

Title: An Average Elder  
Text: 1 Timothy 3.1-7 (3-7)  
Theme: The qualifications of an elder  
Series: 1 Timothy  
Prop Stmt: The qualifications of an elder are intended to help the congregation look like Jesus.

Read Text:

1 Timothy is all about how the church is to function and leadership is part of that. Overseers, pastors or elders are entrusted by the congregation to provide leadership, oversight, direction and care for the members of the church. Like dads taking their family on vacation or tour directors, the calling of an elder is to get everyone to their destination, safely because we know the joy that awaits you. Our destination is more than a place. It is Christ! The mission of the elders is to help get their people closer to Christ. Simply put, we want you to reflect Jesus more this year than last. 1 Timothy 3 provides a list of qualifications for elders. But, first, here are some...

I. **General observations about the qualifications of an elder.** (3.1-7)

A. **These qualifications are not that unusual.**

The Lord has graciously raised up unusually gifted people from time to time like an Augustine, Athanasius, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, but the vast majority of the advance and impact of Christianity has been by ordinary people. In fact, that was one of the reasons why Christ was sneered at. In the minds of the Pharisees, he hadn't been to the right schools. He didn't come from the right circles. He didn't dress the part. From the outside, he looked so ordinary. Then, look at the guys Christ chose to be his disciples. Christ was not the coach who walked into the locker room one day to size up the team that he was stuck with to lead. Christ recruited the team. Christ used his first 12 draft picks to select guys that were not on anybody's depth chart. Christ intentionally recruited ordinary men. The disciples were no all-star team. In fact, some of these guys wouldn't have made JV. But again, God has historically used ordinary people to do the heavy-lifting for the advancement of his gospel and that same theme is displayed once again in this text on the qualifications for an elder. These qualifications seem to be so, well, ordinary. The unusual thing about these qualifications is how "normal" they appear to be.

I read some of the stuff on church leadership with its emphasis on forward-thinking, skill-honing, strategic-planning, visioning, entrepreneurial-thinking, focus-driven, organizational, culture-transforming stuff, and then look at this list, where Paul says stuff like, "hey just don't get drunk – ok?" And I think well, that shouldn't be too hard – right?

There is nothing here about being a big-shot CEO, a well-connected businessman, or a powerful politician. These qualifications are very earthy aren't they? In fact...

## **B. These qualifications have an appeal for the entire church.**

Elders are to be men who set the pace and due to the pattern of their lives are able to call the congregation to “follow me as I follow Christ.” There are several implications:

- 1) This downplays the clergy/laity distinction.

I believe that one of the worst developments that ever took place under the umbrella of Christianity is the idea of a separation between the clergy (priest) and the people. Around 500 A.D. a more formal priesthood was developed and this idea grew and grew until by the middle ages there were separate rules about forbidding marriage, separate arrangements for life (monasteries), separate places for women (nuns and convents) all of which fueled this idea that there are the special and holy people in the church and then there are the rest of us. The special holy ones know the secrets, hold the power and have the real influence. They live in a different world than we do. They operate according to different rules, one of which is that they are too holy to get married, have sex and have children. But all of that is totally contrary to God’s Word.

The idea that the clergy lives in this special arena makes it look like that they are above others or the rules for the normal people do not apply to them. They are different. They are better. That thinking has not served the church well. You never met Virgil Horton. Virgil was the head custodian in the church I grew up in. Virgil had grown up in poverty and never forgot his roots. As a boy I was always amazed at how he could fix anything. When I was 14 he hired me on a part time basis, and I worked for him for 3 years because, I thought that he thought I was a good worker. In reality, I think he did it because he feared that I would go off to college and seminary and turn into a snob. Virgil loved Christ and he loved the church and he knew that ministers who were snobs hindered the gospel and the church no matter how educated or gifted they might be. Snobs pretend to be better, different, aloof, and unapproachable. When leaders in the church are snobs, it is enormously tragic because Jesus was the complete opposite of a snob. In fact the snobs hated him. So, if a leader in the church is a snob, that leader has more in common with the enemies of Christ than with Christ, and that is an enormous tragedy. So, what do you see here?

- 2) These are descriptions of the fruits of the gospel.

These characteristics are what we expect to be produced in the life of every believer over a period of time. These are not qualifications only for the elder, but they are qualities that an elder has demonstrated consistent fruit in. Elders are charged with the mission of seeing every member look more like Jesus. Jesus is above reproach. Jesus is sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. The Elders are to be men whose lives set the pace for the congregation. These are men who are known by the congregation because they are part of the congregation. We know their testimony in the community. We know their testimony at home. We know their kids. We know their spouse. We know their lives. And when we need counsel, or we need wisdom, we can

look to these men because we see how they consistently apply the Scriptures to their own lives. They are not in a different world from us; they live in the same world as we do. They rub shoulders with us. Their effect upon us is so much more than telling us information from the Bible, but their effect on us is profound because they seek to live out the doctrine that they carefully think about.

### 3) These descriptions assume involvement.

The elders are not a group of men who are ahead of and leading the congregation in that sense, but they are in the congregation. The consistency of their lives affects the congregation because they lead by example and influence through their teaching.

Once again, look at the life of Christ. He lived with his disciples for several years. They ate with him, fished with him, watched him care for little children, watched him be tender and moved with compassion to widows who had nothing, to diseased people whose condition was repulsive to most, and they watched him not be impressed or intimidated by the powerful. His teaching was not done primarily in a classroom, but in the course of life. So, when Jesus commanded his disciples to “teach them to observe all that I have commanded you” the disciples did not think of a 4-story classroom building where students would go from room to room with notebooks to fill out. Teaching someone to observe means that you instruct by information and example. Teaching in the church requires more than a classroom and information. It demands life. Christianity is not an experiment in a lab, a theory to be discussed; it is life.

One Christmas I gave Cathi a gift certificate for couples dance lessons. She did not need the lessons, I did. I have no idea what I am doing when it comes to dancing, and honestly never cared. Cathi did, but I didn't. So, she was really, really happy that I got this, but I forgot about it. I forgot all about it until my daughter got engaged and then, in the midst of all of the happiness and celebration over her engagement I had this moment of sheer terror. My daughter is going to want me to do a dance with her at her reception. I thought maybe I could give a devotional instead. So, guess what, I took those lessons. Those lessons did not take place in a classroom. They took place in a ballroom. I needed more than information about the history of dance and to be able to identify the different types of dance. I had to actually learn how to dance. Someone had to tell me where to put my foot, where to hold my arm, where to step, how to count, how to move, how to change direction, etc. I learned from someone who had more experience than I did. Their goal was to help me be like them. That is what elders do. We call the congregation to come and learn from us what we have learned from others.

## II. Specific Qualifications for elders. (3.3-7)

### A. **Under the control of God** (3)

Verse 2 lists attributes that qualify a man for the position of elder. Verse 3 lists characteristics that disqualify a man from being an elder.

### 1) not a drunkard

A person under the control of alcohol is NOT under the control of God. The same thing could be said for any intoxicating substance. An elder is not someone who occasionally goes off the wagon because he is setting a pattern for the church. Believers are not to be alcoholics. Like many of you, I have seen the effects of this in my family. I know the deceit, the lies, the embarrassment, the long term effects not only on one's body, but the grief that this brings upon entire family units. I've heard the excuses, the cover-ups, and have witnessed the pity, and yet the total lack of trust. Beloved, there is forgiveness. There is help. But this qualification is so beneficial for the church. Elders are men whose lives should never, ever cause people to wonder if they are under the influence of anything other than God. But, this is not just for elders. Ephesians 5 is very clear for every believer to not ever get drunk. Drinking wine or beer is not prohibited by Scripture, but getting drunk is sin and like other sins, getting drunk is related to other things, which is why I think that Paul then mentions not being violent but gentle.

Do you drink alcoholic beverages? If so, do you get drunk? Do you make excuses for yourself or others? Are you under the control of other intoxicants? Are you under the control of pain medication? Do you lie to yourself or others about how serious this is?

### 2) not violent but gentle

People who are drunk are out of control and that lack of control is often expressed in violent outbursts. But not being violent is only part of it. An elder is one who is gentle. Do you see why being gentle is so important? An elder is to be a reflection of Christ so that the members have examples before them of how to live. Even under stress, we are to be gentle. Even when someone disagrees with us, we are to be gentle. Jesus is more than someone who did not have a hair trigger temper. Jesus was gentle. And as such, we should be known as a people who are gentle. A person who is gentle is generally more concerned about the person he's having a disagreement with, than he is about being proven as being right. Always having to be right is what marks a quarrelsome person.

### 3) not quarrelsome

This one is always stirring things up. Always creating conflict. Always looking for a reason to disagree and point out the failures of others. Always looking for an argument. Always looking to find fault. The opposite of this is being a peacemaker. Christ said, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God." When somebody shares something personal with you, you have been given a trust and you are to guard that trust. You can take that and hurt the person with it. But think of this. Christ does not do that with you. He died in your place so that your sins would be forgiven and your guilt would be removed. He died that we might be at peace with God and at peace with one another. A quarrelsome person does not reflect the gospel and as such is not qualified to be an elder. So, here are a few questions to consider:

Do people who know you well live in fear of how you will react?

Do people look to you for comfort when they are hurting?  
Does your influence on others generate love or generate fear?

4) not a lover of money

For the love of money, people will sell drugs that will enslave and destroy others. For the love of money girls will sell their bodies. For the love of money people will give away everything and even what they don't have to a slot machine, casino or lottery ticket. For the love of money people will steal, lie, cheat and even kill.

It is commonplace to hear outsiders accuse the church of "only being after your money." Why wouldn't they think that when so many TV preachers make it very clear that they really are after your money. But, this is not a new problem. This year is the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. While there were many issues that came together that resulted in the Reformation, one of the most prominent was the selling of indulgences by the pope who promised eternal life to any person who gave money to help build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Give me money and you are guaranteed not to go to purgatory. If you are looking for reasons to distrust the motives of religious leaders, Christianity has sadly provided too many.

A person who doesn't love money is not someone who is necessarily poor. In fact, some people are poor because they love money. Someone who loves money is greedy. A greedy person is not generous. Generosity is a soul mate of grace. A person who loves deep is a generous person. Elders are to set the pace in this area so that our congregation is characterized by generosity. Being generous is a fruit of the gospel. You can see how this connects to being in control of your home. One of the areas of being in control of your home is being in control of the finances of your home. If you are not in control of your finances, then you are not able to be generous.

Again, some good questions to ask: Are you a generous person? Does your giving to the church reflect that? Do you look for reasons to give to the church or for reasons not to give? If you have investments, do you look at them with an earthly perspective or a gospel perspective? What is your philosophy of money?

**B. In control of his home (4-5)**

The connection between verses 3 and 4 is pretty clear isn't it? Dads who are not in control of their own lives do not do a good job of staying in control of their homes.

- 1) manages his home with dignity
- 2) keeps his children submissive

There is an emphasis in verses 4 and 5 on managing and caring. Both are needed. An elder needs to manage (be in charge of his home) at the same time he needs to care, because that is how he is provide leadership in the church. The home is the little church. Some dads really love their kids, but they fail to manage. They fail to say "no." In other

cases, dads manage by control, but there is no love. Managing through intimidation, threats, or fear may get immediate results, but it is not managing with dignity. Managing with dignity speaks of a manager who manages himself well. How well you manage yourself is generally reflected in how well you manage your home. How well you manage your home prepares you for oversight in the church.

Dads, do you actually lead your home? If you are the parent of a small child, does your child obey you when you ask him or her to do or not to do something? If you have to constantly repeat yourself or count to 3, or threaten, then hear me carefully. You are not leading your child. Your child is leading you. If you are the parent of an older kid and every decision you make is met with an argument, or an attitude, or conflict, then once again, you are not managing with dignity. The Lord uses our children to reveal so many things about ourselves. Questions to ask: Are you attentive to your children? Do you know them well? Are you involved in their lives? Do you have spiritual conversations with them? Do they come to you for advice? Do you pray with them? Do you ask them good questions? Do they obey you without attitude? If you were asked to teach a lesson on parenting how would they respond?

I don't ask these questions to weigh you down, but to help you think about what really matters. I know that it is tempting to not talk about things that really matter.

### **C. Seasoned believer (6)**

New believers are exciting. I love watching the discovery process. There are times when you see a particular person devour everything you throw at him and you see the potential that this person has. It is tempting to put this person into a position of influence because of the potential encouragement they may be. But, ministry is hard. You cannot grow roots overnight, and leaders need deep roots to withstand the strong winds. Simply put, new believers are not ready to handle the weight of ministry. Besides, the maturity of a man generates trust by others. It also gives the congregation time to see if this brother is going to be humble, because if he is puffed up by ministry opportunities then his influence will have a condemning effect. And finally...

### **D. Established reputation (7)**

Simply put, is he the same person in the church as he is in his home and with others? This is a great challenge for us? In other words, if the waitress at the Coney Island, your co-workers, students in your class, neighbors, family members and friends at church all got together and compared notes, would they be the same?