at home.

The man ought to steward his family and children *first* before he stewards the church. And the proof that he is leading the family well is seen in the *conduct* of his children. Jesus said in Luke 7:35 that “*wisdom is justified by her children*”.

We will have to pick up verses six and seven next time.

Let me close with an illustration.

A few years ago my wife and I were traveling in a cab in India. And the cab driver told us he wanted to make a better living and found a potential job in New York to work in a restaurant. And I asked him, what about your family? Do you have a wife and children? He said he lived with wife and two small children. So I said, “don’t you think you are needed at home when your kids are that young?” I asked him “would you rather make more money and be away from your family and not be involved in raising those young children or continue what you do now and raise your children well?” This man seemed to be persuaded that he was needed at home and be there for his family. This man was from the Muslim faith.

Ancient Israel restricted a man to be with the family if he was newly married.

⁵“*When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be liable for any other public duty. He shall be free at home one year to be happy with his wife whom he has taken.*” Deuteronomy 24:5

How much more should a Christian man be about the business of the home?

“*Being passive is a choice. Not taking ownership and responsibility for your family is a choice. The simple truth is that all of our choices have consequences, and the series of choices we make shape who we are, how those around us see us, and determines the impact we can have on the world around us*”. Brant Hansen in *The Men We Need*

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

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Devoted To Family. 1 Timothy 3:3-7

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

1. What are some distinguishing marks of a Christian home or household? Hebrews 13:4, Ephesians 6:4, Deuteronomy 6:4-7

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

2. Why does Paul say that our Christian conduct needs to begin at home and how does leadership at home crucial for church leadership?

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?