

The qualities of the elder

1 Timothy 3.1-13 / Titus 1.5-9

In Matthew 16, Jesus Christ says to his disciple, Peter, I will build my church. For Jesus, the church is his church, the church of which he is the architect, the builder and the head. And if that's true, it means that everything that happens in the church, all church activity, all church decision is under the authority of Jesus Christ. This is his church. And in his church he's the one who decides. The church of Jesus Christ is governed by the Word of Jesus Christ, the will of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. In all things, we ask the question, "What does Jesus want us to do in this situation?" Jesus did give clear instructions on how his church is to function, to be organized.

In a few weeks, we will be choosing elders to lead our church. And the most important question we can ask is, "What does Jesus say about choosing elders in his church?" "Does Jesus have anything to say about the men who will be the leaders in his church?" And the answer is yes. Jesus revealed his will to us in his Word. Jesus, through the mouths of his apostles, gave us precise instructions not only on the role and responsibilities of elders, but also on the qualities or aptitudes necessary in the life of the elder.

The main teaching in the Bible about the character or qualities of the elder is found in two different books, but they are two books written by the apostle Paul, 1 Timothy and Titus. Paul dedicated his life to church planting in Asia Minor and Europe. It is he who instructs Titus to establish elders in each city. And he is the one who writes to two young church leaders to tell them about the qualities needed in the lives of elders.

And we must study these lists with a spirit of prayer to let the Word of God guide us in choosing elders. We pray to God, "Show us the men you want to be chosen as elders in the church." And in response, God directs us to these two passages. If we take the two lists together, there are between 15 and 20 qualities or gifts required. Some are so similar that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the qualities. We can classify them into three groups and this will help us to study and understand them. There is the teaching of the elder that we looked at last Sunday and then there is the character of the elder and the family or home of the elder.

But before we meditate on these groupings let us observe two general truths concerning these lists and the elders.

First, we see that **these are essential qualities**. Look at verse 2 in 1 Timothy and verse 7 in Titus 1. Look at the first two words in each of the verses: "They must be".

The Bible doesn't say it's desirable, it's better. "they must be". It is essential, imperative.

These qualities are non-negotiable. We are not looking for 10 out of 20. We are looking for 20/20.

The elder must be all of these things, have all of these qualities. It is true that very, very few men will have all of these qualities fully developed. Some of those qualities will be there in bud form, not fully developed, but they have to be there.

Some of these qualities and gifts will need to be developed, but they will all be evident.

The other thing to note at the beginning and I say this because some of you have asked the question: **An elder must be a man**

In 1 Tim 2.12, Paul says, "I do not permit the woman to teach, nor to take authority over the man". It is not my intention to preach on this passage this morning, but it is important to note what is being taught. This prohibition is not because the woman is in any way inferior to the man. Nothing in the Bible suggests that a woman is inferior to a man. There is a whole lot of teaching about the different roles of men and women, but nothing to say that there is any superiority or inferiority. The ban here has nothing to do with abilities. It is not that she lacks spiritual maturity. Paul's argument is based on the order of creation, on what happened during the Fall. We must refuse any teaching which says that a man is superior to women, that a man is more important in the sight of God than a woman. This is not the case. But we believe the Bible teaches that the role of elder, leader with authority in the church is a role reserved for men.

Let's now look at what the Word of God says about the character of the elder and the home of the elder.

The character of the elder - It is interesting to note that the vast majority of what Paul says about the qualities of the elder is about his character. About three quarters of the qualities relate to the character of a man. And in both lists, the first quality is the same: "The elder must be beyond reproach / blameless". Do not think that this means that the elder has a morally perfect life. If Paul demanded this, there would be no more elders in the church. Here is what the American pastor, John MacArthur says: "To be blameless means that his life is free from any objectionable character flaw in a Christian that would prevent him from setting the bar very high in matters of holy conduct. The elder must be a role model for the assembly and give the enemies of the church no pretext to sully his reputation. The elder is a man who reflects the character of Jesus in an exemplary fashion, free from apparent sins. He is orderly in his conduct, righteous and holy."

Appointment of blameless men to the role of elders fosters confidence in the church in its spiritual leaders. There can be no legitimate doubts about his character. You don't choose an elder thinking, "I'm going to vote for him, even though I know in his professional life he's far from honest." "I will vote for him but I have doubts because I often see him get angry with his wife." The elder is blameless. And when you look at the qualities of character listed here, you could summarize them as follows: There has to be self-control in the life of the elder. The elder knows how to manage, master, control his thoughts, emotions and desires.

Titus 1: 8 says he must be "master of himself." Look at the list in 1 Timothy 3 for things that speak of self-control: Sober (watchful, lucid) self-controlled (thoughtful, moderate). Paul talks about the elder who knows how to manage and control his thoughts. He does not make decisions without first thinking a lot. He knows how to calmly analyze the situation. He is careful and not thoughtless.

The elder also manages to control his carnal desires. 1 Tim 2.3 "Let him not be addicted to wine" We see the same thing in Titus 1.7. A drinker has no place in the ministry, a man who cannot say "no". It is not enough to never get drunk, but the elder should be a model of moderation, of discipline when it comes to alcohol. But there are other carnal appetites that he must master. He needs to come to grips with his desire for sleep, his desire for leisure, TV, his computer, games, his appetite for food. He must not be a glutton. Paul writes to Titus in verse 7 that the elder should not be greedy for gain, not be a slave to materialism, not to seek wealth at all costs. He is not a slave to his property, to his money. The elder must not be dominated by carnal desires but rather master them, hold them in submission. We also see that the elder must control his emotions. 1 Timothy 3.3: He must not be violent but peaceful. Titus 1.7 "Let him not be arrogant or angry." Why is this so important? The elder will have to do with stubborn sheep, who provoke him, who do not share his point of view, who are aggressive towards him, who bite him and in all these things, in the face of enormous provocations, in the face of accusations sometimes false, he must carefully guard himself against a spirit of hostility, bitterness and anger.

There will be conflicts and disagreements in the life of a church, and the church needs elders who seek to resolve them calmly, reasonably, and without the slightest animosity. We need elders who are able to manage conflicts with a perfect mastery of their emotions and their words. The character of the elder

The home of the elder

While Paul insists that the elder manage his own character well, it is also essential that he manage his own home. One commentator said that how a man manages his own home is an entrance exam for the elder's role. Before we go any further, it must be said that Paul did not exclude from this role men who are not married or who do not have children. Paul points out the benefits of being celibate in the ministry elsewhere. He is talking here about cases where the elder is married and has children. And in these cases, it is as if God gives the elder a mini community to manage, a mini community of which he is the shepherd or the elder, his family, at home. God asks him to lead his own home, to take care of his own family, to be a pastor to his wife and children and to others who benefit from his hospitality.

His relationship with his wife

In both passages Paul speaks of an elder who is "Husband of one wife." Some commentators suggest that here Paul is talking about the men who had several wives who were converted and instead of getting rid of his wives he remained married to several wives. Paul says such a man cannot be an elder. But as far as I know we do not have men in the church married to more than one woman. So what does this phrase teach us? It should be understood that the elder is a man who loves one woman, who is faithful to one woman. In his heart, in his thoughts, in his life in church and in the world, he is devoted and faithful to one woman. He flees like the plague, any situation where he can indulge in some impurity with another woman. He puts limits in his life that he refuses to cross. He avoids any situation that could lead to a moral or sexual fall. The ideal is that the elder has as a rule in his life, never to be alone with a woman, other than his wife. I saw this in practice last week. A married Christian man came to see me at our house, but I had to go pick up Matthew from school. And instead of going into our home alone with my wife, he stayed outside until I got back. He honored his wife and he was blameless in his relationship with a sister in Christ.

And what about the elder's relationship with his wife. He loves her. He understands her. He knows how to lead her, encourage her. He knows how to speak to her gently. He knows how to console her. He cherishes her. He and his wife are not always arguing, hurting each other by their harsh words. There is harmony, oneness in Christ. There is no tug of war between the elder and his wife.

But all this does not mean that there is never a disagreement in their relationship. That doesn't mean his marriage will never go through rough times, that there will never be tension between the elder and his wife. But the man of God will know how to manage and deal with these difficult times. The elder will assume his responsibilities in the relationship to direct towards solutions, to seek help, if necessary. The marriage of the elder will not be the perfect marriage, but it will be a manifestation of the power of the gospel. It will be a marriage where forgiveness is asked for and given. It will be a marriage built on grace.

His relationship with his children

1 Timothy 3: 4: "Let him rule his own house well and hold his children in submission with perfect respect" Titus 1.6 "having faithful children who are neither accused of debauchery nor unruly".

Paul gives a very simple reason for this quality in the elder. 1 Timothy 3.5 "For if one does not know how to run his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?" Do you see Paul's logic? He said: If you want to know if a man has the qualities necessary to lead in the church, first look at his ability to lead his own family. If you want to see if a man is able to exercise authority over the lives of God's children, first see if he exercises authority over the lives of his own children. If you want to know if he is able to teach the Word of God, if he is able to convince of the urgency of salvation and obedience to the Word of God, if he knows how to lead others to salvation and sanctification, first see if he does it with his children. If he does not do it within his own family, we have no reason to believe that he will do so within the family of God.

Paul tells Timothy about children who submit to their father with perfect respect. Members of the church will have to respect the elder. Do his children do it? The members of the church will have to submit to his authority. Do his children do it?

In Titus 1.6 we read that the elder will have "faithful children, who are neither accused of debauchery nor unruly". "Faithful" children. We must seek to understand what Paul means here when he says "faithful". Does he mean "believing"? This word can be translated "believing" and some commentators say it is so for this verse. Other commentators tell us that Paul speaks of the loyalty or obedience of children to their fathers. Children are faithful, trustworthy and not given to debauchery or unruly. I am sure Paul is talking about the spiritual management of the family. Every Christian father has a responsibility to teach, to educate, to pray, to call them to repent, to follow Jesus. He does it all with love, with meekness, with humility, relying on the grace and wisdom of God, day in and day out. The father must not put an obstacle in front of his children, prevent them from believing by his anger, his laziness, by a toxic or chaotic atmosphere. But after all that, no father, elder or not, can save his child. No father can force his child to believe. No father can repent for his child. Often the children of believing parents will themselves come to faith in Christ. Children of believers have enormous privileges. Their parents, under the direction of the father, do everything to bring their children to faith and repentance, but they cannot save them. And the elder is a father who does everything to bring his children to faith in Christ.

The character of the elder - We saw last Sunday that he is a man devoted to the word, able to teach and this morning we see that he is a blameless man who controls his thoughts, his emotions, his desires. He is a man who loves his wife and leads his family in the faith. I am sure we have men in the church who have the qualities described here. I pray that God will give us such men to do the work of the elder. Every church needs such men. We need them. But more than that, these men need Jesus, his work of grace, the transforming work of his Spirit. They need his forgiveness, day after day. And while the elders of the church have an important role to play in the life of every member of the church, the elders are still imperfect men and the elders are there to direct us to Jesus.

No elder possesses all of these qualities perfectly. But every elder leans on the one man who perfectly meets all of these criteria, and that is Jesus. Jesus, the man perfectly attached to the Word who taught it with power and authority. Jesus, the blameless man, the man without sin, without blemish. Jesus, the man who has always perfectly controlled his emotions, his thoughts, his desires, who has never said an inappropriate or cruel word, who has never given in to temptation. Jesus, the man who loved his bride, his church and gave his life for his bride, who sanctifies her, who prays for her, who leads her. Jesus, the man who leads his family, who strengthens it in the faith, who gave his life for its salvation. Dear brothers and sisters, may God give us men who direct us to this Jesus.