

**1st Timothy 3: 1; “Desiring to be an Elder”, Sermon #20 in a series entitled –
“To Honor God in the church”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall,
on May 30th, 2018, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

Having in previous verses looked at the roles of men and women in the local church, in terms of their involvement in the worship services of the church, the Apostle Paul now turns his attention to the men who will teach and lead and rule in the local church. He is specifically looking at the office of an elder. There are only two offices which the Lord has instituted within His churches; that of elder and that of Deacon. The office of elder was instituted for the purposes of teaching and ruling in the church. And the office of deacon was instituted for the purpose of the formal and designated serving which should be taking place in the local church. The deacons are to be helpers of the elders and serve the whole church in the practical outworking of what the church needs, both in terms of the church’s people and in terms of the church’s property. Both of these offices are vital to the health and strength of a local church. Since our church has only one Elder and the Bible clearly teaches that plurality of Elders is desirable; it has been my desire for a number of years, to see other qualified men raised up to the leadership.

As an elder myself, I know that in order to faithfully do the work of the Lord, there must be more than an appointment; there must be desire. Paul says here in verse 1, “If any man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work.” The word in the Greek is the word, “epi – theou – meo”, which means to set the heart upon, to long for; to covet in a holy sense, this position.” If a man is to become a pastor, he must have this holy desire. He must not be a shepherd of the flock by compulsion, but because he desires it willingly.(1st Peter 5: 2) He is not to be a man looking for dishonest gain, but rather, eagerly serving. There should be a real and sustained desire and love for God’s people; His sheep. Then, too, where there is a desire for the office of an elder or bishop or overseer, for the words are used interchangeably in the Bible, he must understand that it is a work. It is a good work, a noble work, that he desires to do. So what I want to overview this afternoon is the relationship of desire, as to how a man becomes and continues to be a true pastor of God’s people. I want to give you 3 observations on desire, and how it relates to a man becoming a pastor.

1st of all – Desire for the office is essential for a prospective candidate for the ministry.

The desire, I believe, is a part of the call to the ministry. It would normally come as an integral part of the gift of teaching which would be conferred on him by the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion. But a man may have the desire, and even have the gift to preach, and yet not have the desire to lead, or be equipped to lead. A man who desires to be a pastor has, or should have, a desire to do more than teach and preach. He should also have a desire to see the Word of God being lived out in the lives of people. A pastor must not only love the truth, but he must also love the people of the church that he would become an elder over. It will be true of him that he will desire to feed, and to shepherd, and to protect the people of God.

This is a desire that works both ways. He desires to bring the truth of the Word to people, and he desires to bring people to the knowledge of the truth; to live it out, and to do it. This is a true Biblical and spiritual pastor. He teaches people, loves people, and leads people by God’s word and by his example. The desire of a person to be a pastor or shepherd is not complete unless there is also a desire, burning in his heart, to bring glory to the Savior; to advance Christ’s Kingdom, and to see sinners converted to Christ. These are the components of the desire which must be seen in a man if He is to be useful to Christ in the ministry. If there is a short-circuiting in any one of these areas, then there will be trouble in the church. For if a man does not love the people of God, then how will the truth come to reside in their hearts? It may reside in their

heads as knowledge, or in their notebooks to show that they listened, but when a pastor loves the people they will respond to the grace they see at work in the person communicating the Word. They will respond to the Word preached because it is conveyed with a personal love for the welfare of the souls of his brethren. If a man does not desire to convey the truth, the church will also have trouble because there will be nothing to build with, and nothing to build upon. The sheep will not be fed, the lambs will not be tended. The people of God will be starving or malnourished. They will not be equipped for serving Christ; but they will only able to serve themselves.

Turn with me over to Ephesians 4: 7-16. “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.” “Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’” “(Now this, ‘He ascended’ – what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?” “He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)” “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of the body of itself in love.”

You see, the purpose of Christ's giving the gifts of pastors and teachers to the Church is so that the saints would be equipped to do the work of service; the work of ministering to one another, and the work of ministering to people who are in need, and people who are unsaved; so that they would come to Christ. Those who are taught, are to build each other up. That is what it means to edify. They are to be speaking the truth in love to one another until they all come to the unity of the faith and to the knowledge of Christ who is making them holy and truly happy. They will be becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus if the man who is teaching them is showing them more and more of Christ by his words and his behavior.

If he teaches them sound doctrine they won't be deceived by the cults; they won't be carried about by the winds of everything they hear. They will refer everything that they hear to the truth that they have been taught from the Bible. The whole body in a local church will then be growing up into Christ by each part doing its share; that is, by each member of the church wisely and lovingly serving others and being a good example of the believer in all that they do and say. This is how a church becomes strong and fruitful. They will, by edifying one another, come to the place where they will be a more outward looking people. They will not be concerned about being first, and being seen. They will be truly concerned with the glory of Christ. But the pastor is the one who builds upon the foundation of Christ, for this wonderful progress to take place and to develop, by his own teaching and example. If a pastor does not love to spread the word and have a desire to see souls saved, and for people to come in from the community, then the work and the flock will remain very small indeed. But desire is essential to the prospective candidate for the pastoral ministry.

2nd – This desire must be tempered by a sober assessment of the kind of work to which the man is being called.

A man may have a desire to become a pastor who has no idea of what the actual work is like. It is a work of working hard at preaching and teaching. Look at 1st Timothy 5, verse 17. “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.” This is the primary work of a full-time pastor. It is especially the work of a lone

elder, for he will bear the burden and know the lion's share of the labors in the word and doctrine. Much is depending upon him. It is a strenuous work. There are long hours of study and preparation. It is a discipline akin to being in the yoke as an oxen. The scripture says here in verse 18 of chapter 5, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." The ox in this case, is the full-time pastor. It is he who takes the grain of the word of God and treads it; breaks it down fine so that it can be made into bread, which is then fed to the people of God in regular Sunday by Sunday meals. It is like angel's food by which the people of God will go on the strength of that food throughout the following 6 days. It must be remembered that the pastor's main work is feeding Christ's sheep. It is attempting to win souls and nourish them on the words of faith and sound doctrine. (1st Timothy 4: 6) It is attempting to lead Christ's people to discern correctly what the Word is saying, so that they may live by it and walk in it.

The Word of God has been designed by God to make application to every area of a believer's life when the pastor preaches it. It is the pastors job to make that word palatable; that is to serve it up as food that can be eaten and digested. And when delivered by the power of the Holy Spirit, it will become wholesome food for the strengthening of the believer's heart and soul, so that they will hopefully go about to do God's will. Being a pastor is also a work of shepherding; that is of leading, and guiding, and protecting the flock. And you should know that it is a desirable thing that in a local church that there would be elders who would labor, not so much in the preaching and teaching of God's word, as much as in the ruling and shepherding of the people. "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor..."

Here in verse 17 of chapter 5, Paul is indicating that there are some elders who are given more to ruling; to help make decisions in connection with other elders in the church, about matters important to individuals in the church, and to the church as a whole. Acts 15: 6 says, "Now the apostles and the elders came together to consider this matter." (That is; whether a man who had believed in Christ needed to be circumcised.) And when they had determined by the Scripture that it was not necessary, it says in verse 22 – "Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas... and they would go to the churches, and with the circular letter that they had drawn up. They would declare to each church that circumcision was not necessary to salvation.

Oh, how good it is to have more than one elder in a church to make decisions related to what is Biblically sound in doctrine, and what is Biblically sound in the practice of the church. There are so many fine points of doctrine, and so many questions related to how the truth of God's word should be understood, and also there is much discussion needed concerning what should be done in various situations which come up in the church. There is a need for plurality of elders to guard the church from wolves who may come in among the sheep. You see this in Titus 1 and 1st Peter 5. In Titus 1: 9 it says that, the elder must be"one who holds fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince or to convict the gainsayers; those who contradict." "For there are many insubordinate both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision whose mouths must be stopped."

And it says in Ecclesiastes 4: 9, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor." "For if they fall, one will lift up his companion." "But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up." There is a need for the plurality of elders, and there is also a need for parity among those elders. That is, that they would as elders be able to speak as equals and to help one another out and to help each other up if they fall down; either in discouragement or in regard to some sinful weakness. Sometimes what one does not see, the other will see. And when someone in the flock is not living in the right way, they can both speak with such a one, together, and thus strengthen one another's hands. Their desire is, together; to protect Christ's sheep. A ruling elder, as all elders, must look well to the condition of the flock and manage things which require order and discipline within the church, as a steward of God in

spiritual things, and he should be able to organize the practical matters of what activities the church should engage in, and how the church can together reach out to the community. It is a work which requires humility, diligence, patience, and watchfulness. He must learn by experience what to lead in, and what to delegate to others; what to spend his strength on, and what to encourage others to do.

And then finally, an elder must not allow the sober assessment of the work to take away his desire to see the work as a good work.

It is a good work that he desires to do, as the first verse of 1st Timothy 3 says. It should be regarded as such, not only by himself, but also by all the congregation. It is the work that Christ would have done. He is the One who gives overseers to His church, who are shepherds. We will in future weeks look at the qualifications for an elder and what kind of men Christ is looking for, as under-shepherds. I like Bunyan's description of a godly minister which is found in Pilgrim's Progress. Pilgrim, on his journey, came to the house of Interpreter. And Interpreter said to him, "I will show that which will be profitable to thee." "So he commanded his man to light the candle, and bid Christian follow him: so he had him into a private room, and bid his man open a door; the which when he had done, Christian saw the picture of a very grave person hang (*hung up on*) against the wall; and this was the fashion of it." "It had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, the law of truth was written upon his lips, the world was behind his back." "It stood as if it pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over his head."

"Then said Christian, 'What meaneth this?'" "Interpreter: The man whose picture this is, is one of a thousand, he can beget children, travail in birth with children, and nurse them himself when they are born." "And whereas thou seest him with his eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, and the law of truth writ on his lips, it is to show thee that his work is to know and unfold dark things to sinners; even as also thou seest him stand as if he pleaded with men; and whereas thou seest the world as cast behind him, and that a crown hangs over his head, that is to show thee that slighting and despising the things that are present, for the love that he hath to his Master's service, he is sure in the world that comes next, to have glory for his reward."

"Now, said the Interpreter, I have showed thee this picture first, because the man whose picture this is, is the only man whom the Lord of the place, whither thou art going, hath authorized to be thy guide in all difficult places thou mayest meet with in the way; wherefore, take good heed to what I have showed thee, and bear well in thy mind what thou hast seen, lest in thy journey thou meet with some that pretend to lead thee right, but their way goes down to death." I would say that Bunyan has spoken well in this description, but I would add; how much better it is, in the local church when there are two elders instead of just one; to help those headed to the Celestial City, to be able to find their way. May it come to be so for us, here in this church.