
The Standards of Leadership

I Timothy 3:1-13

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Introduction I thought we would begin this morning with an activity many of you may usually take up *after* church, not during: Reading the weekend edition of the newspaper. This is an article from the January 13th edition of the Charlotte Observer entitled: *Putting Manliness Next to Godliness*. It is a piece that chronicles several Christian movements which are responding to what they believe to be the “feminization of church.” Here are a few excerpts:

Brad Stine [of the organization Godmen] runs onstage in ripped blue jeans, his shirt untucked, his long hair shaggy. He’s a stand up comic by trade, but he’s in Nashville, Tenn., this day as an evangelist, on a mission to build up a new Christian – one profanity at a time.

...In daybreak fraternity meetings and weekend paintball wars, in wilderness retreats and X-rated chats about lust, thousands of Christian men are reaching for more forceful, more rugged expressions of their faith...

...The virility crusade is, in part, a response to a stark gender gap. More than 60 percent of the adults at a typical worship service are women...Women are also significantly more likely to attend Sunday School, read the Bible and pray regularly...Murrow blames men’s lackluster attitudes on the feminization of mainline churches...Eldredge [states], “Christianity as it currently exists, has done some terrible things to men...[men] believe that God put them on Earth to be a good boy.” “Factor in the pressure to be a “Christian nice guy” –no cussing, no confrontation, in tune with the wife’s emotions – and it’s amazing men keep the faith at all.

Stine argues that the genteel façade of a Christian nice guy inhibits introspection and substitutes clichés for spiritual growth...His speakers admit to masturbation and adultery. Such honesty, Stine contends, molds better more godly men than a typical Sunday service...Maybe worship could be hanging out with a bunch of guys, admitting we like blowing [stuff] up... Caldwell urges...leaders to have NFL bloopers on the big screen when the men come in, and oldies or country western on the radio.

While writers like Eldrege and Murrow have made some important observations about gender patterns in the church, should the “masculinization” of the church be the answer? Or, is this another instance in which the church, when coming upon difficulty, turns to the culture for an answer when it should be turning to the Word? Our purpose this morning is to turn to the Word to understand what God has revealed to us about the issue of male leadership in the church. [PRAY]

Contexts

As most of you know, we are in the middle of our annual Family Enrichment series held in the month of January. In this series we generally take a topic that concerns the family and work to develop a greater understanding of what the Scriptures have to say about that topic and its practical implications for our lives. This year our series is entitled “Leading Men.” The aim of the series is to enable men practically to become godly and effective leaders. In the last two weeks we’ve discussed men’s roles in the home and at work. This week, we’ll discuss men’s leadership roles in the church.

The text we will be studying from this morning is 1 Timothy 3:1-13. [READ] Before we begin into our text this morning, I’d like to bring our attention to several contexts and connections that will affect our understanding of what we hear today.

Family Enrichment Series

First, although it has been stated implicitly several times throughout our series, I want to briefly and explicitly answer the question: Why are we spending a whole month talking about adult men? After all, is there not another gender and other age groups that make up our body? Certainly there are. Is this an attempt to drive out the “feminization” of the American church and create a space where men can be men? Or are we trying to increase the attendance of males in the church by preaching on topics of interest to them? The reason we speak to men this month is because the Bible has *clearly* identified men as those who have certain leadership responsibilities in several very important spheres of life.

This biblical pattern begins as early as Genesis 2 and 3 (cf. 1 Timothy 2) and continues throughout the course of redemptive history until we reach very clear statements in passages such as Ephesians 5 and Titus 1. God has unique expectations for men as leaders *especially* in the spheres of church and home. I say unique because these are expectations and responsibilities that are not given to women or children. As men, we must not only know what these expectations and responsibilities are, we must by grace work hard to fulfill them in our lives. So we can summarize by simply saying that we address men specifically from this pulpit for the month of January because God addresses men specifically in his Word, and **that should be** the pattern for all of our preaching.

Paul’s Letter to Timothy (vv. 14, 15a)

A second context we need to consider this morning, beyond the Family Enrichment Series, is the context of the passage we will be considering, 1 Timothy 3:1-13. A few basic points should help us understand Paul’s intent for this passage in his letter to Timothy. We can start by noting that the “book” of 1 Timothy is not a book per se, but a letter. Unlike an essay or a journal article, it is a *personal* response from Paul to Timothy addressing real-time problems that Timothy and the church at Ephesus were experiencing. What were these problems? Well, because Paul spends much of his time addressing false teachers and their doctrines and order in the church, we can assume that the Ephesian church was infiltrated by false teachers and was experiencing difficulty in knowing and/or implementing biblical patterns for the body. So to a church troubled by false

teaching and a wandering sense of “how” to function as the body, Paul writes. Not so different from the church today.

Look with me at 3:14-15 [READ]. One of Paul’s clear purposes in writing to Timothy was to lay out the pattern for how the body was to behave. It is in this context that Paul addresses the role of male leadership in the church, particularly as elders and deacons are concerned, but also as all men are concerned as we will see in a moment. The point here is that in arriving to 3:1-13 we should be clear that Paul is writing very specifically and purposefully. The list of character qualities we find here are not random or simply about being “nice” Christians – they are the qualities that male leadership *must* have if it is to please the Master of the house. So note the specificity – it would not make sense to insist a bricklayer know how to bake cakes. Similarly, Paul is not insisting on qualities which have nothing to do with male leadership in the church – these qualities are *fundamental* to healthy doctrine and God-pleasing conduct in the church. As such we must take these as seriously as we do the church itself.

Connections

We’ve addressed two contexts of the message this morning and now I want to observe three connections with you in the form of these questions: What does this have to do with me? What does this have to do with the church? And, what does this have to do with the devil?

What does this have to do with me?

A first important connection we need to make is between the fact that I am addressing all adult males in the church this morning and Paul is addressing elders and deacons specifically in this passage. It is a seeming disconnect. After all, it would be very simple to say, “I am not an elder nor do I want to be and I am not a deacon, nor do I want to be...” Let me attempt to persuade you to remain awake with three points. First, each character quality (vs. skill, such as aptness to teach) required of elders and deacons in this passage is required of all believers elsewhere in the Scriptures, therefore, these are not requirements unique to these offices. The distinction lies in the fact that these things *must* be true of persons who hold the office of elder or deacon in the church; while they *should* be true in increasing measure of all persons in the church, though they may be evidenced in varying degrees.

Second, if you, male adult in the body here at Clearcreek, intend to influence others in any capacity whatsoever, you will be aspiring to these characteristics. Remember Paul is writing with specific intent in mind – this is what the person who leads and wields influence in the church should be known by. I would argue that this comes *home* to roost, literally, in your capacity as leader and shepherd *in your home*. To lead well in your home, as well as any sphere in church, is to be increasingly characterized by the qualities described in this passage and I suspect Pastor Greg will elaborate on this more fully this evening. Third, what Paul is doing for us in this passage is not compiling a “check-list” of sorts but painting a portrait of the mature, well-rounded, full of integrity, individual in the church. Do you want to be ever-moving toward a picture of practical holiness and Christian maturity? Then make the features of this portrait the subject of your constant

prayer, and the object of your daily labors. Are you convinced? I hope so. This is material that is important for all of us.

What does this have to do with the church? (v. 15)

The next connection to make is between this passage and the purpose of the church as described in the book of Timothy. We've touched on this a bit already but we can further elaborate by considering the second part of verse 15 (READ 3:15b). Pastor Chad just preached an excellent sermon on this reality several weeks ago. Do you remember? Ladder>Tabernacle>Temple>Church? The reality emphasized here is this: What is happening *here*, at this very moment, constitutes the household of God, the church of the living God! We are stewards and bondservants in this house and the will of the Master has been made clear when it comes to the character of leadership in his house.

Further, not only are we the house of the living God on Earth, this house, the church, represents the living God to the world. This happens in part as the church functions as the pillar and buttress of truth. As one commentator put it

Christ on earth was the Truth...The assembly is not the truth: the word of God is the truth... *But the assembly is that which maintains the truth on earth...[our duty is the] the maintenance and presentation of the truth¹*

If indeed then we are the house of the living God, and this house is to be that which displays, distributes, and defends the truth to the world, the importance of the character of the leadership in the church cannot be underestimated. Note the language here is PILLAR and BUTTRESS! Not straw and mud, tent pole and support rope, or frailty and feebleness. Leadership in the church should be known as solid, upright, enduring, persevering, inspiring, and full of the cement of integrity. This passage gives us the specifics.

What does this have to do with the devil? (vv. 6, 7)

The last connection has to do with the unseen nature of what is unfolding in the realm of God's household, church leadership, and the spiritual personalities arrayed against it. While we don't have time to dwell on this point, I think it is worth noticing as mention of the devil occurs five times in the short six chapters of 1 Timothy (1:20, 2:6, 2:7, 5:14, 15). Satan has no interest in seeing the progress of the church on Earth. The fact is, the devil is continually looking to slander and discredit the church in the eyes of believers and unbelievers alike – this is a choice strategy for him (Luke 22, 1 Peter 5:8, Eph 4:27). When believers in leadership fall, you can be certain that Satan is pleased and the church is made to look foolish, false, and faltering in everyone's eyes. The one institution on Earth that is charged with presenting and maintaining truth, with being the bulwark of righteousness, consistently falls prey to the devil's traps and snares. There is no lack of examples in our country or even in our community. A major defense against this is the strong but humble, committed but caring, unyielding but gentle leadership of men in the church.

¹ Darby

Character

Now we come to considering the character of leadership in the church. God calls all of us to these qualities at one time or another in the Scriptures (as we stated earlier) but this morning we focus specifically on men who would yield influence in the church. Again, for those of you men who are tempted to say, but I don't "lead" in the church – remember, you at minimum lead in your home which is simply another place where body life should be expressing itself. In this sense, to lead in your home is to lead in church. And there are many of you who do hold offices and positions in the church which by their very nature bestow the role of leader upon you: Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, adult bible education leaders, A/V team leader, grounds crew team leader, as well as deacons and elders. So as we consider these qualities do the hard work of asking yourself, "Does this describe me? If not, how must I change?" Women, and children (that includes you, youth) listen closely as well. While certainly you should also aspire to these qualities, there is a critical role you play in adult male leadership in the church, which we will discuss shortly.

I have divided the character qualities described in this passage into three groups, qualities of character, qualities of home, and qualities of faith. I have combined the qualifications for elders and deacons under these headings as we will not be speaking to either office specifically. And we will only mention those portions of this passage which speak to the scope of our focus on male leadership in the church this morning, while focusing on the character of those who lead.

Qualities of Character

In verses 2 and 11 of chapter 3 Paul uses the terms "above reproach" and "blameless" to describe the overall character of leaders in the church. Much of the rest of this passage is spent unpacking the content of what it means to be above reproach and blameless. Here is how one commentator summarizes their meaning: *...it is a high and mature standard that speaks of being a consistent example. It is God's demand that His steward live in such a holy manner that his preaching would never be in contradiction of his lifestyle, that the pastor's indiscretions never bring shame on the ministry, and that the shepherd's hypocrisy not undermine the flock's confidence in the ministry of God².* I think at some level all of us know, even young children, how important this quality is. A synonym might be "integrity" which means being complete or undivided. How easy is it to respect, let alone be led, by someone who does not practice what they preach? A man who requires of his children what he does not require of himself WILL embitter his children. A leader in the church who calls those under his charge to that which he does not set the example for WILL disillusion and anger his people. Even worse, perhaps, are men who attempt to bring their unbiblical ways and patterns into the church and destroy its testimony in the world – they are in danger of hell itself (Matthew 15:1-9; Acts 5:1-10). We in the church must be **who we say we are** and we must, with undying perseverance, watch over ourselves and each other, lest the credibility of the church be destroyed.

² MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry*

What the Leader Must Be (vv. 2, 3, 8)

Next, we will consider the positive qualities of character that begin to unpack the ideas of blameless and above reproach. They are sober-minded (v. 2), self-controlled (v.2), respectable (v.2), dignified (v.8), and gentle (v.3). Rather than looking at these individually, we'll consider them together as a picture or portrait, as each word carries its own meaning fairly readily. Here we have a man that is clear-minded and vigilant, he is aware of the needs, hopes, and desires of both his immediate family and his extended family, the church. He works hard to bring his public life into line with his private life. He is ever aware that *all* of life is God's and he is accountable before him. He is consistent. He is careful. He understands that what he says and how he says it matters, and therefore is continually self-aware, that is, biblically evaluating what he has said or done or is about to say and do. He does not use his position or his power to manipulate people. Rather, he expresses conviction and kindness simultaneously being ever careful that unneeded damage is not done. He takes care of sins and offences promptly. Hence he is regarded by those around him as trustworthy, credible, and honorable.

What the Leader Must Not Be (vv. 3, 8)

What must a leader not be? A drunkard or addicted to much wine (vv.3, 8), violent (v.3), quarrelsome or double-tongued (vv.3, 8), and a lover of money or greedy for dishonest gain (vv.3, 8). I believe that we can extend the prohibition against drunkenness and addiction to wine to all forms of addiction including any substance that would master us. Quarrelsome and double-tongued refer to aspects of the godly leader, both his speech and interpersonal interactions. Quarrelsome people must always have it their way and are obviously upset when it is not. They can find something wrong about anything. Whereas the double-tongued individual is frequently guilty of deceit, whether it be in exaggeration, candy-coating, telling a half-truth, telling a whole lie, or saying one thing while doing another. The violent are controlled by their emotions and are characterized by outbursts that may or may not result in physical violence – but will certainly be evidenced in words and emotions. One who loves money and is greedy is someone who “does not care how he makes money” so long as he makes it. He will engage in questionable or risky pursuits and be willing to sacrifice things more important such as church attendance or relationships with wife and children to make or obtain money.

It is interesting to note that Paul, in effect, instructs Timothy to see to it that leaders in the church possess these qualities. This assumes that such qualities are observable and can be judged as present or not in varying degrees. What this means for men at Clearcreek is that they can go to those who know them well, especially perhaps, their wives, and ask them, “Am I quarrelsome? Am I gentle? Do you feel that I am growing in self-control.” And women, you will benefit your husbands greatly by answering honestly and lovingly.

Qualities of Home (vv. 2, 4, 12)

Next Paul instructs Timothy that the homes and domestic lives of those who lead in the church should have certain qualities: First, he is to be a one woman man (vv.2, 12). While there are many aspects we could discuss of this, we'll limit our comments to simply this: Men, you should be in love with only one woman – emotionally, physically, socially, etc. If you are constantly wondering how your life would be if only... You are not meeting this requirement. Next, your home is to be characterized by hospitality, which is, love for strangers – today, in Christian circles this has somehow come mostly to mean love for friends. Hospitality is not simply having Christian friends over for dinner who are in little need of your generosity and are certain to return the favor, though this is kind. Consider Christ's words in Luke 14:12-14: *When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.*

There are two other qualities of home that are noted here and these two are different as they come to us with a rationale. A leader in the church is to manage his own household well which includes keeping his children submissive (vv. 4, 12). The home is a proving ground for leadership in the church. Paul says clearly that if a man cannot lead in his home then how will he do it in the church? Paul's argument is the same here. Men whose children are always out of control, who disrespect adults, and do not obey their parents will not lead in the church. Households that are continually on the brink of ruin or chaos, that are known for strife and disharmony, and that are in constant disarray or disrepair for lack of attention are unlikely to be headed by godly men who are equipped for leadership in the church. The principle here is this, what happens at home does not stay at home. A man must learn to lead at home before he will lead in the church. Need help? Look around. There are many godly men, young and old, who are doing this with great adeptness. Find one, ask for their help, and humbly submit yourself to their wise and biblical counsel.

There is an important caveat to admit into our thinking here. It comes to us in an apparent tension in the text. Godly men who work hard to lead well in their marriages may have disruptive, unruly, and ungodly wives. Godly men who work hard to lead in the home may have disobedient and rebellious children. While I believe this will generally be the exception, it highlights this most important of facts: Wives, you can paralyze your husband's leadership in the church. Children and teens, you have the ability, the power, the potential to ruin your father's ministry – to limit his potential to serve and lead in the church. You do this by discrediting his ability to lead in his own home. Beware that in your stubbornness or lack of obedience that you do not cheat the church of the effective ministry of your husband or father. In turn, you should realize that you have a tremendous opportunity to serve the church well by working in harmony with your husband/father to produce a home that is managed well, establishing the credibility of your man in the church.

Qualities of Faith (v. 9)

Finally in verse 9 we are told that “They [deacons] must hold the mystery of faith with a clear conscience.” In Titus 1:9, a parallel passage, we are told that elders “must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught.” At the heart of the person who leads in the church is conviction – a God-enabled grip on not only the fundamental teachings of the faith, but on Christ himself, who is the gospel (Eph 3: 4 ff). If you are wondering how is it I become all that God, through Paul, is requiring of me here (what to be, what not to be, what my home should be like, etc.). The answer is here. Hold firm to the Word, which is Christ himself. Hold to him in a way that gives neither your conscience nor anyone around you any reason to condemn you. A vigilant and sober man will tend to his conscience, especially as it is ever-more shaped by the Word. He will not ignore its protestations but will check them against the Word as applied by the Holy Spirit. If are sitting here this morning with a conscience that is not at ease, PAY ATTENTION, you may not be holding firmly to the mystery of the faith, Christ.

Conclusion

As we move toward wrapping up this morning I’d like to make a few final observations. Note that in v.13 there is a reflexive principle: *For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.* God-honoring leadership in the church will yield benefits for the individual, but more importantly for the church. Such men will grow in respect and honor among others and in turn their credibility is further established which protects the body. And, such men will grow faith and assurance which will allow them to better serve and lead the body, both at home and in the church. The Lord is gracious in that he blesses us in obedience, and that he blesses us through his body.

I want to strongly urge men to take with grave seriousness the issue of leadership in the church. Avoid these errors: 1) God is sovereign, therefore whether or not I am a man after the heart of 1 Timothy 3:1-13 does not matter. Not one word in the Bible supports your “reasoning.” May that sentiment never be found in our minds or on our lips. 2) I do not lead in the church, therefore I do not need to pay close attention to this sermon. You DO lead in the church if not only in your own home. 3) The church is beyond help – it will never be what God has called it to be. There is no way we can stand strong, like pillars and buttresses. I’ll address that in a moment, but first consider this: Here is bald truth, the reputation of Clearcreek Chapel, therefore of *Christ himself*, rises and falls on the character of men in the church. The stakes men, are very, very, high. If you know yourself as I know myself – the picture is grim. If the reputation of Christ is on my shoulders – then with certainty the church is doomed for I am nothing like a pillar or buttress. Where is our hope?

Dear brother, our hope is not in adopting a cultural idea of masculinity or anti-femininity, it is not in bearing our chests and cursing, it is not in running roughshod over those who challenge or despise us, our hope is in the Word, chapter 3, verse 16 to be exact. How do we come to be what chapter 3 calls us to? *Great is the mystery of godliness.* “Godliness” here refers to a manner of living, godly conduct. Paul presumes the question, “How can mere men ever be buttresses and pillars of the truth? Those who are above reproach and blameless?” I do not know, it is a mystery? Beloved, rejoice mightily and shout for joy, the mystery is solved, the question is answered in the song that completes v. 16:

*He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.*

Our answer is in Christ, our gospel, our hope, our strength. Our ability is not in our masculinity – we need not prize it to any greater degree than what the Scriptures warrant. It is in Christ. So, men, you can and you must be those who are above reproach and are blameless, you must be pillars and buttresses, that the household of God might stand for truth with mightiness!