

Title: Above Reproach pt.1  
Text: 1 Timothy 3.1-7  
Theme: Qualifications of an Elder  
Series: 1 Timothy  
Prop Stmt: The qualifications of an elder are reflections of Christ

Read Text:

When applying for a job we all know that it is so important to have a contact. It's not what you know, but who you know, we say. And while that can be a problem for nepotism and cronyism, it can also be a wonderful blessing. (explain) When considering the position of elder, it is what you know and who you know and who knows you. The requirements for this position do not start with educational degrees, but with one overarching description. An elder is to be a man who is above reproach. The requirement is not for perfection, but for someone who has no unresolved issues, no secret sins, no areas of inconsistency. The life of an elder is to point others to Christ by not only being able to teach people the Scriptures in a way that people can understand, but he is to be an example so that the church can see how the gospel affects our entire lives.

For example, Ephesians 6 tells fathers to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Great! What on earth does that mean? How do you do that? What does that look like? What have dads done this? What a blessing to have a group of elders who have done that, and are doing that. These brothers can help set the mark so that others can keep the pace. That is the idea. All of these qualifications for being an elder are so that the elder can teach the entire Bible with a clear conscience and (if he is married and has children) his wife and kids can be in the front row, cheering him on, because they know that behind the scenes, he really believes it and he really lives it.

Being above reproach is a great description of someone you can trust. So, follow the logic of this. The church exists to be an embassy of the kingdom of God. We point people to Jesus. Ok, that sounds really nice, but what on earth does that mean? I mean how do we do that? We do that by telling people the right truths about Jesus and by believing them and living our own lives under their authority. We want people to love Jesus, but Jesus is not here. But, the church is. The church is called the body of Christ. We are Christ. What the world is going to know about Christ, they are to learn from us. So, we need to think like and live like Christ. But, we need some help, because we need someone to teach us what to believe so that we will think like Christ and we need people who are thinking like Christ and who are applying that, to model that for us, so that we can learn how to do that. Elders are to teach and live in such a way that the members of the church learn how to take another step in becoming more like Jesus.

Every qualification has a private aspect to it and a public affect from it. The emphasis is clear. The gospel makes us whole. We are to be whole people. The gospel unites us to Christ. The gospel unites us as persons. The gospel enables us to be restored to wholeness. I am able to be a complete person rather than a fractured one. The gospel grounds me. My identity is in Christ and that rootedness informs and governs every role

that I am called to live out. So, I am a husband, as a follower of Christ. I am a dad as a follower of Christ. I am a pastor as a follower of Christ. I am a neighbor, friend, son, and citizen as a follower of Christ. I do not have different rules that I live by. I have different roles through which I live out my core identity. I am a follower of Christ. That informs all of my roles.

The closer people get to Jesus, the more consistency they see. The closer people get to us, they should see and experience the same thing. So, men are qualified to be elders in part by their competency (able to teach), and by their character. They are to be men whose lives are characterized by consistency looking like Jesus in every area. Therefore, an elder is a man who is:

I. **The Husband of one wife.**

Does this mean that he has to be married? No. And the command to have submissive children does not mean that a man has to have at least two children in order to be considered either. The point is, if he is married, he is faithful to his marriage vows. The wording means he is a one-woman man. It does not mean that he could not be divorced. It means that he is faithful to his wife. It clearly prohibits polygamy, but it is beyond that. This is a man who is not a womanizer, does not make other women feel uncomfortable, is not flirtatious, but is privately and publicly known as being completely committed to his wife. She has no concerns about him. Others have no concerns about him.

The obvious reasons for this are that by fulfilling his marriage vows, this man demonstrates that he is willing to make promises and keep promises no matter what. If a man does not love his bride faithfully, he is not going to love the bride of Christ faithfully. Christ is faithful to his bride and he calls and appoints men into leadership who will love the bride as he does. A man who has eyes for other women is a man who is seeking to take something that is not his, in an effort to make much of himself. Leadership in the church is not for men who want to make much of themselves, but for men who want the bride to be loved, esteemed, provided for, and to feel secure.

Ephesians 5.25-28

Christ loves the church so much he died for her. His love for his church is what makes her lovely. He did not love her because we were lovely, but his love for his church causes her to grow in loveliness, to the point that one day she will not have a stain or a wrinkle. This is how husbands are to love their wives, not simply so they will have good marriages, but good marriages are designed by God to be illustrations of the church. Therefore, a husband of one wife is one whose faithful love for his wife is so experienced by her, that she is free. She is at rest. She is comforted in knowing that she is treasured, esteemed and provided for. She will not be left for another. She will not be embarrassed. She is not afraid of what he might do. That freedom is beautiful. Every man who is a member of this church who loves his wife like that is giving the church an incredible gift. This is how men who follow Jesus are to love their wives, because this is how Jesus loves his bride.

Every man in this church who is married should faithfully and exclusively love his wife. Every man in this church who is considering getting married, should plan to faithfully and exclusively love his wife. Therefore, pornography is to be treated as being exposed to radiation. When nuclear reactions get going, they spit out particles with enough energy to rip electrons off of atoms or molecules. The altered bonds produce ion pairs that are extremely chemically reactive. This is known as ionizing radiation, and it's where the problems start.

There are many types of ionizing radiation. Take your pick from cosmic, alpha, beta, gamma or X- rays, neutrons, or from a handful more. What really matters is how much an organism is exposed to—a concept called absorbed dose. Pornography rots a man's capacity to love his wife faithfully and exclusively. It is not a harmless little habit that guys do. It takes over and must be aggressively fought. Every man in this church who is married or considering getting married must cultivate a deep dependence upon God. Brothers, I implore you to be men of the book and to cultivate a faithful prayer life. We need grace, strength and resolve from God to love faithfully and exclusively in the midst of a world that is hell bent on ruining purity, faithfulness and joy. If I am left to myself, I will think chiefly about myself. My soul will starve and my love will shrivel if I am not reading God's Word and talking to God. I cannot love my wife and the church unless I am dependent on God and I cannot be dependent upon God without listening to him talk to me through his word and without expressing dependence upon God in prayer. An elder is a man who is:

## **II. Sober-minded**

This does not mean dour and sour. It means level-headed. This is not a man of extremes. He is clear-headed. You always know what you are going to get. I remember having a professor who was either so silly and wacky that it was weird, or he was mean and surly. Before we would go into class, we would ask the kids coming out of the class what he was like that day, just so we could brace ourselves. You lived on edge because you did not know which professor you were going to get. If you grew up with a parent who was an alcoholic or who was addicted to some form of meds or drugs, you know the feeling. One moment this parent was showering you with love and praise and the next moment dishes and expletives were flying and you were racking your brain trying to figure out what had happened.

A sober-minded man is the opposite of that. You know what you are going to get with this man. And the reason why it is so important for men to be like this is so that everyone who is under their care will get a taste of what God is like. God is not subject to temper tantrums and mood swings. He makes promises and keeps promises. He does things based on his character and does what he says he is going to do. Sober-minded men cultivate safe places for people around them to thrive in.

## **III. Self-controlled**

A man who is self-controlled must first have a proper view of himself. Romans 12:3 says, *“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment....”*

A man who thinks that he is the most important person in the world will not control his mouth. A man who thinks that he knows everything will not listen to others. A man who thinks that he is better than others will not care for others. But a man who sees himself as God sees himself, will be humble, will be thoughtful, and he will not trust himself. Emotions are a wonderful gift from God, but we are not to be ruled by our emotions. Just because I get angry over something does not mean that I have to be ruled by that anger. Just because I am passionate about something, does not give me the right to be a jerk and say demeaning and abusive things and even untruths. Feeling strongly about something is fine, but it can be dangerous. A man who is self-controlled does not trust himself. He trusts God, but he does not trust himself. He knows that his thinking and emotions uninformed by God’s word can be bad.

So, here are some good questions to ask: What do you get angry about? When you get angry, what is it that you want that you aren’t getting? How does your anger affect you and others? Is your angry productive or destructive? Are you a man who is given over to his appetites? Are you self-controlled with food? Are you self-controlled with money? Are you self-controlled with your time? Are you self-controlled with your mouth? Are you self-controlled with your emotions?

A man whose life is marked by godly self-control is that way because he is trusting God who is in control. A man who is out of control is out of control because he is trying to be in control of things that God did not give him the power to control. A man who wants to have power and respect is going to be out of control with his anger because he will demand that he be respected. A man who wants to have pleasure, no matter what, will be out of control in his pursuit of it. But, a man who trusts God does not trust himself, but seeks to rely upon the Lord.

#### **IV. Respectable**

Respectable is the fruit of these first three. This is a man who knows how to behave. He is not a loose cannon. He is going to be helpful to a situation. An elder should be a man whose life and wisdom earns him an audience that is interested in hearing what he thinks. Do you ever cringe because of the things that certain people post on social media? Our words are to help. What does being respectable look like when you are interacting with someone who disagrees with you? Do you see why this is so important?

When the elders are working through an issue, we do not always agree. Do not think of these men as being “yes” men. I have proposed things and have been voted down. I was voted down 10-1 one time. We have to have the freedom to disagree and dialogue in the midst of our disagreement so that we can learn from one another. I have an opinion on a matter and I have that opinion because I think I am right. But, I need to be self-controlled enough to not trust my opinion as the final opinion. So, I need to present my opinion

humbly, but clearly. I want to persuade others to think as I do, but recognize that others may and often have a perspective that I have not considered. I never learn anything from someone who agrees with me all the time. We need elders who are mindful of the opinions of others and who desire to hear them. So, when I get outvoted, I get outvoted knowing that I have been heard and that gives me great reason to respect these men.

## V. Hospitable

Hospitable simply means one who opens his home up to others. Hospitality is love in action. If I love others more than I love my space, my quiet, my comfort, my seclusion, my orderliness, then I will choose honoring them and serving them, more than I will choose serving myself. An elder is a man whose home is open to others because he not only loves others, but because his home is a means by which you can see closer into his life. So much life to life ministry and deep relationships are built around eating together in each other's homes.

Cathi just finished a book called... The author pointed out that Christ, in a pre-incarnate (define, then example: "Hail the incarnate deity"), appearance ate a meal with Abraham as part of establishing the Abrahamic covenant with him. Christ, after his incarnation, ate many meals where many important things took place, not the least of which was the establishment of the New Covenant with his disciples the night before he died. Eating together is a very important aspect of a healthy church. Elders need to be examples of that.

What do these have to do with Christ?

Christ hates hypocrisy. The leaders used the law to make themselves look good, instead of using the law to expose their sin and be humbled by it. So, what did Christ do? He shone the spotlight of truth on their lives that they did not want to admit and confess. So, they killed him. Christ died, in part because hypocrites did not want their sin exposed.

Christ launched the church to be a people whose lives are truly changed by him. We are called to be a people who genuinely follow Christ. Sadly, and tragically, the church has been full of the very same kind of people who killed Christ. They use leadership positions in the church as a means to advance their own standing and to appear to be respectable. These qualities are designed to protect the church from being led by men who are hypocrites. The focus of these qualities is not on what you do, but who you really are. But, you cannot grow in these areas apart from the gospel.

This list is NOT intended to be viewed as a double standard. In other words, this is not what the elders are to be and no one else has to take this seriously. No, this is what we all are called to pursue, and the elders are to be men, whose lives have clear evidences of maturity in these areas. There is a sense in which the elders are called to a higher standard, but not a double standard. A double standard is when you say one thing and do another or when there are two different sets of rules. A higher standard is when you expect more from those in leadership.

For example, let's say that a football player gets called for a personal foul because he lost his temper and shoved another player in the face mask after the play was over. If his coach yanks him out of the game, and then starts screaming at him and cussing him out and smacks him in the helmet because he lost his cool, we would call that a double standard. A higher standard, is when the coach demonstrates to the players how to stay in control, even under pressure. But this is more than a matter of leadership and example. This is ultimately an issue of Christ and the gospel.

Conclusion:

A gospel-centered view of elder qualifications:

Whenever we read our Bibles, we ought to regularly ask ourselves, "how does this passage point us to Jesus?" This is particularly important when we are given a list of qualities that we ought to aim for. In fact, lists like these, are dangerous if we think of them apart from Christ.

1. Christ alone is the perfect example of these qualities.

We do not hold these up as a means to scrutinize one another in an effort to find flaws in others. No one, but Christ is the perfect example of these. That alone is very freeing. I know, we know that Christ alone is the perfect example. We do not expect perfection from one another. We desire growth. We hope for maturity. We want to encourage one another to take another step toward looking like Jesus. That is quite different than demanding perfection.

Example: Arianna boot camp, corrective training procedures, crunches - designed to correct behavior. Very effective at correcting behavior but absolutely awful at changing a heart. Our aim as followers of Christ is not correcting behavior, but seeing heart-change. (Luke 18.9) Heart change will produce behavior that reflects Christ, but you crush people when you have a culture in your church where you demand Christ-like behavior through fear, instead of cultivating Christ-like behavior through Christ!

2. Christ alone is the perfect fulfillment of these qualities.

These qualities reveal areas of failure in all of us. Those failures are opportunities to rely upon Christ for his grace. He died for this too.

3. We cannot view nor pursue these qualities apart from Christ.

Take the quality of being respectable as an example. We can pursue that in a man-centered way or in a gospel-centered way. If I am pursuing that in a man-centered way, then I am overly concerned about appearing respectable. I am trying to constantly figure out what would be respectable in the eyes of others, and then attempting to measure up to that. Instead of focusing on the issues of my heart, I would focus on looking respectable

in front of others. What I am trying to say is this: Do not pursue being respectable so that you will be respectable. Pursue Christ. Grow in your dependency upon Christ. As we continue to apply the gospel to our lives, we will grow in our awareness of our own areas of idolatry and self-centeredness.

What is one area mentioned that stood out to you this morning as being an area that you need to grow in? (Need help? Ask someone who knows you well to be lovingly point one out.) Be intentional this week about specifically depending on God to help you address anything that hinders you from pursuing this. In other words, rely upon God's Spirit to help you be aware of your need and to help you depend on him in those times when you are tempted to fail. As you read your Bible, be mindful of ways this particular issue is illustrated in the text. Choose to meditate on those passages and let the power of God's Word help you address that.