

Elders and the Church

1 Timothy 3:1-7

Today is a day of celebration. As a church, we get to welcome two new elder nominees. Come on up Paul and Austin. Introductory words: Austin is a Risk and compliance consultant with Bridgepoint Consulting and enrolled in graduate studies program in theology. Paul teaches and directs a research center at UT and has recently completed a book on the war in Afghanistan. Both have been through an Assessment Process. 2 others are continuing to grow toward elder qualification and hope to appoint them within the next 12 months. Meet & Greet. Install on July 19. In view of this celebration, it would be wise for us to collectively reflect on: What an elder is, what an elder does, and how you can support your elders. IS: **Character**. DOES: **Responsibility**. **Support**.

What is an Elder? Imitator of Christ who models imitation of Christ.

What is an elder? *Elders are biblically qualified men appointed to provide theological and pastoral oversight for the church.* First, biblically qualified. St. Paul appointed elders in every city and gave them one meta-requirement: “Therefore an overseer must be above reproach” (3:2). The word overseer is used interchangeably with the word elder (cf. Titus 1:5,7; Acts 20:17,28). What does it mean? Well, if it’s perfection we’re all out. You all know me well enough to know I fall way short of perfection. Being above reproach means you live a life that is above disqualifying criticism. It’s not a sinless life but a holy life. You give the church a good reputation. (Many qualified, fewer called. Oh for 500!) Commenting on “above reproach” early Church Father Chrysostom said, “*In this every virtue is implied.*” What virtues? Let’s take a look and as we do you’ll notice that *most of these are prescribed to all Xns but required for elders*: “the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money” (3:2-4). **Husband of One Wife** - “**the husband of one wife**. This can be taken in a number of ways: An elder can’t have ever remarried or be single or be a polygamist. Paul can’t be barring single men since both he and Timothy would be disqualified. Nor can he be referring to remarriage since he encourages young widows to remarry in chapter 4. The phrase is literally *one woman man*. The best interpretation of this requirement is that an elder is a man who is *faithful* to his wife. Faithful—sexually, emotionally, spiritually. Faithfulness in heart, mind, and body. This means no dabbling in pornography, FBing with old girlfriends, flirting at work with other women. A one woman man dates his wife. She’s never far from his thoughts. Considers how his purchases, his actions, affect her. He’s zeroed in on her needs, struggles, longings. *This is why we ask specific questions about sexual purity and marriage.* This kind of faithfulness is connected to the next trait. **Sober-minded** – to make clear judgments (not possible when we are intoxicated by other allurements, **blurred by intoxication with success, approval, image**. If so, you’ll use the church to feel more important and won’t say or do the necessary things when push comes to shove. **1 Thess 5:5-11** says this is should set Christians apart, as children of the day not the night, who are laser focused on encouraging and helping one another in the way we are encouraged and helped by Christ. An elder isn’t fogged up with compromise, but sees Christ with clarity. *We ask theological questions and communion with God.* Sober-minded tips over into **Self-controlled**. Refers to self-control in all areas of your life. *We always ask if a sin was going to take you out of the faith what would it be? We should all be able to answer this question and have a plan to fight that sin. It’s not indulging*

excessively in anything—Sportscenter, Fitness, Movies, Beer, Work, iPhone, Shopping, Music, Videogames, personal beauty, grades, social media. Self-control is the result of a sober mind. **It's not just seeing Christ but walking with Christ.** This requires discipline. Some of you lack discipline. You're jolted up and down by life circumstances. Difficulty always catches you by surprise. Easily blown about by bits of gossip or failure instead of a sturdy strength. You need elders as an example. Lack of self-control often shows up as **apathy**. Which is often cool indifference to spiritual things. Why? You're controlled by something other than Christ, by your hobbies, fears, hopes. Men, your wife needs a self-controlled man. Our church needs men passionate not apathetic about Christ and his character. For some of you, it's time to grow up. *Find a sober-minded, self-controlled man or a woman, take them out for coffee, and ask them how they do it.* This leads to being **respectable**. If you want to know if you're respectable look at the last three traits or ask an honest friend. Next, **hospitable**. Huge emphasis on this in the Early Church, ministering to *others*. A generally welcoming spirit, inviting people into your home and life. Grocery budget goes up, discretionary income goes down. Why? You're inviting in and ministering to others. *Not fancy in décor but focused on people.* Paper plates and people. **Required of all (Rom 12:3; 16:23).** *We look for men who minister in the community not excel in the company.* **Able to Teach** means "skilled in teaching." This requirement assumes a certain level of theological understanding. The NT says an elder should know doctrine well enough to be able to expose deceptive, untrue philosophies and teach true, life-giving doctrines. Later in our passage the church is described as "**pillar and support of the truth**," strong images drawn from the temple to communicate the importance of promoting and protecting the gospel. Study your Bible. Explain its truths. Live them. Titus 1:9 **Not drunkard** – Obvious. Related to self-control. **Not violent but Gracious/Gentle** – I wouldn't have qualified in my mid to late 20s. I'm weak in this area but pray about it every day. G. Hawthorne: "**one of the truly great Greek words that is almost untranslatable**" and suggests "**magnanimity, sweet reasonableness.**" This is cultivated over time through communion with Christ, steady application of the gospel to your heart, *and an imitation of other men who possess a gracious spirit.* **Not Quarrelsome**, not given to combative discussion, arrogant arguments, FB rants, or angry conflict. A peacemaker, willing to see things from another perspective. Looks to win a friend not an argument. **Not lover of money.** You don't let comfort & convenience rule your life. Embrace inconvenience. Put others first. Not driven by greed. **This is for all (1 Tim 6:6-10).** The proof of all this is found in a man's **family**. Paul writes: "**He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?**" The primary testing ground for godly character is in the privacy and responsibility of the home because the family of the elder is meant to be a microcosm of the church family, where he leads, models, cares and provides for his family. As a result, his wife and children respect him. **As young parents, a lot of you need to hear this: When we fail to manage our children and household well, we ultimately fail to teach the family Christ. Our parenting tells our children something about Jesus, that he is pushover, passive and can be ignored OR that Jesus is a punk, overbearing dictator and angry disciplinarian. But a godly man will show his family the Jesus who is Redeemer&King, gracious but firm, gentle and strong, forgiving and true. And the only way we can do this is by being close to Jesus, experiencing his grace and truth firsthand on a regular basis. Otherwise, you'll default to what natural, pushover or punk. In fact, some of this can be faked. We can adopt an outer demeanor of humility while being rife with pride, "leading others in praise while hoping**

people will spare a bit of praise for us” (Stott). Because of this elders have to be vigilant repenters, the first to confess and to hope in Christ. You’ll want to imitate not just their obedience but their repentance. So, you see the virtue that fills “above reproach” is a display of the glory and beauty of Jesus, an imperfect display, which is why we CLING to a perfect Christ.

Responsibility: Accountable to Christ as the Chief Shepherd of the Flock

That’s what an elder is, now what an elder does. Elders are responsible for three main things: **1) Lead Vision and Mission** of the Church. See this throughout Acts, where elders make decisions through reasonable discussion and dependence upon the holy Spirit through prayer “*It seemed good to us and the Spirit.*” Acts 15:22-28. We do this for you in meetings and retreats where we: think, pray, & plan. Meet every other week. **2) Pastor the Church.** Shepherd imagery includes a rod to guide, protect, correct. Good pastoring starts on its knees. We open every elder meeting with prayer for specific people in the church who are in need. Pastoring also happens informally as elders participate in our three environments of discipleship: *Sundays, City Groups, Fight Clubs.* Where they disciple and offer counsel. This happens very intentionally through coaching CG leaders, trainings. Being a counseling & encouraging presence. **3) Promote and Protect the Gospel.** This happens when we preach, teach, counsel, pray (*lex credendi, lex orandi*). We labor to push the gospel through everything in order to avoid authoritarian or passive leadership and to focus on Jesus Christ as Redeemer and King. This promotes health in the church.

Honoring Elders: Submit to them as you Submit to Christ

Finally, how can you support your elders? Returning to Paul’s earlier instruction in 1 Timothy, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (5:17). Not just honor but double honor. How do you do that? Two main ways: Words & Actions. Begin by using your **words** in the presence of God. Pray, pray, pray for your elders. Leading a church is hard, not just because of the work but because of your own limitations and sins. Pray that we put to death the deeds of the flesh, by the Spirit, so we can lead you into love. It’s also hard because church has an invisible enemy, One who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking to devour. And the shepherds stand in the way to protect the sheep. Pray for holiness, perseverance, and wisdom. Honor your elders with **words of prayer and words of grace.** In this passage, Paul goes on to say how important it is that the church does not circulate accusations or entertain gossip about leaders. And if we are in sin, don’t rebuke an elder sharply but approach them humbly with words of grace and truth. Instead, use your words to convey grace and gratitude. Encourage them with Scripture, observations in how the Lord is using them. Point us to Jesus as Redeemer and King. **Actions.** Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 1 Pet 5:5 “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” (Heb 13:17). In context, he’s talking about obeying *biblical teachings*, which help us live in line with Christ. So, when you obey and submit to your leaders, you’re not really obeying them, you’re obeying Christ who has appointed them. **Submission is intermediately to leaders but immediately to Christ.** We have earthly elders but there is one true Elder; we have shepherds but there is one Chief Shepherd (Heb 2:12; 1 Peter 5:4). Honor your elders with your words and actions as men who care deeply about you and the



outcome of your faith. **Elders that practices humble above reproach leadership, who are supported by humble, elder honoring church uniquely display of the authority and love of Jesus as Redeemer & King.** The opposite is a stumbling block to the city. Let's showcase Christ by displaying him *as King and as Redeemer*—and **celebrate** God's gracious provision of two biblically qualified men to *provide theological and pastoral oversight to City Life Church!*