

We are studying Paul's first letter to Timothy. A letter Paul wrote, as Timothy's father in the faith. Paul was writing Timothy on how he should instruct the Ephesian believers and church leaders. We must bear in mind the church, Christianity, was a new institution. The church, rooted in Judaism, was not welcome by the Jews, in the same way Jesus had not been welcome. Early Christianity had many things in common with Judaism but it was also a new wineskin, a new work and it was not meant to exist as subset of Judaism. Jesus told the disciples about a time when He would be taken away,

17“Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.” Matt 9:17

When Paul had first come to Ephesus he was able to teach in the synagogue. We read in Acts that some of the Jews, most likely leaders of the synagogue became *hardened and disobedient* to what Paul was teaching.

8And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. 9But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. Act 19:8-10

This can apply to us as believers, like the Ephesian believers. We might have considered ourselves to be 'religious,' good Christian people and then God begins speaking to us like Paul did the Jews of the Ephesian synagogue. This is new teaching for us but God is *reasoning and persuading about the kingdom of God*. He might be showing us the truth about our relationship to Him, that we are sinners, this might happen in a church, with a friend or as we are reading the Word and praying in our quiet time. Isaiah wrote,

Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool. Is 1:18

For two years Paul reasoned with the Ephesians about the Kingdom of God. Then he left Timothy in Ephesus and with the task of establishing a lasting work, a beachhead in the city. We are looking today at chapter three of First Timothy. Paul was teaching here about qualifications of church leaders. Jesus had told His disciples, *You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, Matt 20:25, 26 NLT* The Christian leader is not to lord it over other believers but to serve other believers. The leader's purpose is to prepare others to service, *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. Eph 4:12* The Greek word is *episkopeo*, Overseer, a leader in the church is to offer oversight, *that naturally goes on to provide the care and attention appropriate.*

Paul wrote the Corinthian believers, *I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. 1 Cor 3:2* In the passage we are looking at today Ephesians 3 we are looking at greater works. This word is for those that want to be elders, teachers, and leaders in the Christian church. This is not the elementary principles of the faith as is mentioned in Hebrews 5. *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles. Heb 5:12*

We must keep in mind that much of the early church was made up of slaves, men, women and children, widows and Gentiles. Most of these could not imagine rising to

this criteria that Paul was demanding for elders and deacons. We must in looking at this list of qualifications not judge ourselves too harshly. Paul is placing the bar high enough that most Christians cannot measure up but we can press on and become more mature, we can desire meat. *So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don't need to start again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God. Heb 6:1* If we are going to accomplish anything in life, we must make that which we are hoping to attain, a goal. And it must offer us a bit of a challenge, we must set the bar high. In this passage Paul writes to aspire to the office of overseer.

1It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. 2An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. 4He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), 6and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. 7And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. 1 Tim 3:1-7

There is a lot here, this seems to be an impossible standard, but let us remember, it is impossible with man, with our own abilities to live to this standard but *With God all things are possible. Mark 10:27* Let us also Paul is speaking to born again people, everything is new. It is God who is building His Church and He has chosen to use ordinary men, you and me. It is not all about us and what we are capable of, it is about what God can do by working through us. *It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. 1 Cor 3:7 NLT* So it is good to desire growing as a shepherd of God's sheep, that is a good goal.

The elder *must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. 1 Tim 3:2,3* These are all qualities to look for in a leader/servant in the church. But it makes perfect sense that these are qualities for any believer to strive for, these are ways we love our neighbors. Let's examine these terms. Above reproach means blame less, not living with hidden deceit, thou shall not lie.

"above reproach" is first a legal word that indicates a kind of innocence in the eyes of the law. It means that no one can legitimately rebuke you or make any charges against you that will stick. They may accuse, but your conduct will eventually acquit you by proving you blameless. <https://www.challies.com/articles/the-character-of-the-christian>

Paul says they must be, *the husband of one wife*. We must remember that this is written to early Christians living in a very pagan world, where there was polygamy, divorce among the Jews and all sorts of immorality, much like today. This is the Christian standard but in light of the times that this book was written an elder must be living with one wife. Elders are to be *temperate (exhibiting moderation or self-restraint), prudent (show good and careful judgment, not rash), respectable (honest, good, and proper), hospitable (welcoming, friendly), able to teach (able to teach others)*. Paul makes a similar statement in 2 Timothy. *The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Tim 2:2* These are qualities for every believer who hopes to be a faithful witness for Jesus Christ.

Paul continues, *not addicted to wine (one who sits long at his wine) or pugnacious (a striker, ready with a blow contentious, quarrelsome person), but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.* Paul wrote later in this book, *For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 1 Tim 6:10 Money is not evil but the love of it, thou shalt not covet, to desire wrongfully, inordinately, to lust after worldly gain.* The overseer is to be *free from the love of money, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust (2 Pet 1:4).* Peter has a similar list in writing to believers of the same precious faith

2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:2-8

This moral excellence is not just for overseers, we all are overseers in our worlds, we all have people watching us. The Christian cannot control the time they are born into. The Christians of Ephesus lived under the oppressive rule of the Roman government. We cannot change the positive giftings we have received or the limitations. Some are born wealthy, some have been able to accumulate wealth, some have talents and others are pretty normal. But we should all desire to be witnesses, to watch over those God loves, *if any person aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work they desire to do.*

26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 1 Cor 1:26,27

Let us desire to live as witnesses and *press on toward the goal to win the prize of God's heavenly calling in Christ Jesus.* We are living in a day that is testing our souls, our faith. Kipling wrote, *If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you... you'll be a Man, my son!*, The world needs Christians who trust in the Lord, who *press on toward the goal of God's heavenly calling in Christ Jesus.* As Thomas Paine wrote in 1776, *THESE are the times that try men's souls.* The Christian has a hope, a rock that will help us weather the present storms if we but press on with moral excellence toward godliness and love, *if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:8* Let us boast in the Lord, *"Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."* 1 Cor 1:31

*When darkness seems to hide His face, I rest on His unchanging grace
In every high and stormy gale, My anchor holds within the veil
Oh Christ the solid Rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand.*

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Eph 6:13