



“THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ELDER”

1 Timothy 3:2-7

Parts 1 & 2

Theme: *There are aspects of a spiritual leader’s reputation that are essential.*

Introduction: Military tactics for a long time forbade the shooting of officers by enemy soldiers. During the battle of Brandywine in the Revolutionary War, a British soldier had the opportunity to shoot General Washington, but refused because it would not be “gentlemanly.” However, Morgan formed a band of sharpshooters which evolved into the modern snipers, and they recognized that with such an inferior force, one of the ways to capture advantage is to eliminate the officers and thus weaken the enemy force through the lack of leadership. Additionally, they sat atop horses which provided an excellent target for those with “long guns.” It was considered despicable and a violation of conventional standards of the day for a “professional army.”

Satan realizes that leaders provide the greatest target for mischief in the Church. If he can strike an elder, luring, tempting, seducing, illegitimizing, and compromising, he can weaken and defeat the effectiveness of an entire church. In Matthew 26:31 – Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7. The antithesis of this principle is given by Paul in 1 Timothy 4:16. If faithfulness to the truth will “ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” then unfaithfulness to the truth will ensure the falling away “for those who hear you.” Hence Paul realizes that if shepherds fall, many will fall away. Therefore, it is necessary that spiritual leaders be men of integrity in whom exist a clear manifestation of grace. Our text today emphasizes that **“there are aspects of a spiritual leader’s reputation that are essential.”**

- I. Freedom from Indictment – 3:2a
- II. Freedom from Imbalance – 3:2b
- III. Freedom from Ignorance – 3:2c
- IV. Freedom from Indulgence – 3:3



I. FREEDOM FROM INDICTMENT – 3:2a

A. The Requirement for Overseers

1. Given the role overseers provide to the integrity and strength of the church by means of influences that have eternal consequences, Paul states: **“An overseer, then, must be ...”**
2. **“must be”** [δεῖ οὕτως] – of essential necessity; something that must be; non-negotiable.
3. The emphasis here is that God has a standard for leaders that can only be

compromised to the detriment of the Church.

4. As we look at the qualifications for spiritual leaders, we must recognize that no church is free to determine what these qualifications are – God has dictated that if a church is to be strong, it must have strong leaders.
5. The notion that anyone who wants to serve ought to be able to serve is unbiblical.
6. Certainly, a desire to serve is the subjective aspect of a qualified spiritual leader that is between God and the man – something only the individual man can assess.
7. No leader ought to be compelled to serve if God has not stirred the desire within him; but elders cannot serve “under compulsion, but voluntarily” – cp. *1 Peter 5:2*.
8. However, simply having the desire without the objective qualifications falls short of the divine standard necessary for a man to serve the Church – many a man has yearned to be “in charge,” but their spiritual maturity prevents it.

B. The Reputation of Overseers

1. Hence, God has provided this 2nd qualification of an overseer – describing the reputation and objective element in setting a man into the office.
2. It is necessary that he be “*above reproach*” [ἀνεπίλη(μ)πτος] the emphasis is on the absence of guilt where it means “*having no handles.*”
3. Essentially, this means that “*his life has not been marred by some obvious sinful defect in character which would preclude him setting the highest standard for godly conduct.*”¹
 - a) *His life must not provide an opportunity for Satan to discredit the Gospel.*
 - b) *His life must be ready to endure the stricter judgment of which we are warned.*
 - c) *His life must not disprove in conduct what he teaches in word – “lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues.”*²
4. In Titus 1, the term “*above reproach*” [ἀνέγκλητος] - means not just the absence of guilt, but the presence of an unmarred reputation – cp. *Colossians 1:22*.
5. Unfortunately, we have reached a period in church history where evangelicalism prefers to have men who are “marred” in reputation as it accomplishes two things:

¹ MacArthur, p. 103.

² Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, pp. 63.

- a) *It enables us to have our own consciences assuaged.*
- b) *It enables us to feel like a pastor can “relate” to us in our struggles.*

II. FREEDOM FROM IMBALANCE – **3:2b**

A. *“Husband of one wife”* - literally a “one woman man” [μῑᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνῆρ].

1. Various explanations of this term exist:
 - a) *He cannot be divorced.*
 - b) *He cannot remarry if widowed.*
 - c) *He can have one wife at a time.*
 - d) *He must be married.*
 - e) *He can have only one wife living.*
2. However, the essence of this qualification is that he is renown as a man who demonstrates devotion to one woman for life: “for as long as we both shall live.”
3. It bans a “womanizer” – a man whose eyes are constantly prowling for satisfaction from the attention of females – ***2 Peter 2:14***.

B. *“Temperate”* - [νηφάλιος] – lit. = “wineless”

1. It refers to the state of being “sober.”
2. It is the freedom from excesses of passion or extreme, renown for restraint in conduct through the exercise of self-control because you are clear-headed.

C. *“Prudent”* [σώφρων] – this is the “distillation” of being sober – and becomes a quality of being in control of self; thoughtful to avoid extremes so that responsible actions are deliberately sought.

D. *“Respectable”* - [κόσμιος] – lit. = “orderly” – cp. “adorn” in v. 2:9

1. It refers to being characterized by qualities that evoke admiration or delight.
2. It is the opposite of having a life that is a mess – or is chaotic and undesirable.

E. *“Hospitable”* - [φιλόξενος] – lit. = “lover of strangers”

1. It shows the kind of maturity that exists by the ability to extend oneself to others to include them in one’s life.
2. It avoids seeking to preserve one’s solitude at all costs and causes a spiritual leader to open himself and his home up for all the see and enjoy.
3. This is something we seek to have characterized even our church

generally as we welcome new people into the assembly all the time.

4. All of these characteristics provide a “blamelessness” on the part of the elder pertaining to various imbalances.

III. FREEDOM FROM IGNORANCE – 3:2c

A. The Interest in Truth

1. The anomaly in all these characteristics is this one – “*able to teach*” - [διδασκτικός] which is a skill more than a moral quality.
2. It has led some to claim this term refers to the “ability to be taught” or “teachability” which would bring it into alignment with the other qualifications.
3. However, in the only other place it is used, it clearly refers to the ability to impart knowledge to someone else – cp. 2 Timothy 2:24.
4. However, before a person is “*able to teach*” they must learn what it is they will be teaching.
5. Hence, this qualification requires the prerequisite of being taught – cp. 2 Timothy 2:2.
6. This qualification does not mean that an elder must have the gift of teaching, but that they are familiar enough with the truth that they can explain it and disciple others into the truth.
7. Clearly some within the eldership will be gifted in teaching and they will usually assume the pulpit responsibilities as the teaching pastor.

B. The Imparting of Truth

1. There are two aspects to the activity associated with being “*able to teach*.”
2. First, there is the proactive exhortation of the flock in sound doctrine – cp. Titus 1:9.
3. Second, there is the correcting exhortation of those who are embracing false doctrine – “refute those who contradict.”
 - a) “*refute*” [ἐλέγχω] - *means to scrutinize or examine carefully, bring to light, or expose.*
 - b) “*contradict*” [ἀντιλέγω] - *to speak against or contradict.*

IV. FREEDOM FROM INDULGENCE – 3:3

A. “*Not addicted to wine*” - [πάροινος] – literally, “not beside wine”

1. This characteristic describes a person who is not given to drinking too

much wine.

2. “drunkard” is a way the describe this indulgence – cp. *Isaiah 28:7*.
3. A spiritual leader “*must be a man whose associations are radically different from those of the world, and whose example leads others to righteous conduct, not sin.*”³

B. “Pugnacious” - [πλήκτης] – lit. = “not a giver of blows”

1. This is the man who expresses violent behavior, easily provoked into an altercation.
2. It is a man who “bullies” others through intimidation and outburst of hostility.
3. A spiritual leader must not indulge in his anger, but is able to calmly and meekly respond to wrongs in a way that persuades others of the benefits of grace.

C. “Gentle” - [έπιεικής] – refers to the man who does “not insist on absolute and immediate conformity to every letter of the law;” but is tolerant and courteous; such a one does not hold a grudge.

D. “Peaceable” - [ἄμαχος] – “without a machete”

1. The idea is that such a man is not armed for battle.
2. The spiritual leader must be one who is more interested in unity and conciliation than fighting against other believers.

E. “Free from love of money” - [ἀφιλάργυρος] – a man who is not covetous or materialistic

1. It is the “*love of money*” that lays at the heart of those engaged in false teaching.
2. When the “*love of money*” exists in a spiritual leader, it results in the inevitable straying from the truth and causing many heartaches and disappointments – cp. *1 Timothy 6:10*.
3. When these characteristics are present in a spiritual leader, it provides handles onto which critics can lay hold and make indictments of hypocrisy, imbalance, ignorance, and indulgence.

So What?

1. What handles “stick out” in my life and reputation onto which others might take hold?

³ MacArthur, p. 110.

2. What imbalances exist in my life?
3. In what ways can I become more interested in the truth?
4. Are there ways in which I indulge in anything that would disqualify me from spiritual leadership?
5. If I were to ask someone very close to me: “How can I become more ‘blameless?’” – what would the response would be? ... What should I do about it?

Part 2

A person’s character is most easily observed by the way he conducts himself when no one is watching; or who conducts himself in different ways around different people. We all know the person who acts one way when he or she is around someone they think to be important or who can provide them some advantage who quickly changes when they are in the presence of “underlings.” Flatterers and those who seek to “polish the apple” of the teacher are normally resented by those around them. Their behavior when peers or “inferiors” are around provides a far better analysis of a man’s character. This is often why some spiritual leaders have children who turn away from the faith – their father’s real character is contradictory to the way they portray themselves when around “people who matter.” Although no man is perfect and all men, including the man with the greatest integrity is still a struggler against sin, there is a dynamic and determinative difference between a person who seeks to walk before the One in whose eyes all things are naked and open, seeking to be a person who pleases God and not mere men.

As we continue to observe what God requires of spiritual leaders, we see three essential vantage points of evaluation of a man’s reputation – the church (as we have been observing in the previous verses), the home, and finally the secular world. Failure in any one of these vantage points disqualifies a man from serving as an elder. (Story of Jehu)



Again, by way of review, we see:

There are aspects of a spiritual leader’s reputation that are essential.

- I. Freedom from Indictment – 3:2a
- II. Freedom from Imbalance – 3:2b
- III. Freedom from Ignorance – 3:2c
- IV. Freedom from Indulgence – 3:3
- V. Family Influence – 3:4-5
- VI. Freedom from Inexperience – 3:6
- VII. Freedom from Infamy – 3:7



A. The Emphasis on Influence – v.

4a

1. As Paul continues to emphasize the place where the spiritual integrity of a leader is placed on display.
2. Is a man capable of exerting the influences necessary to lead people – are there people willing to join him in his pursuit of Christ Jesus and His glory?
3. Paul states: *“He must be one who manages his own household well, ...”*
 - a) Obviously, the term *“household”* [οἴκου] – refers to his house, or to those who live in the same place he does; those who are the closest to him and over whom he has the most consistent opportunity to lead.
 - b) *“manages”* [προϊστημι] – lit. – *“to stand before,”* conveys the environment that a spiritual leader’s influences are seen in the direction that those who live with him take in response to his life.
4. Thus, a leader must be a person who stands at the head of his family and whose wife and children are responsive to his leadership.
5. Inherent to *“manages”* is the presence of interest in them, *“to show concern, care for, give aid to.”*
6. There have been times when a family has gone through a struggle and the children are demonstrating a lack of responsiveness to leadership and the influence is waning – warranting a limiting of focus to the home and ministry to those within it.

B. The Evidence of Influence – v. 4b

1. The evidence of godly influence is when the family is responding to the leadership of the man – *“... keeping his children under control with all dignity.”*
2. *“under control”* [ὑποταγή] – sounds a bit harsh – conveying a dictatorial

or autocratic reign within the walls of his home.

a) *It is better to recognize that the spiritual leader is to be conducting himself within the home in such a way that his influence results in the voluntary submission of his children out of devotion to him, love for him, and respect for that for which he stands.*

b) *The term lit. = “to be under the determination” - a state of willingly aligning oneself under the position of the leader - submission in contrast to the children being controlling or dominant in the home.*

3. The evidence in the integrity of a spiritual leader is whether those closest to him will join him in the pursuit of Christ – the genuine test of this qualification.
4. The phrase *“with all dignity”* [σεμνότητος] should be associated with both the elder in the way he conducts himself with his children as well as how the children respond to their father.
5. It means “a manner or mode of behavior that indicates one is above what is ordinary and therefore worthy of special respect.”
6. Again, it refers to the presence of definitive influence in calling his children to join him in following Christ – cp. *Titus 1:6*.

C. The Endorsement through Influence – v. 5

1. Paul desires that we not miss the point: *“but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?”*
2. *“Take care”* [ἐπιμελήσεται] – describes the broad demands a church imposes upon a man and his influences; a reference to the intense concern or care a man is able to provide for a church.
3. When a man’s own family is wayward, rebellious, or unbelieving, his energies ought to be expended there and he will not have anything left to provide the church.
4. His influences – first demonstrated among his own family - must provide Spirit-led sway in order to ...
 - a) *Provide an example of godliness*
 - b) *Preside in conflict resolution*
 - c) *Preserve unity*
 - d) *Produce a loving spirit*
 - e) *Promote serving one another*
 - f) *Protect theological precision*
 - g) *Proclaim the truth of God’s Word in a way producing fruit as the*

ultimate demonstration of the Spirit's presence in his ministries.

5. If he cannot provide sufficient influence in his home among those with whom he has the greatest opportunities, how can he possibly provide the influences for people he sees only intermittently?
6. However, when he does impact his family to follow Christ, there is a reasonable expectation that the same influences will be provided to *“the church of God”* – cp. *1 Timothy 3:15*.

VI. FREEDOM FROM INEXPERIENCE – 3:6**A. The Ineligibility of the Immature**

1. This qualification focuses on the need to protect men from being placed into a position of such influence who are not prepared for it – *“... and not a new convert...”*
2. *“New convert”* [νεόφυτον] – refers to a man “newly planted in the Christian community” and can mean:
 - a) *A man who only recently joined the congregation from other places.*
 - b) *A man who only recently converted to faith from paganism.*
3. Such “newcomers” to the church [or faith] should not be promoted without adequate opportunities for them to be taught and tested.
4. There must be an incontestable establishment of a reputation of blamelessness that is not superficially gained but earned through a demonstration of Spirit-driven godliness throughout a variety of trials and challenges – cp. *1 Timothy 5:22, 24*.

B. The Instability of the Immature

1. When immature men are promoted to leadership, there is an inherent lure to pride – *“... so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.”*
2. Satan was an Archangel charged with leadership over other angels and yet he became proud in his position – *“conceited”* [τυφωθεις] – “puffed up; blinded by foolishness” (thinking oneself unaccountable).
3. He developed a disregard for the supremacy and glory of God and sought to promote himself and his own agenda.
4. The result is that he was cast down from heaven and lost all honor and authority.
5. Such a derangement is too often present even among spiritually mature

men who loose their grip on dependency upon Christ let alone the immature who never really established such a grip – ***Proverbs 16:18***.

6. The ***“condemnation incurred by the devil”*** [κρίμα ἐμπέση τοῦ διαβόλου] - is not a reference to the loss of one’s salvation (which would errantly speak of a works based justification), but ***“condemnation”*** refers to the ***“legal action taken against someone”*** – meaning the removal from leadership with shame as was Satan.
7. With reference to Satan, he not only lost his role as leader, but additionally he was forever reprobated and condemned; something not in view here.

VII. **FREEDOM FROM INFAMY** – **3:7**

A. **The Substantiation of His Testimony**

1. This chapter began with the notion that a spiritual leader – overseers – must be beyond reproach from the point of view of other believers.
2. It then moved into the home and established that his godly influences in the home must result in the promotion of godliness among those who live with him.
3. It now moves to outside the home and the church extending into the community at large – ***“and he must have a good reputation with those outside the church...”***
4. The term for ***“reputation”*** [μαρτυρίαν] – is where we get the word “martyr” and describes the promotion of one’s testimony or to the attestation of one’s character.
5. It describes a person whose character is so constant their commitment to doing what is right is so strong that one will die instead of compromising.
6. The idea here is that unbelievers (***“those outside the church”***) will have respect for the consistency of a spiritual leader’s life – despite their likely disagreement with his convictions – cp. ***1 Peter 2:12***.

B. **The Susceptibility in Temptation**

1. The importance of a consistent testimony inside the church, inside the home, and outside the church in the community is because of the susceptibility that an inconsistent commitment creates to the enemy.
2. Paul states: ***“... so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”***
3. ***“Fall”*** [ἐμπέση] – describes being caught in an undesirable state of some kind – both ***“reproach and the snare”*** – the same state as ***“the devil.”***
4. ***“Reproach”*** [ὄνειδισμὸν] – the disparagement that results in disgrace –

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bringing that disgrace upon the Lord Jesus Himself whom a spiritual leader serves.

5. **“Snare”** [παγίδα] – devices designed to catch prey – being brought into the control of an enemy.
6. **“of the devil”** - is a *“subjective genitive”* meaning it is a **“snare”** that is “set by” **“the devil”** to overwhelm a leader...
 - a) **S** - *Temptations to **Sedition** - the interest in priorities that are opposed to those of Christ.*
 - b) **N** - *Temptations to **Neglect** - the ignoring of the disciplines of godliness and conformity to Christ.*
 - c) **A** - *Temptations to **Adultery** - the indulgence in one’s own lusts of the flesh.*
 - d) **R** - *Temptations to **Rage** - the intemperance of spirit agitated by circumstances one cannot control.*
 - e) **E** - *Temptations to **Envy** - the insistence on gaining what others have.*

So What?

1. How can I become a greater influence of godliness to those around me?
2. To what can I point to clarify the nature of my influences on others?
3. What can I do to gain greater experience in intentionally helping another follow Christ more?
4. How can I change so that my reputation inside the church is the same outside the church?