

54. Jesus in 1 Timothy

February 22, 2018

The apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy is one of three NT epistles – 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus – of special interest to churches and their pastors. These letters are commonly referred to as the "Pastoral Letters," because they give instruction concerning pastoral care. To this day these three letterers remain the most accurate and very best counsel a "pastor" and his "congregation" could receive. They are the divine curriculum, "Pastoring 101." This first letter to Timothy is the longest of the three and most thorough treatment of Paul's pastoral advice.

We need to study and learn and keep the guidelines from this Book for life in the church. While specific problems addressed by Paul may not apply exactly in every case to the church today, the principles that Paul teaches certainly hold true for every church in every age.

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

1 Timothy 1:1-2 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope, 2 To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Timothy offers practical and pastoral advice from the aging apostle Paul to a young pastor named Timothy who was pastoring at the church in Ephesus. More than a decade prior to writing this letter, Paul had first met Timothy in the city of Lystra – in Asia Minor – according to Acts 16. Upon recognizing Timothy's impressive spiritual qualities, Paul recruited the young man to travel with him as he continued his second missionary journey.

While Paul went on to preach in Macedonia, he heard reports of Timothy's church work at Ephesus that prompted him to write 1 Timothy, probably in AD 63.

The man's name Timothy appears 25 times in the NT. Of course, they all refer to the same man, Paul's spiritual son. I wouldn't doubt if Paul led this young man to the Lord Jesus, if not, at least mentored him and in doing so had developed a "father-son" relationship. By the time this epistle was written, Timothy was about 40 years old.

B. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

In my opinion, 1 Timothy presents the most thorough and complete instructions for church leadership and organization in the entire Bible. This includes sections on appropriate conduct in worship gatherings, the qualifications of elders and deacons, and the proper order of church discipline. Paul advised Timothy on these practical matters in a way that would have helped the young pastor to emphasize the purity that should characterize Christian leaders and the gatherings they oversee.

I am sure that Timothy's younger age gave him vigor and stamina that he needed to serve his congregation. However, it also caused inevitable difficulties with older Christians who may not have taken the young man's leadership seriously because of his lack of knowledge and experience. It was important to Paul that Timothy set an example of consistent faith and a good conscience, remaining above reproach and exercising the spiritual gift that the Lord had given him.

I've seen many older Christians who are immature in spiritual condition, while I see some young believers who have firm faith in the Lord beyond their ages. Older age in Christ does not guarantee the maturity in the Lord.

C. QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS

1 Timothy 3:1-7 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

According to the NT, the terms "bishop," "pastor," and "elder" are the same. Bishop means "overseer," and that person has the responsibility of overseeing the work of the church. "Elder" is the translation of the Greek word 'presbutes', which means "an old man." Finally, "pastor" means "shepherd," one who leads and cares for the flock of God.

It is good for a growing believer to desire to be a pastor/elder, but the best way to achieve it is to develop Christian character and meet the qualifications mentioned here. But the most important thing is the call of God. While a person strives to be godly, God would call him to be a pastor/elder. Without that call from God, it is nothing more than human effort that would not last long and make himself and others around him miserable.

Before we go over these verses in detail, we need to see who should not be in this office:

1) Popularity

In far too many churches, charisma, visibility in the community, and professional success put an individual in leadership. Popularity alone is an unreliable barometer for determining leadership skill, wisdom, or character. Remember, being in the majority doesn't make them to be right and true. It only means that the majority people agree with that person or agenda for that time. Nothing else.

2) Politics

Some people get into leadership by slick political maneuvering. Pulling the right strings, shaking right hands and throwing around weight in the right place. That might work somewhere, but not in God's sight.

3) Pocketbook

Money can't buy everything. But in some churches it can get you a seat on the elder board. We often assume that, simply because a person has wealth, he qualifies for leadership. Wealth doesn't necessarily signal integrity.

We find 16 items of qualifications for an elder. They are not easy to meet them. It takes a long time for a person to meet these kinds of qualifications:

1) Blameless: There must be nothing in his life that satan or the unbelievers can take hold of to criticize or attack the church. No man living is sinless, but we must strive to be above reproach.

2) The husband of one wife: The idea here is of “A one-woman man.” It is not that a pastor/elder must be married. If so, then both Jesus and Paul could not be spiritual leaders in our churches, nor is the idea that a pastor/elder could never remarry if his wife had passed away or was biblically divorced. The idea is that love, affection, and heart is given to one woman, his lawful wedded wife.

Again, I know some denominations allow women to be pastors/elders. It is against the Word of God. I am not belittling women. Many of you know that I have great respect for women, their godly hearts, and desires to serve the Lord. But the Word of God is final. God means what He says in the Bible.

3) Temperate: The idea is of someone who is reliable and trustworthy without wide swings of vision, mood, or action.

4) Sober-minded: This describes the person who is able to think clearly. He does not constantly crack jokes, but knows how to deal with serious subjects in a serious way.

5) Good behavior: It is about a man whose life displays discipline and grace.

6) Hospitable: A pastor/elder or his wife must be hospitable to the fellowship of a local church. What the church doesn't need are leaders who are unapproachable and cold.

7) Able to teach: Teaching the Word of God is one of a pastor/elder's main ministries. He must be a careful student of the Word of God. The pastor who is lazy in his study is a disgrace to the pulpit. That is why I guard my study time very carefully.

8) Not given to wine: Am I saying that no alcohol for any Christian? Yes and no. You think about this. What kind of testimony would you give to the unbelievers when you have a glass of wine or beer bottle in your hand while you talk about salvation through Jesus? Would it be convincing? I think not. Drunkenness violates God's standard, not just for leaders but for all Christians.

One of our church congregation came to me long ago. She told me that she decided not to drink wine anymore for the sake of her testimony to unbelievers. That shows an obedient heart and maturity of her faith.

9) Not violent: Paul is warning us away from someone who is quick to get upset, physically or verbally, always looking for a fight or argument. A good leader knows how to take the heat without spreading the flames.

10) Not greedy for money: The KJV puts it far more memorably: “*not greedy of filthy lucre*”. It is possible to use the ministry as an easy way to make money, if a man has no conscience or integrity.

11) Gentle: A gentle leader's words and actions must be seasoned with grace, forgiveness, and kindness. But he doesn't let people walk all over him, either.

12) Not quarrelsome: It is an ability to get along with and accept the views of others for non-essentials. But when it comes to the essentials, he shouldn't back off. He builds people up instead of tearing them down.

13) Not covetous: The covetous man is never satisfied with anything, always demanding something more or different.

14) One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence: Leading the church certainly involves management and more, because the church is a family, not a business. It has a heavenly Father, not a chairman of the board, brothers and sisters, not shareholders. A word of caution, though: nobody's home is going to be perfect 24/7. The children here are not grown-ups.

15) Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil: It calls for someone who has been seasoned by life's triumphs, failures, joys, and disappointments. A brand new believer, right out of the spiritual womb, can easily fall victim to discouragement or pride.

16) He must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil: He should have a good reputation among unbelievers.

It is not easy to serve as a pastor/elder. Extensive qualifications? Yes. Unreasonable? No. God takes leadership seriously. The Good Shepherd love His sheep too much to leave them unprotected. Character is the best defense against wolves.

D. FOUR MORE REASONS

Here are four more reasons that the apostle Paul wrote this letter to Timothy:

1) To warn Timothy about false teachers

1 Timothy 1:3-4 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, 4 nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.

Timothy needed that warning because there were so many heretics on the loose in the church at Ephesus. False teachers have always plagued the church, from its earliest days right on down to the present days.

So if you want to learn about standing firm against false teaching, become a student of 1 Timothy. You will discover insights into discerning the differences between sound doctrine and false teachings, and you will gain trustworthy techniques for resisting those who would distort the pure Gospel of Jesus.

One of the least enjoyable tasks of "shepherding" a flock is fighting off wolves who prey on the sheep. Today, as in Timothy's day, pastors, church leaders, and Bible teachers need to be ready to protect their people from the cunning ways of false teachers.

2) To instruct Timothy on how to conduct himself as he carried out his duties

1 Timothy 3:14-15 These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; 15 but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Paul took the time to give clear instruction to his young friend about how he needed to go about the work of ministry in chapter 2 and 3. Paul covered topics important

for public worship; the prominence of prayer in 2:1-7; the roles of men and women in the church in 2:8-11; and guidelines for teaching Biblical submission in 2:12-15. He also explained the roles and qualifications of elders/overseers and deacons in chapter 3.

3) To encourage Timothy to bring up the believers to the truth.

1 Timothy 4:6 If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.

There is a tremendous difference between a good Bible teacher and a good pastor. A good Bible teacher can teach what the Bible says clearly and concisely. His and her job stops there. But a good pastor's job goes beyond what he teaches from the pulpit. He not only needs to be available practically 24/7 for his congregation, but also he needs to live out patiently and consistently what he teaches as an example for his congregation to mimic.

4) To teach Timothy to be sensitive, yet not to be so sensitive

1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Perseverance in what was good often became a difficulty for Timothy, one that required thick skin and a clear purpose. To be a good pastor, a man who was called by God should have a gentle heart of a deer, yet he should have a set of thick and tough skin of an alligator. It is a known fact that church sheep often bite their own shepherd.