

## “Now An Overseer Must...” The Basic Qualities Preparing for Shepherds, 2

There are qualifications for almost everything. Qualifications for work, qualifications to get into college, qualifications to get a loan, qualifications almost everywhere. And there are reasons for this. Qualifications are the first way to determine if a person will be successful in what they want to do. And the same is true with elders in the church. There has to be starting places when we try to determine who God would have us select to be shepherds over the Meadowlark church. I think the starting place is found in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Basically what Paul writes to the young preachers who are given the task of appointing elders in Ephesus and on the Island of Crete is that first of all you look for faithful and dedicated men.

It might be good to start with talking about the names used for these men. The first name is found in I Timothy 3:1. It is the word *episkopos* and is generally translated overseer. “Overseer” describes a person who watches over others, who is aware of their needs and struggles and makes mature decisions concerning them. It in general describes the function of men who would serve in this role. They are to watch over the church in a number of ways.

A second word is found in Titus 1:5. It is the word *presbuteros* which simply refers to the maturity of the individual. The elder should be a person who is mature both in age and in spirituality. Many times these two kinds of maturity go together.

The third word is found in Acts 20:28. In fact all three words can be found in Acts 20:17-32. It is the word *poimen* and refers to the manner in which these older, mature men who watch

over the church function. It is the way they oversee. We will spend a whole sermon talking about shepherding in a couple of weeks but for now we want to concentrate our efforts on how Paul describes to Timothy and Titus what a faithful devoted older and wiser Christian man looks like.

We will start with Paul's letter to Timothy. Timothy was in the city of Ephesus when Paul wrote to him. Paul write to Timothy to help him understand what he needs to preach and teach so that the church knows how they should behave in the household of God (I Timothy 3:15). Instructions about the kind of men who should be elders is an important part of his letter to this young preacher.

I Timothy 3:1-7 -

1Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. 2Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. 5(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) 6He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. 7He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

This instruction begins with a statement to Timothy that anyone who sets his heart or aspires to being an overseer, he desires a noble task. I think this should have a little more explanation.

What is it that a man would desire if he desires this role? Does he desire power or position? Does he crave being in control? Does he want to be the one who sets the course for the church? Maybe Jesus can help us with this a little.

Matthew 20:20-28

20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

21 "What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

22 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

23 Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

24 When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. 25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus is very clear that whoever would be first or great among us must be the servant of all. We do not have leaders in the church that function in the same way that leaders in other more worldly pursuits might function. Although it is true that when leaders of worldly pursuits follow biblical instructions they are much better leaders no matter where they might serve. It can be devastating to the Body when there are individuals who desire a certain role of leadership because they want to run things or be first or they desire prestige. Remember Diotrophes?

III John 9, 10

9I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. 10So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

And remember also Peter's admonition to those who serve as shepherds.

I Peter 5:1-3 –

1To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock

Again the issue is willingness but not in the way of the world. Shepherds are not greedy for money or power but eager to serve. Shepherds are never to lord it over others. To lord it over means to command or to be the master over someone. Instead of commanding, elders are to be examples to the flock.

After establishing that elders must desire this role in the church for the right reasons Paul then describes these good men. The first requirement is an overarching one. Men who would fulfill this role of leadership must be “above reproach.” This doesn't mean that these men are to be perfect but it is one against whom no charge can be brought that sticks. An impartial examination would clear this man against all charges. In essence it has to do with the reputation of the leader. They must have a good reputation.

Next Paul says that these men must be the husband of one wife. This deals primarily with moral purity. One sign of moral purity is a man's absolute commitment and faithfulness to his wife. Nothing can destroy trust more rapidly than immorality. In essence, Paul is saying that if you couldn't trust a man to be loyal to his wife, how could you trust him in other areas of life? Too often we discuss whether this means a man can't have been divorced or that a man couldn't have lost his first wife and remarried. I really don't think that is the emphasis here.

The third quality is that these men must be temperate. Literally the Greek word translated means not mixed with wine. But the word probably does not just refer to the way this person deals with alcohol. Paul is describing a man who has a clear focus on life. He is stable and steadfast and his thinking is always clear, reflecting faith, hope and love.

The next quality is to be "self-controlled" or in other translations "sensible." The Greek word literally means "to be sound in mind." To be discrete, sober, or sensible is another way to translate it.

Next Paul states that this man must be respectable. Our English word cosmetics comes from the Greek word that is used. In essence Paul is teaching that our lives are to be like cosmetics to the Gospel—to make the gospel as attractive as possible by the way we live our lives.

The sixth quality of elders is to be hospitable. This refers especially with the way that one uses his material possessions. Our homes and even the food we eat must be available to those in need and to those in the church. What we have is to be used as a blessing to others.

Elders also must be able to teach. Paul uses this Greek word twice in his letters. The other time he uses it is to describe how Timothy was to deal with those who opposed him. He was to be able to teach them and lead them to the truth (II Timothy 2:23-25). Those who have developed this quality are able to communicate in a nonargumentative, nondefensive, and nonthreatening way.

Not give to drunkenness is another quality these men must possess. Almost ever scholar agrees that most references to wine in both the Old and New Testaments refer to fermented grape juice. Paul's concern is that spiritual leaders should never over indulge and over drink (Proverbs 23:29-30), never cause others to sin because of their freedom in Christ (Romans 14:21), and they should never become addicted to anything.

The ninth quality is that these men should not be violent. This means that their anger should never be out of control—physically or verbally. The Greek word behind our English word literally means “a bruiser,” or one who is ready with a blow, pugnacious, contentious, or a quarrelsome person.

Gentleness is in contrast to being violent. Paul chooses a word for gentleness that describes a person who is forbearing, equitable, fair, and reasonable.

He is also not to be quarrelsome. This is a man who avoids debates and arguments. It is impossible to be able to teach if a person is quarrelsome.

Men who aspire to be elders must also not be a lover of money. The Scriptures do not teach that money is evil per se. Nor do they teach that it is wrong to have money in abundance. However, Paul makes it clear that even though the man might not be free from money, he must

be free of the love of money. Anyone who serves as an elder should model generosity and nonmaterialistic attitudes and actions as they shepherd.

An elder must manage his own family well. This is one key way we can judge if a man is suited for a key leadership role in the church by looking at the way he serves his own family. In fact this one requirement is given more space than any other. The children of this man should not by their behavior affect their father's reputation. Even though he cannot control the actions of grown children, he should respond to them in a godly and faithful manner.

Any man who would be an elder must not be a recent convert. If we select men like that we are setting them up for an attack from Satan. The point of attack will be pride. A person who is new in the faith is not able to see clearly that the role of elder is a servants roll and not one of power, privilege or position.

And finally, these men must have a good reputation in the local community. Just as he must be above reproach among the believers, his reputation among outsiders must be above question.

There are a few qualities that are unique to the list Paul wrote to Titus on the Island of Crete. They are very close to some of those that we see in I Timothy.

Titus 1:5-9 –

5The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. 6An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. 7Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. 8Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what

is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. 9He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

They include:

1. Not overbearing. To be overbearing means to arrogantly disregard the interest of others in order to please self.
2. Not quick tempered. To readily yield to anger as a response to any challenge. His work demands much patience.
3. Love what is good. This man is an ally and zealous supporter of the good, including men as well as deeds and things.
4. Upright or just. This is a man who conforms his conduct to right standards.
5. Holy. This speaks of personal piety, an inner attitude of conforming to what is felt to be pleasing to God and consistent with what God desires.
6. Disciplined. This means to have the inner strength that enables the man to control his bodily appetites and passions. This is listed as one of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.
7. Hold firmly to the trustworthy message. Elders cling to the truth despite the winds of false teaching and open opposition. An elder must have the courage to stand for what is true.

We might ask why the difference in the lists? In Crete, some men had already emerged and were “ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for dishonest gain (Titus 1:11). These false teachers were so blatant in their sinful actions that Paul classified them as “detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good” (Titus 1:16). It is

no wonder that Paul told Titus to look for spiritual leaders who were “not overbearing” (arrogant or self-willed) and “not quick tempered”, but men who loved “what is good,” where were “upright, holy, and disciplined” (1:7-8). And maybe the requirement most relevant to the situation in Crete was that Paul told Titus to appoint shepherds who would “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught,” so that in turn they could “encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (1:9).

These are high standards and within these requirements it is easy to see at least some of the job description for shepherds in the church. Next week we will apply these qualities to the way in which overseers are to take care of the church as shepherds.

There are a few points we need to make as we close today.

1. No man could ever fully meet these high requirements but they must be in the process of exemplifying all of them to a degree. It is process that we are speaking of here and it is imperative that spiritual leaders of the church not only exemplify the best qualities of a Christian man, but that he also is growing in each of those qualities every day.
2. Even though this list of qualities from I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are full of good indications of how a man would take care of the church, it is not the whole picture. It is important to discover how shepherds take care of the sheep. These men will oversee the church but they will do it in the constant light of shepherding. Their primary task is to shepherd. All they do is in some way related to taking care of God’s flock in a good and healthy way.
3. We need to also aspire to this kind of faithful life. All these qualities can in some way be related to our lives and should be characteristic to some degree in our lives.