

Christ Design for His Church - Part IV – Elders

Three weeks ago we began the third chapter of 1st Timothy by examining Christ's relationship with His church and the church's relationship with leadership we put these into proper perspective. I clarified the proper relationship between leadership and the congregation using the five positions of headship, priesthood, authority, leadership and eldership. Two key verses we looked at where, "...Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior." (Ephesians 5:23) Elders are to serve as under-shepherds of Christ. Further, it is the purpose and life of the church to come together as Acts 2:42 says, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." These four elements are key to a healthy church.

Two weeks ago we looked at what it means to serve sacrificially as a pastor, but also God's call for all believers to serve. The Apostle Peter instructed, "... you, meaning every believer, **are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession**, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10) **All believers in Christ, as Christ's body, are His priests and ministers.** Jesus' design for His Church goes beyond how an individual church community is to function and live out the scriptures. Christ's church is to be global. As John wrote in Revelation, "Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and **made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father**, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (Revelation 1:5-6) All of Christ's true and faithful church communities, known as the remnant, make up His kingdom.

You are not priests of God because you desire to be, but because God ordains it. Very simply put, every believer is a priest of God through the authority of Jesus Christ. Therefore, every Christian is to be a minister of the gospel.

Last week we examined 11 character traits listed in verses 2 and 3 of 1st Timothy chapter 3 that define a man's qualification to serve as an elder or overseer. The beginning of verse two gives us the purpose of this list of character traits, please look in your Bible at verse 2, "Therefore an overseer must be above reproach." If a man's character reflects God's character, he gives no cause for dishonor to the Church or to Christ. The unsaved world belonging to the devil waits eagerly for elders to fall. After the service last week Richard so accurately reminded me that this is not just true for elders, but for all men as they are called to pastor their homes. The result being our wives and children are shepherded well and their lives infused with the Word of God. The church is a community made up of families that honors God. When the community lives out the Word of God the unsaved world can find no offense, other than their own sin, and the church represents Christ so well that the unsaved desire to know more about Christ and what it means to live holy.

An Elder's Life of Integrity

This morning we finish Paul's outlining of the calling and qualifications for an elder within Christ's church found in verses 4 to 7. All of the character traits listed in verses 2 and 3 are important and for a man to fulfill them takes intelligence, diligence, vision to lead, administrative skills, decisiveness, courage and faithfulness. However, spiritual leadership will not work without integrity. In the business world integrity is sought after and at times found. However, integrity can be set aside if the financial goals of the business are met. In the spiritual leadership of Christ's Church integrity is an absolute requirement.

I am reminded of Theodore Roosevelt during his time as a rancher. **Teddy and one**

of his cowpunchers lassoed a maverick steer, lit a fire, and prepared the branding irons. Then, Teddy began looking around and realized that Gregor Lang, one of Roosevelt's neighbors, claimed the part of the range they were on. According to the cattleman's rule, the steer therefore belonged to Lang. As his cowboy readied to apply the brand, Roosevelt said, "Wait, it should be Lang's brand." "That's all right, boss," said the cowboy. "But you're putting on my brand," Roosevelt said. "That's right nobody will know," said the man. "Drop that iron," Roosevelt demanded, "and get back to the ranch and get out. I don't need you anymore. **A man who will steal for me will steal from me.**" It seems today in business stealing is not a problem; just getting caught is the only problem. Profit motive outweighs the need for integrity. Integrity in the church is everything because Christ is everything and when integrity is lost, souls can be lost. They are lost not for a short time or even a lifetime, but for eternity.

Vincent Lombardi who is considered one of the greatest football coaches of all time began his career as a high school coach. Because of his success he became a college coach and then he coached at West Point, New York Giants and Green Bay Packers. As a head coach his lifetime winning record was 73.8%. How did he accomplish this amazing feat? He believed everything in life was built upon the basics of doing the little things right. He was a man of integrity beginning with the little things upon which the larger things are built. So it is with our faith in Christ.

First a man must have integrity in his faith and relationship with Christ. Integrity is the living out of what you believe. If one teaches and preaches something different than what they truly believe at some point, it will become clear, they are hypocrites. One who desires to lead people to live a Christ-like life must be a living example of a Christ-like life. This begins with their personal relationship with Christ and upon that is built their family life and upon the family life is built the community life of the church.

An Elder's Home Life

Verses 4 and 5 read, “He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” It is not enough for an overseer or elder to live a life of integrity as an individual but he must he also live a life of integrity at home, a life that includes his wife and children. Lombardi knew that to have respect from his players and the ability to teach them the fundamentals of the game and to enable them to be the best players they could be, he had to live with integrity in his personal life and his family life. This is true for an elder as well. How can an elder lead Christ’s church in spiritual growth if his personal or family life is fractured. How can a man lead his family in spiritual growth if his personal life is marred with inconsistent behavior or behavior that lacks integrity? **The standard set in scripture is that a man must have a strong personal relationship with Christ to lead his family well.** It is upon this foundation that is built an elder’s ability to lead the church. This does not mean that a single man cannot lead, but the norm is that leaders are men already leading their families well.

I want you to think of some of the religious cults and problems that have arisen throughout church history. Think of the problem of legalism that is found among some churches, which is also found in all the cults. Think of this as I read what Paul said would happen two thousand years ago. “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.” (1 Timothy 4:1-5) These are the opposite of the qualities that Christ wants in his leaders. Spiritual

leaders live out God's Word not with legalism, they hold fast to God's Word but do so with love and compassion.

A leader **“must manage his own household well.”** The word “manage” implies and means to influence others and to cause people to follow the true path. For us, as believers in Christ, the true path is what the scriptures teach. This is not autocratic rule, but the exercise of authority to guide and direct people on the true path. If one cannot do this within their own home, how could they hope to do so in a church community made up of many homes? To lead one's own household well means to lead with excellence. The foundation to do so is based on the concept found in the scriptures of servant leadership. Jesus said of Himself as an example for His disciples, **“You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** (Mark 10:42-45) A husband and father is to put the needs, I did not say the wants, but the needs of his wife first, his children second and his needs last. This can only be accomplished if he places Christ first before all others. A man's life, like Christ's, is one of service and he is to give his life in service for others. For those called as elders serve first Christ, then family and then the church.

Finally, verse 4, in saying, **“He must manage his own household well.”** Which means something many American do not understand. The biblical model of family or household is multigenerational. I was raised in what I believe is the typical American middle-class white family structure. That structure implied that your family is made up of father, mother and siblings. Other relatives are extended family, not nuclear or immediate and therefore have little influence in one's live. When you graduate from high school you go to trade school or college meet

someone, marry and begin the process of your own family and your parents and siblings are now extended family and their influence quickly wanes. America has paid a high price for its loss of the multigenerational extended families or households. The wealth of knowledge that older people can impart is not used. The scriptures teach that knowledge is imparted by, older men and women, teaching sound doctrine to younger men and women. Joyce and I began to understand the advantages of multigenerational family as missionaries living overseas. In American society we view the elderly as burdens instead of a wealth of knowledge.

In Leviticus chapter 19 we are given statutes we are to obey among this list is, “**You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.**” (Leviticus 19:32) A man who has lived in the fear and awe of God and traveled life through this sinful world has much to teach and like Abraham becomes the patriarch of his household. Overseas a father and husband made no important decision for his wife and children without consulting with and receiving his father’s blessing. As modern day Christians return to the model of family in the scriptures of multigenerational patriarchal families it brings much benefit and in turn builds a stronger and better church community.

Verse 4 concludes with, “**with all dignity keeping his children submissive.**” This does not exclude men without children, but assumes the normal family life structure includes children. An elder’s children, as with the children of all Christian families, should be taught to be respectful first to the Lord, then to their parents and to elder adults in general. Being respectful includes courtesy, humility, obedience and honoring ones parents. In the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses for God’s people, number 5 reads, “**Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.**” (Exodus 20:12)

There are at least four things a father needs to do in order for his children to live with dignity and submissiveness. A father must exercise his authority for children to

learn to obey, but he is to do so for their benefit. As Paul wrote, “For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.” (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12) Second, a father must correct disobedience. Proverbs says, “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.” (Proverbs 13:24) Discipline is for correction not punishment. Third, a father loves his children so they desire to obey in order to please him. Fourth, a father must be able to impart the Word of God in such a way that his children understand the urgency of God’s Word in their lives, the privileges and blessing of God’s Word in their lives and that to live holy is to live in obedience.

An Elder’s Spiritual Maturity

Paul continues with his explanation in verse 6 that an elder “**must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.**” One of the greatest dangers that an elder faces is that of pride. Pride often comes with newness of accomplishments. In this case an elder is not to be a new convert for this rapid advancement to leadership would lend itself to pride. Satan uses men’s pride to cause them to fall into sin and this then would mean they “**fall into the condemnation of the devil.**” Here “**condemnation**” means the state of being condemned and to be judged as guilty. The writer of Proverbs gives us the result of pride and the blessing of submission to the Lord. “**Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.**” ¹⁹ It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud. ²⁰ **Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD.**” (Proverbs 16:18-20) Benjamin Franklin wrote of his life experience saying, “**There is perhaps no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive. Even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility.**”

The opposite of pride is humility, which is a mark of a spiritually mature leader. If a church raises up men to quickly to leadership they may see the Lord later take them out of leadership. Of course, this would affect the reputation of both the man and the church, just as humility in leadership affects the reputation of the church to the unsaved community at large.

An Elder's Reputation

Aptly Paul closes out this section of scripture on the qualifications of an elder in verse 7 with, “Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.” The godly character of an elder must not only be seen in their personal life, his home and the church, but also be evident outside the church to society at large. Nonbelievers may not like God, Christ, the church and Christians, but a leader who is consistent in belief, character and lifestyle will be respected. When Joyce and I were working in El Salvador in the prisons with the gangs, who have be labeled as the most violent in the world, we discovered they respected true Christians. They had no respect for the government or the Catholic Church because they saw them as corrupt. As Paul wrote in Romans, “You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. ²⁴ For, as it is written, ‘The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’ ” (Romans 2:23-24) However, they did respect true Christians for their righteousness, moral character, love, kindness, generosity and goodness. They may not of believed in Christ and they certainly did not believe in living the scriptures but they respected those who did. Living true to the scriptures helps one avoid the “falling into disgrace, and into a snare of the devil.” We live in a time and society where no one takes responsibility for their behavior. Their failure is circumstance or someone else’s fault. The Apostle James wrote, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.” (James 1:13-

14) Even though God tempts no man, Satan would like nothing better than to set a trap to discredit a leader of Christ's church.

Leaders face many temptations in their private and public life. Often they face temptation through discouragement. They become discouraged with their own failure to live up to the high standards of scripture, and they sense failure when they see people they are responsible for leading not grow spiritually or fall away from the Lord. They can be tempted by indifference. Leaders will distance themselves from the flock emotionally to avoid being hurt. Then the intimacy of community life disappears. Leaders can become overwhelmed and begin to look for the easy way to lead and they become spiritually lazy, thus leading to shallow teachings. There is the ever-present temptation to compromise in order to please men instead of God.

This is why the elder must work diligently to keep the armor of God on at all times. Paul wrote, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." (Ephesians 6:11) Taking all that Paul wrote here in these first 7 verses of his letter to Timothy, to elevate a man prematurely into leadership is to expose him to temptation and set him up for failure. The church needs to choose leadership carefully by praying for God's wisdom and direction and by evaluating a man's ability to serve by the standards God has given the church in His Scripture for "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task." (1 Timothy 3:1) It is the church's responsibility; it is your responsibility, to keep the position of elder a noble one, an honorable position before God and man.

So, beloved, let us work together so that Canyon Bible Church will "be well thought of by outsiders" and create a desire in people's hearts to know more about Christ because we live holy before God.