

1 Timothy 3:1-13 - testing leaders

Preached by Rob Durant at Church on the Green, 17th November 2021

When I was a teenager, I loved making radio controlled model boats... And they were brilliant... you could build something and then watch it sail off across the lake... And as long as the propellers didn't get tangled up, it would come back again as well...

Now - before you set your pride and joy off sailing across the lake, there were some checks you had to do.

You had to make sure that the crystal in the transmitter was the same one as the crystal in the receiver... that was how you made sure you were talking to your model and not someone else's... And you had to make sure you switched on the transmitter before the received... otherwise, the boat could get some weak signal from somewhere over the other side of the lake and set off all on its own.

It became all the more important as other people turned up at the lake, and suddenly there were five or six models all sailing together... The transmitters all flying little ribbons to show which crystal they were using...

Get the wrong crystal, and you'd end up with someone else sailing your boat, or you'd be controlling someone else's boat... with predictable, and undesirable consequences.

A little planning, and preparation could avoid all the problems.

In this letter - 1 Timothy - we've seen that Timothy's been charged with getting the church in Ephesus back on track. Two of its leaders - Hymenaeus and Alexander - have been transmitting on the wrong frequency... the boat's gone way off track, and it's behaving erratically, as the wrong signals have been sent to it...

Paul's given advice to the church - advice that will help it to rediscover the right direction - to ignore wrong instruction... but now he needs to make sure that the church picks the right leaders to help Timothy as he guides them back on track.

So... this morning. Advice for picking your leaders.

But more than that... because if Godly leaders are people who show us how we all ought to be, then this IS advice for picking your leaders, but just keep in mind, that it's also a blueprint for how we all ought to be... WHO we all ought

to be seeking to be... leaders should be models of godly living for all of us.

With that said... advice for picking your leaders...

1. Leaders should aspire, but not self-appoint.

Does God call leaders? Certainly. But can a prospective leader enter into leadership simply by announcing that they're called to the role? No. Why? Because that leader is as fallible as any human, and might be mistaken. Worse still, they may be lying, or have wrong motives in wanting the role.

And so, we don't allow people to play the "God card". We don't allow people to turn up and say: God's given me the role of pastor, elder, deacon in your church. I'll start now, thank you.

Instead, we hope and pray that those God is raising up into positions of leadership within the church will sense God's calling on their lives, and will aspire to it... but the language of aspire leaves room for discernment. It leaves room for the possibility that perhaps you are called, but not yet equipped... it leaves room for the possibility that you may desire the role, but you are not yet sufficiently mature in your walk with God... It leaves room for the church to speak into the process, as it ought.

We know that the church ought to have the final say in this process because that's exactly how Paul describes it in this passage.

He describes two roles.... Overseer (or elder) - in vv1-7, and Deacon - in vv8-12...

And the language he uses... they must, they must, they must not... is the language of qualification, isn't it.

If this is true of this person then that qualifies them for the role... if this is not true of the person, then unless they change, it disqualifies them for the role...

Finally, in v10, Paul spells out that deacons "*must first be tested, and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.*"

Notice the order. This is a test that happens BEFORE they take on the authority of a deacon in the church.

And notice that the test is not a given. Only IF there is nothing against them - based on the qualifications just listed by Paul - should they begin to serve.

Let me put that another way. Putting your name forward to be a leader in

God's church should not, and ought not to automatically result in your becoming a leader.

We have no reason to think that there would be any less stringent testing of an elder... indeed, if anything the qualifications are more strict, and not less.

So. Leaders in God's church are not self-appointed, but are tested by the church and only if they pass that test, are they then welcomed into that position of authority.

Now, it sounds a bit like GCSEs doesn't it... a test?

But this isn't a technical test, or an academic qualification...

So... what does the test look like? What does it test?

As we've already said, Paul lists the qualifications for deacons and elders separately, but there's a lot of cross over... let's look at the qualifications for elders, first...

vv2-7

They come in three parts...

The overseer is to be... (7 things)

- * above reproach,
- * faithful to his wife,
- * temperate,
- * self-controlled,
- * respectable,
- * hospitable,
- * able to teach,

And the overseer must not be... (4 things)

- * 3 given to drunkenness,
- * violent but gentle,
- * quarrelsome,
- * a lover of money.

Notice that, at no point has Paul said - the overseer needs to be an expert in leadership strategy, or well connected with the Roman authorities... he hasn't said he has to be rich, or politically savvy.... He hasn't said he needs to have IT skills or be an expert in the law... Nor has he said that he has to be a charismatic leader or even an evangelist...

None of those appear. They are neither championed, nor rejected.

Because that's not where Paul's focus is.

No he says that the person who's suitable to be an elder is someone who lives their life in a way that could not draw criticism.

Not that they're perfect, but that they are of good and godly character.

The way they live their life doesn't simply manage to skirt controversy, but, if we knew it in detail, we would find it is truly above reproach.

The overseer is to be faithful to his wife. Now - Paul isn't saying that you can't be an elder if you haven't been married... He isn't saying you can't be an elder if you've been divorced... but he is saying that you cannot be an elder if you are not faithful... not committed to the place that God has put you. If that's in marriage, then you must be committed to your wife, to the exclusion of all others. If you are single, you must be committed to celibacy until such point as God might call you out of singleness into marriage.

What I think it does mean - and the language of the NIV shows this helpfully... the role of an elder in the church - as it reflects the role of Christ as head of the Church, and the husband as the head of the family - is to be a male role.

So when you look at the NIV, you'll notice that it uses "he" in v4,6 and 7... where in v8 it talks about Deacons as "they", and then specifically refers to women in v11... it could refer to the wives of deacons, but it seems more likely that it refers to female deacons. This would fit with Romans 16:10 where Paul mentions Phoebe, who we're told is a deacon.

The overseer is to be temperate - not flying into rages, but self-controlled... someone not demanding, but commanding respect. You can never gain respect by asking for it... only by demonstrating yourself worth of it. Paul says overseers are those who are worthy of it.

Overseers are to be those who are hospitable... generous... opening up their lives to those around them, and being open-handed with what God has given them.

All these things are equally true of Paul's qualifications for deacons... but then Paul adds another...

v2 *"able to teach"*

Deacons are to be those who *"keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience"*... but being an Elder means being one who not only holds onto these truths of the gospel, and is committed to living them out, but is also appointed to share those truths by teaching.

That doesn't mean that every elder is someone who stands at the front and preaches on a Sunday... but it does mean that the Elder is one who has the charge of passing on the teaching of the gospel, whether through life groups, or one to ones or preaching, or pastoral work...

These are the requirements for Elders.... The things that will be tested before an elder takes office... And if you're aspiring to be an elder and you don't find those a challenge, then I would say to you that you haven't perhaps considered how great a task it is to live according to that measure.

Paul goes on to point out four things that are incompatible with the role of elder...

Drunkness

Not having a drink, but losing control of yourself to drink. You cannot claim to be submitting your life to God, and be giving control of it to alcohol. The two are mutually exclusive.

Not violent but gentle

Again, if anger and violence control you - even if they don't break out as physical violence, but simmer as unrepentant resentment - you ought not to be becoming an elder... First, you need to give up the idol of your bitterness and rage.

Not quarrelsome

If you are someone who struggles to avoid arguments, or who loves to quarrel, then you're not suited for the task for bringing God's people together... the role of Elder is a peacemaker's role... not a platform to win arguments or a boost to your pride.

Not a love of money

Again, if your idol is wealth or possessions, then you ought not to look to be an elder, and the church ought not to be appointing you... because you will only lead the flock in the same direction, and as Timothy is about to tell us in 6:10, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

If those testing the candidate for leadership are able to say that they are not caught up in any of these snares, Paul has some more advice about what to look for in an elder... And where the previous advice has been about problems now, this advice is about problems that could occur down the line...

vv4-5 "4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full[a] respect.

5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)"

It seems so obvious, but if an elder is unable to look after their own family, why would we ask them to take on a greater task? Paul challenges those testing a potential elder - look at their family... does his family respect him? Or does he make it very hard to respect him? Does he treat his work seriously? Does he take his responsibilities to provide for them seriously? Does he manage to put food on the table? Does he run up debts and leave them struggling?

These are indications of how he might serve as an elder.

V6 “6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. “

There’s a spiritual dimension, too, isn’t there. The reality is that new believers have not had time to experience the pitfalls of Christianity - the temptations to pride when we’re doing well... the temptations to despair when things go wrong... Raising them up into a position of authority could be bad for them as the church puts them under pressure and they collapse... equally it could harm the church ... The pendulum of pride and despair for church leaders, so easily unsettles the church... So we need to be careful of raising people up too quickly.

v7 “He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.”

Finally, an elder needs a good reputation with outsiders.... They should be the same person outside the church as they are inside, and that person should be one with a good reputation... one who is trustworthy, and gentle... one who is all the things Paul listed in vv2-3. Any hypocrisy in this will cause a fall from authority into disgrace harming both the church, but also them.

The qualifications for both male and female deacons are very similar... And so, the role of the church is clear.

Take care as you raise people into leadership. It is your task, as the members of the church, to perform this role with care and diligence. Not rubber-stamping the process... but paying careful attention. Seeking to know one another so that when one of you stands up for election, you are aware of who they are.

If you don’t feel they measure up to these qualifications, you should not nominate them, or second a nomination.

The leadership of this church will also play our part... in CBC when candidates for leadership roles - deacons and elders - are nominated, we have an interviewing process...

We test one another - and we do it regularly - each role apart from the staff - lasts just three years, and then if an elder or deacon wants to continue, we interview them again...

If you're considering standing to be a deacon or an elder, then take this passage absolutely seriously. Ask yourself: Not, am I perfect, but am I committed to living this way? Am I committed to being a servant of God's people, for God's glory?

Ask yourself how you match up to the requirements, and if you're not sure, talk to a mature Christian you trust.

Finally, I just want us to look at the starting and finishing verses today...

Eldership is a noble task. Those who take it on are supposed to embody the godly living that each and every Christian is called to. Elders are called to be examples... those that the church can follow. So do pray for your elders in CBC as we seek to live out such lives. Pray that we would be such people that you can follow us with great joy.

And pray for your deacons Pray with Paul that they would *"gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus."*

And then - as your leaders set out to lead you into Christ and his gospel, by their example, pray that you would follow closely, and so we would continue to grow and flourish as God's church, for his glory.