

“The Requirements for Elders” 1 Timothy 3:1-7 Shane Hatfield 8/28/22

Alright, we are going to continue our study on elders. Open your Bibles up to 1 Timothy 3. We have been studying “Elders: The Shepherd Leaders” for the last three weeks. We’re studying this because we are going to, as Emily said, open up elder nominations. For those of you who aren’t familiar with that terminology, an elder is someone who oversees the church. They care for the church like a shepherd cares for his sheep. They do that until the Chief Shepherd, Jesus, returns to care for His sheep in person. We have two types of elders. We have teaching elders, myself and Caleb, we are both teaching elders. We are seminary trained, vocational ministers who pastor the local congregation. Then we have ruling elders. Ruling elders are laymen who are nominated, elected, and trained from the congregation, and they are ordained to work with the teaching elders to shepherd the flock. So, teaching elders and ruling elders work together to shepherd the congregation. That’s what we’ve been talking about the last few weeks.

This week we’re going to wrap that up by looking at the requirements for being an elder. Next week I’m going to be out of town, I’m going to a family reunion in Kansas City, so Steve is going to preach for us, and he’s going to be talking about spiritual gifts from Romans 12. If you’ve been sitting there wondering, I’ve been sitting here learning about these elders but what about me? What about my spiritual gifts? How do I use them for the church? Then come back next week, and Steve is going to talk about that from Romans 12. Then after that week we are going to start a study on the book of Acts. We are going to go through the first half of Acts looking at this new community. If you were with us in the spring, we studied the Sermon on the Mount and we said that Jesus was creating a counter cultural people that live differently than the rest of the world. In Acts we’re going to see what that community looked like in the first century and hopefully that is going to give us a vision for the kind of community we can be together. So, there’s the broad outline of where we’re going and what we’re doing. College students, you just heard all of that and you thought, ‘Oh Lord, this is syllabus day at the church. I’m just tuning this guy out. I don’t need to know this for like years and months down the road.’ Please don’t tune me out. This is not syllabus day, okay? What we’re going to talk about this morning impacts your view of God, your view of yourself, and your view of salvation, and your view of leadership! We’re going to talk about church leadership a bunch, which hopefully, you will all be church leaders as you grow. That’s our vision for you.

So, let’s hear the word of the Lord from 1 Timothy 3:1-7:

“**1** The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. **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.”

All men are like grass, and their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers, and the flowers fade, but not God's word. It stands forever. Let's listen to it.

When I was in college, I wanted to be a leader and I joined a fraternity because I thought, 'That's what leaders do!' My freshman year, when we first arrived, our pledge class was taking nominations for officers, right? You have a pledge class your first year, you take nominations for officers. One of the officers was what we call a corresponding secretary. Their job is to develop relationships with other fraternities and sororities to write letters and thank you notes and that sort of thing. When I was in high school one of my passions was writing, so I wrote for my school newspaper, and I wrote for the town newspaper, and I thought, 'Man, this is it. I'm going to be the recording secretary for my pledge class and this is going to set me off toward being a leader in the fraternity.' So, you know, when you do an election you have to give a speech. So, I stood up in front of all my new fraternity brothers and I laid out my resume of writing. I told them all of my accomplishments, all of the awards I'd won for writing, everything that you can think of about how good I was as a writer, I just threw it in there. And guess what happened? I lost.

So, I thought, 'That's okay. That's alright. There are other offices!' House manager came up, and I thought, 'Okay, I grew up on a farm! I know how to fix things! I'll be a great house manager.' So, I stood up and proudly talked about how I was good at fixing things and how I could organize and fix everything around the fraternity! Which was a lie, but I thought it would win me the election. And I lost! So, the Intramural chair came up, and I thought, 'Intramurals! I played sports in high school! I'm a physical education major! Who better to have as your Intramural chairman than a Physical Education major!' And so, I stood up and proudly spouted out my accomplishments, and guess what? I lost again! I kept running for like every single office, and every office I stood up and proudly gave them my resume of how I would be the best person for that position, and every single time, I lost. I didn't win a single race that evening. That night was the beginning of God teaching me some very, very hard lessons about leadership, and what it means to be a leader. One of the things that I have learned over the years as the most important thing about leadership, it's not about your competency, it's about your character. What I showed that night by spouting off my resume to all my new fraternity brothers, was that I was proud, and I was arrogant. They saw that, and they did not want a proud and arrogant leader.

As we look at the requirements for elders, what you're going to see is that God prioritizes character over competence. Yes, competency is vitally important as a pastor, but character takes priority. What you see is that godly character is what makes an elder competent. Godly character, first and foremost, is what makes an elder competent. Now, this is important for us, very, very important for us, because character is important for choosing leaders in all aspects of life. Who is a leader? A leader is someone that other people follow, or it's someone who has influence on others. From that perspective, every single person sitting in this room is a leader, or can be a leader. Everybody here has somebody that follows you, or somebody that you influence. It may be your younger siblings, it may be people at work, it may be friends and family members, it may be people in the church! It's important that we all take our character seriously. What tends to happen is, man looks at outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. When we choose leaders, we tend to look for competency and charisma, and not character. So, we need to look at character.

College students, this is very important for you as you come to college. You are looking for friends and mentors and leaders. Maybe you're thinking about becoming a mentor or a leader, and there's a lot of stuff going on in college and so, you're focused on building your resume, building your friendships, developing your competency. In the midst of that, don't forget that your character is the most important thing for you to work on. Character is more important than competency.

It's important for being a leader, but it's also important for understanding the gospel. As we look at this, this morning, what you're going to see is that the gospel is what transforms our character. The gospel is the power of God for salvation that radically transforms our character, and that transforms all of the rest of our lives. What we're going to see in this passage tonight is that elders are examples of transformed character, relationships, and reputation. Those are our three points. Elders are examples of transformed character, relationships, and reputation. Kids, as you're listening, maybe write down one of these character qualities that you want to work on, and talk to your parents about what it might look like to work on that character quality.

The first thing we see is that elders are examples of transformed character. Paul tells us that elders are sober-minded. A sober-minded person is someone who has a clear perspective on life. They have good discernment about right and wrong, and they're self-controlled. They possess a sound mind and good judgment and a calm demeanor. They are calm, cool, and collected under pressure. They are slow to speak and slow to anger. This makes them respectable. Their life is well ordered, it's well managed. It's adorned with Christ. It's not chaotic on the one hand, and it's not vain on the other hand. It's a life that glorifies Christ in all that it does. He's not a drunkard. He's sober-minded and self-controlled and that requires the careful use of alcohol. This does not mean that he has to abstain from alcohol totally, but he must be able to abstain from alcohol, or use it in moderation. He's not a lover of money. Like alcohol, money can cloud your judgment, and so, a good elder is someone who is a good steward of money. They see money as a tool, not as a master. So, what you see when you begin to look at these different character qualities is that the gospel comes in and it reshapes us from self-will, and self-expression, to self-denial. An elder is someone who models self-denial in their lives.

I've been reading a book called "A Band of Brothers." It's about an "easy" company who were really instrumental in World War 2 in winning the war for us. It tells the story of several men in the war, and at the end it tells what happened in their lives after the war. There was a man named Skinny Sisk, and he was a sharp shooter. He was very good at shooting and killing, which served him very well in the war, but after the war he was obsessed with his nightmares. He had these nightmares, dreams, and visions about all the men that he killed in the war and he couldn't escape them so he turned to alcohol. He became an alcoholic, and his life was totally destroyed by alcoholism. One night he was at a family gathering and he was so unbearable to be around he just went into his bedroom to be by himself, and while he was in there, his little niece came in and his little niece said to him, she said, "I want you to know that Jesus loves you, and I love you. If you repent, He will forgive you for all of those things that you did and you'll stop trying to kill those men over and over again." He asked her to leave the room. He got on his knees, and that night he prayed a prayer of repentance and he asked God to forgive him for all the things that he did in the war, and he asked God to change him. After that, he changed! He stopped being an alcoholic. He stopped fighting. God transformed his character and he

became a minister of the gospel. He devoted his entire life to sharing that gospel of grace with others. The gospel transformed his character.

The gospel transforms our character. It transforms us when we first become a believer, and it transforms us throughout our entire lives. If you want to change, if you want to grow in godly character, then you do exactly what Skinny Sisk did that night. You get on your knees, you ask God to forgive you and to change you, you repent, and you seek relationships that will help you change and grow.

That transformed character leads to transformed relationships. That's the next thing we see. It says that an elder is the husband of one wife. That means an elder must demonstrate the biblical sexual ethic in every way in his life. He strives to be faithful and loving to his spouse in thought, word and deed. Now, this doesn't exclude single men, or men who have been divorced for biblical reasons: adultery, abuse and abandonment. If you're interested in learning more about the biblical sexual ethic or about divorce, I preached two sermons on that in the Sermon on the Mount, they should be posted online, you can go back and revisit those sermons. This elder is the husband of one wife and he manages his household well. He shepherds his children the way he's going to shepherd the church. He knows his children, he feeds his children the gospel, he leads his children to Jesus, and he protects them through good, godly discipline. Now ultimately, he's not responsible for their faith. There comes a time when every child is responsible to make their parents faith their own, but he is responsible for modeling and teaching Jesus to his family and creating an environment where his children can grow up and know the Lord, and where they'll want to respect him and submit to him. He loves his wife well, he loves his children well, he even loves strangers well.

Paul says he needs to be hospitable. The word hospitable means literally, 'love of stranger.' This means he opens his home and he opens his heart to others. He invites the poor, the orphan, the widow, the outsider, into his home to experience the love of Jesus. Also, he's not violent or quarrelsome. His self-control, his sober-mindedness, leads him to treat others with kindness and gentleness, rather than violence. He uses his hands and his words to build up others, not to tear them down. He's firm and fair in how he communicates, but he's not argumentative. In all these ways, an elder is an example of how the gospel transforms us from self-centeredness, to self-sacrifice. That's the mark of a true godly person, they move from self-centeredness, to self-sacrifice in all their relationships.

I heard about a movie that came out in the '90s, the name of the movie is not important, but in this movie there was a man who was a journalist, like I was, but I'm not anymore obviously. He's always trying to get that last little bit of the story. Anytime there's a family holiday, anytime there's a family event, anytime there's a time when his family needs him or a friend needs him, he always says, 'No, I'm sorry I can't do that, I've got to go get this last quote for the story. I've got to get this last piece of the story.' And his wife just becomes exasperated by his over-working and finally in sort of a moment of tension she looks at him and says, 'Okay, hypothetical situation. Let's say that somebody is going to blow up the office or they're going to blow up the house. Which one do you choose? Do you choose us or do you choose the office?' And he says, 'That's never going to happen!' And she says, 'You're right, it's not going to happen. But every day you choose the office over us.'

The gospel that transforms us into people who sacrifice ourselves for others, and we're willing to die the death of a thousand deaths. Are you willing to sacrifice your work for your

family? Are you willing to sacrifice your friendships for your hobbies? Are you willing to sacrifice forming godly character for climbing up the ladder of the campus, just trying to be a campus climber?

If so, what you're doing is hurting those around you, and what Jesus calls you to do is to die the death of a thousand deaths, the life of a thousand deaths, it's to sacrifice for others. Jesus said, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.' That transformed grace, that transformed character that leads to transformed relationships, we deny ourselves, and then that leads to transformed reputations.

It says that elders are above reproach. That does not mean that they're sinless. But it does mean that there is nothing in their life that opens them up to a charge. They're literally, you can't bring a charge against them. You can't look at their life, and find something you could take to the elders and say, 'Look, this man is disqualified for the office because of *this*.' And when they sin, their repentance is exemplary, in their behavior and in their repentance. It says they need to be well thought of by outsiders. Their character and their relationships are so exemplary that even non-Christians speak well of them. They may disagree with their beliefs, but they can't discount their character.

This reminded me of a story that I heard about another campus minister, not me, but I heard this story about another one. There was a pastor's kid that came to his campus, so naturally he wanted to minister to that pastor's kid, but the pastor's kid had rejected the faith. He kept meeting with him anyways, he pursued this student, he met with him, he developed a relationship with him. One day the campus minister was tabling, so for those of you who haven't done campus ministry, you're passing out fliers, you're inviting students to your campus ministry. This campus minister was out tabling, and while he was tabling, that pastor's kid came up, and he saw the whole group of students there and he said to those other students, 'You know what, I disagree with everything he believes, but he's a good person, and the people in this group are good people. You guys should go there and check it out.' His life was so exemplary that someone who disagreed with him, believed in his character.

That's what happens when the gospel gets in our lives. It transforms our character, and that transforms our relationships, and that transforms our reputations, and elders are people who demonstrate this kind of life. Paul warns us, he says, 'Don't lay hands on someone who is a new convert, someone who is young in the faith,' because it takes time for this kind of character to develop, and it takes time for this kind of character to be demonstrated, and it takes time to be prepared to have the bullseye on your back, because the devil wants nothing more than to take out elders, to take out the leaders of the church. Do you know how he does it? He does it through pride. He does it through puffing him up. Paul warns us not to give the office to anyone who is proud, anyone who has not demonstrated this kind of radical transformation in their lives.

So, we look at this passage and we see that character is more important than competency. This is not a job resume, notice there's only one competency listed, and that's to be apt to teach. So, an elder does need to be able to teach, and what is he teaching? He is teaching about the gospel of Jesus Christ that's transformed his life! So, that makes sense, right? You wouldn't want anyone teaching the gospel that has not been first transformed by the gospel. Every other requirement refers to character. It's also not an exhaustive list, right? There's much more you could say. The fruit of the spirit isn't on here, there's not a lot of spiritual disciplines on here, those things are kind of assumed about this person. What you have is a list

of character qualities and actions that distinguish an elder from the world, and make him an example to the congregation. These are character qualities that all Christians should strive to develop. So, we look at this list and we have to ask ourselves, how do we develop this type of character? How can I be this type of person at home or at work or on campus?

Well, Paul tells us, you have to zoom out. Look at the rest of 1 Timothy and in 1 Timothy 1:15 Paul says this, "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." What was Paul like before he became a Christian? What was Paul doing before he became a Christian? Paul hated the church. Paul hated Jesus. Paul persecuted the church. Paul was on his way to persecute the church when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and Jesus body slammed him, blinded him, led him by the hand to Jerusalem and introduced him to a man named Annas. Annas prayed for Paul, and scales were removed from his eyes. Paul's life was radically transformed. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. He was baptized in the name of Jesus, and he gave his life to spreading the message that he had formerly tried to exterminate. And this is what he said, this is how he describes that transformation in 1 Timothy. He says, "But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who are to believe in him for eternal life." Paul is saying that God transformed this hard, stubborn, self-righteous, proud sinner through the gospel, so that he would be an example to us of the type of proud, self-righteous, wayward people that God can transform, so that we could find eternal life.

That's a Christian-ese term. What does eternal life mean? Eternal life means true life, a life of self-sacrifice, a life of self-denial, a life that glorifies God in everything we do. That's the life that the elders display imperfectly in this life, that's the life that Jesus calls us to live in this life, and that's the life that we will all display perfectly in the life to come. How do you know that a person has been transformed by the gospel? They know that they are a sinner saved by God's grace. If you look at this list, it's easy to see this as a list of things to do, a list of boxes to check. When I see this list, especially as an elder, I see a list of things I cannot do, and that I don't do. You know you're being transformed by the gospel when you look at this list and you say, "Yeah, I fall short. I need Jesus to save me. I need Jesus to transform me. I need Jesus to rescue me, to change my character, to change my relationships, and to change my reputation." The good news of the gospel is that Jesus comes in, and He does that.

I heard a story this week that really demonstrated this. It was about a man named Steve Ryman. Steve Ryman was the CEO of Pizza Hut, and Steve Ryman loved to go around and visit Pizza Huts. He would just pop in and visit a Pizza Hut and check out what it was like. He was known for being a very serious critic of Pizza Huts, as you can imagine. So, everybody kind of feared when Steve would show up and they tried to be on their best behavior. One vacation, Steve and his family were in Steamboat, Colorado, and they just popped into a Pizza Hut for dinner. When they showed up, the Pizza Hut in Steamboat, Colorado, was not on their A game. It was a terrible night, terrible service, terrible food, and Steve sat there getting madder, and madder, and madder. Finally, he had enough, he got his family and took them home, he dropped them off, and then he drove back to the Pizza Hut. Without saying a word, he put on an apron, he went to the back, and he started making pizzas. Then, without saying a word, he went out to the front and he cleaned the tables. Without saying a word, he went to the dish pit and he

cleaned all the dishes. Then, when he was done doing all that, he took off his apron and he said, "Goodnight everybody, good work." And he left.

That is an example of what an elder does; he sacrifices for the sake of others. But it's even more of an example of what Jesus does for us. When Jesus was in heaven, He looked down from heaven and He saw us in all of our sin and misery, struggling and suffering with sin. But He didn't stay in heaven. He took off His crown. He took off His robe. He came to earth, and put on an apron of flesh, became a human just like us, and He lived the life we couldn't live, and He died the death we should have died, and He rose from the grave to transform our lives. When you give your life to Christ, He comes in and He cleanses you. He washes you. He renews you. And He gives you His Spirit, and that Holy Spirit leads you to live and love the way that He lived and loved us. It makes us sacrificial, servant leaders. We get the character to live and love like Jesus by admitting that we're sinners that need Jesus. So, let's go to Him now and let's pray and let's ask Him to transform our hearts so that we might glorify Him and enjoy Him the way He wants. Let's pray.