

Christ's Design for His Church: Part II – Eldership

Review of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 Part I

Last week we laid the groundwork for this first paragraph of 1st Timothy 3. To review Christ is the head of each local church and the universal Church of true believers who hold fast to the Scripture of God as He inspired them to be written. In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus we read, "...Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior." (Ephesians 5:23) 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." It is the teaching and preaching of God's Word that builds the foundation in believer's lives. When a community of believers submits themselves to Christ and comes together out of love for Christ and each other, God does mighty works, continuing in verse 43, "And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common." This describes the church Christ wants believers to be part of, committed to and live spiritually and physically in unity with brothers and sisters. Because the church was struggling to get established amid persecution it was materially poor. The people came together and sacrificed in order for the church to not only survive, but also thrive. ⁴⁵ "And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts." They gave sacrificially and did so with glad and generous hearts. They had the right attitude towards Christ and each other.

Today, we look to the scriptures and they teach we should also sacrifice. How? First, we are to give of our first fruits. God asks us to give back to His ministry from our financial income. Are you giving at least 10% of your income? If you are not being faithful in your giving, then you suffer from a heart condition that affects your relationship with God and His with you. The second, is also a heart issue, are you serving His kingdom by helping your brothers and sisters in need, feeding the poor and sharing the gospel with the lost. If not then you will not fully enjoy the blessing of a faithful heart and service found in verse 47, [“praising God and having favor with all the people.”](#) It is in faithful and sacrificial tithing and spiritual living that demonstrates to the lost world how we praise God with our lives. It is this that gains believers favor with unbelievers. As the church stands firm for living the scriptures it is then that [“the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”](#) (Acts 2:42-47)

My older brother is an unbeliever and dislikes Christians for he has observed many to be hypocrites in what they say they believe and how they live. This caused great friction between us in my early years as believer. And he could hardly believe that I would be so completely gullible to give up my career to serve in fulltime ministry. However, over time as he observed my life he came to see that I truly believed and lived out my life in faith, this led to one of the greatest compliments I have received, my unbelieving brother said to me, “You really are who you say you are.” You see this was the Lord’s doing as I lived my life praising Him and He changed my brother’s heart so that I might gain favor.

This is true of the church also; it is not just a human organization. It is an organism, a living body, not a human or physical body, but a spiritual body whose nourishment comes from its Head, who is divine. Thus the universal Church and in specific our church is called to live a supernatural life by the power of Christ, the Holy Scripture

and the Holy Spirit that dwells in every true believer and is most powerfully seen in life lived out in Christ's body, His church.

The scriptures also teach that, "... 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 members of Christ's body, which is His church, is populated by believers in Christ as the only Son of God, fully God, and all believers are priests and ministers. Jesus' design for His Church goes beyond how an individual church community is to function and live out the scriptures. 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 make up His kingdom. You are not priests of God because you desire to be, but because God ordains it. Very simple put, every believer is a priest of God through the authority of Jesus Christ. Every Christian is to be a minister of the gospel.

Last week we also saw that under Christ, the head of this church, the congregation has final authority. The church submits to Christ and those He calls to serve as elders and pastors. The elders serve Christ and His church. There is a tension in this structure, but this structure brings balance.

With this foundation we will begin this morning by exploring the first verse of chapter 3 of 1st Timothy, "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task." Beginning with this verse Paul moves from his

discussion focused on the congregation to that of dealing with leadership, with overseers or elders. Church leadership was fundamental to New Testament teachings because Christ came to bring salvation and it is through His church this is demonstrated to the world. Jesus said to Peter, “I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:18-19) Christ’s gospel spread throughout the world by the life of His church. Therefore, leadership of Christ’s church was important and God gave considerable amount space to the teaching on leadership throughout the New Testament.

Here in 1st Timothy, Paul begins with a list of criteria that men are to be measured by to determine if they are qualified to lead. All of these qualifications are spiritual virtues and character traits that are marks of godly teachers and leaders. Paul does not define the duties of leadership here, but is concerned with their spiritual and moral qualifications.

The office of eldership is vital to the life of the church and it is a calling from God. We are going to spend time exploring this calling: Christ’s calling is a ***required calling***, a ***restricted calling***, a ***righteous calling***, a ***responsible calling***, a ***right calling*** and ***rigorous calling***. I hope we all will gain understanding of God’s design for leadership and eldership by examining these 6 areas as they relate to verse 1 of chapter 3.

Required Calling

Paul begins by writing, “The saying is trustworthy.” This word structure only appears 5 times in the scriptures and always from Paul. Paul used it to introduce an

important truth. This truth is self-evident and does not need to have a case built to prove its truth. Since Paul does not use “The saying is trustworthy” until later in his ministry he is validating what has already become accepted as the normative for Christians and Christ’s church. Here Paul uses this term to refer to the call to ministry, while the other four times Paul is concerned doctrinal matters.

To serve as a pastor in the early church was truly sacrificial; conditions were difficult, there was little money to support a pastor, there was little prestige in being a pastor because the church was being persecuted and because of persecution often a pastor risked his life to lead a church. However, the position of pastor or elder or overseer was critical to Christ’s developing church. On Paul’s first missionary journey accompanied by Barnabas, “they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” (Acts 14:23) We know from Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Hebrews and 1 Peter that wherever the apostles and leaders planted a church there was great effort taken to place elders to preach the gospel and lead the church.

Just as Paul spent time training the new elders in the Word of God, so too, today we have Bible Colleges and Seminaries to train men to serve. These institutions give men tools to use, but they do not call forth elders nor do ordination councils or pulpit committees. These groups recognize those who God has already called and who are already serving. It is the Holy Spirit that changes men, like Paul, to produce spiritual leaders for Christ’s church.

Samuel Brengle wrote of spiritual leadership in the early 20th century, he said spiritual leadership “is not won by promotion, but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confessions of sin, and much heart searching and humbling before God; by self-surrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol, a bold, deathless,

uncompromising and uncomplaining embracing of the cross, and by an eternal, unfaltering, looking unto Jesus crucified. It is not gained by seeking great things for ourselves, but rather, like Paul, by counting those things that are gain to us as loss for Christ. That is a great price, but it must be unflinchingly paid by him who would be not merely a nominal but real spiritual leader of men, a leader whose power is recognized and felt in heaven, on earth and in hell.” The call to lead a church is so important that it is scary. I fought God’s call to become a pastor because of my fear. Working in the mission fields of a number of difficult countries and even attempts on my life did not scare me, as did the thought of pastoring a church. God was patient and worked in my life and gently brought me to the point where I could submit to His calling.

Restricted Calling

Verse 3 reads, “The saying is trustworthy: If **anyone** aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” I quoted English Standard translation, but the American Standard, King James and several others read, “if any **man** aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*.” The Greek does not indicate gender in verse one. The qualification for the person to be male comes verse 2, “**husband of one wife**” and the male possessive determiners found in verses 4 to 7. So then, the call to church leadership of elder, overseer or pastor is restricted to men who meet the qualifications. This restriction helps to define and clarify what Paul wrote in the prior paragraph “Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.” (1 Timothy 2:11-15) This is not to say women are not of vital

importance to the life of the church and their home. God has assigned different roles for men and women. As His image bearers and children, they are spiritual equals. I know that this restriction is hotly contested in many churches. However, here at Canyon Bible we accept the Scripture as the inspired Word of God and as such we accept it as He gave it.

Righteous Calling

Men who seek the office of overseer or elder must have a Spirit imparted undeniable desire to serve. Again back to verse 1, [“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.”](#) The word “aspires” appears only 3 times in the New Testament and means to “reach out for” or to grasp something. This is not describing one’s personal motive or desire, but one who is taking steps to be obedient to God and taking steps to be an overseer or elder. The Greek implies the word “aspire” means having passionate compulsion to serve God. When we put these two implied meanings together it describes a man who is pursuing ministry because of driving force the Holy Spirit has given him to serve.

For one called to serve in ministry they work hard to prepare and no other life or position will give them peace. There is nothing else he can do to fulfill himself spiritually. This is important for when a person serves with a heart of love for Christ and His people there will be trials filled with heartache. It is God’s given sense of purpose that carries one through they trials.

So if the driving force within is from God to serve, it is good or noble. However, if the desire to serve as an elder is from personal ambition of whatever reason, well then, this will end in tragedy. Those truly called are not called to the office or title, but to service. Ambition for office or title corrupts.

The guideline for the right calling and of love and of service is found in the words of Christ as He spoke to 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) Just as Christ came to serve, so too, a pastor is a servant of the flock Christ has entrusted to his care. He is to love his flock, protect them and be willing to be sacrificed for them.

Responsible Calling

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the **office of overseer**, he desires a noble task.” Having oversight of the spiritual life a church is no easy task in truth it is a sobering responsibility. God speaks concerning this responsibility in Hebrews, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” (Hebrews 13:17) Leaders will have to give an accounting to God of how faithfully they led and how true they preached and how deeply they loved their people. Further it is through the teaching and preaching of the Word of God that the saints are equipped for service and unbelievers hear the truth of Christ. James adds a warning to those who preach, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” (James 3:1) There have been times when I fear that I will draw the wrong conclusions from the scriptures as I study and this is the reason I spend protracted amounts of time in study and prayer before each Sunday. You, see, there is so much revising of the scriptures and redefining of the

meanings of God's Word it can take time to sort through the tares to reach the kernel of wheat.

What are the responsibilities of an overseer or elder? According to 1 Timothy chapter 5, elders or overseers are to rule and teach and preach. In James chapter 5 we see they are to pray for the sick. Peter, a man after my own heart, says the elders are to care for the church and be examples for others to follow. (1 Peter 5:1-2) Luke writes that elders are to set church policy. (Acts 15:22-35) Paul instructed Timothy to train and ordain other leaders. (1 Timothy 4:14)

Right Calling

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, *he desires a noble task.*” To serve as an elder is a noble calling and task. John Wycliffe, who was a key figure in the Protestant Reformation of the 14th century wrote, “*The highest service that men may attain to on earth is to preach the Word of God.*” Jesus Christ's main ministry was not healing and miraculous signs and wonders, but the preaching and teaching of the gospel of salvation. Thus, pastors should do the same. This is what I desire to do and work at by preaching the right Word of God.

I see the calling to preach the Word of God and lead His church, which He purchased with His blood, as the highest calling I could ever imagine. Though, like Moses, I was reluctant at first, but God brought me, like Moses, to the place we have a heart submitted to Him and I desire to do nothing else.

Rigorous Calling

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, *he desires a noble task.*” Ministry is work or a multifaceted life of tasks. If one desires an easy time, as was often depicted in the movies of the 1940s and 50s, it is not ministry life

today and I do not believe it has ever been easy. Paul in his 2nd letter commanded Timothy, “As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:5) Paul also reminded the believers in Thessalonica, “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who *labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13) Here the word translated as “*labor” means to work oneself to the point of exhaustion. Ministry is not a 9 to 5 job because God has entrusted people’s lives to be cared for and protected. This is the reason Paul said, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that ~~he~~ *Holy Spirit* powerfully works within me.” (Colossians 1:28-29) A pastor serves and works, not by his own power, but by the power of God.

The position of elder or pastor is a sacred one and this is why Paul also warned Timothy, “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, *(Paul is warning Timothy to not ordain men to quickly, but be patient and observe them. Observe what is it that they love, which can be determined by where they put their energy and efforts.)*, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. *(Bringing someone into leadership that is not qualified exposes one to their sins and can create problems not only for leadership to serve with unity of purpose, but also cause division in the church)* ²³ (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) ²⁴ The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. ²⁵ So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.” (1 Timothy 5:22-25) Some men may fain outwardly all the right behavior in order to get what their ambition desires, but they cannot sustain that unnatural behavior for long.

Christ's divine call to leadership places a divine passion in the man's heart to serve His people. It is the congregation that either confirms or rejects that calling based on how the man's life measures up to the standards God has placed in the scriptures. It is these standards found in verses 2 to 7 that we will be exploring next Lord's Day.

Let me close our time in God's Word this morning with prayer.

Q and A:

 Elders.