

Why do we have leaders in the church? ... Why is it necessary for a few persons to hold positions of power? ... In his book *Up with Authority...* Victor Lee Austin uses the analogy of an orchestra to explain why we need human authority.

Orchestras need conductors because the musicians don't have a single right answer to questions like, "*What should we play at the concert?*" or "*What should we practice today?*" or "*How should we interpret this passage?*" Each musician might have a perfectly reasonable opinion, but their opinions will inevitably be different and will almost always be incompatible with one another. And it's no good for each musician to do what is right in his or her own ears. It won't do for the brass section to insist on playing a one musical piece if the strings have chosen to play a completely different piece. If the orchestra is to perform coherently, if the musicians want to perform music rather than just make noise, somebody has to have authority to decide.

By submitting to the authority of a conductor, individual musicians attain musical expression they could never realize individually or even as a collection of free-wheeling players. Authority is necessary for classical musicians to bring musical fulfillment to others. In the words of Victor Lee Austin, the conductor's authority yields "*a greater degree of human flourishing than we would have from the musicians separately or individually.*"

What is true for orchestras is true for human life in general.

Leadership has been defined and written about (*nonstop*) in evangelical circles since the 1970's. Most of my fellow classmates in seminary wrote dissertations on Christian Leadership... and there is no shortage of new books every month that come off the presses of Christian publishers. You would think that the evangelical church today should have a very good handle on the subject. (We don't... BUT - we are certainly well-informed!)

For this very reason... I almost hesitate to read to you one of the countless definitions that abound. But I have one that I think is helpful to our passage this morning. Sir Michael Howard (a military historian) gives this to us... which I think (in addition to military leadership) ultimately depicts **church** leadership very ably:

Leadership is the capacity to inspire and motivate; to persuade people willingly to endure hardships, usually prolonged, and incur dangers, usually acute, that if left to themselves they would do their utmost to avoid.

It is a sober fact that as goes the leadership - so goes the church.

It is generally true that if the leadership is Word-centered... the church will be Word-centered. ... If the leadership is mission-minded... the church will be mission-minded. ... If the leadership is sincere... the people will be sincere. ... If the leadership is kind... the church will be kind. ... This is also true negatively — (perhaps) to an even greater degree! ... Unloving... narrow... stingy leaders beget an unloving... narrow... stingy church.

As goes the leadership – so goes the church... and the church at Ephesus was in deep trouble. Certain **elders** in the church had members of the church confused and believing false doctrines. They were false teachers.

But that raises a frightening question. How did these men rise to such positions in the church? (**False teachers** had become trusted leaders with authority!) ... Can such a thing happen today?

The sad answer is that in this fallen and broken world... some people are going to get through. There is no way you're going to create a system that's going to keep them all out. ... After all... Jesus Himself had His Judas.

But that raises another question... then... about who should be admitted to the office in the first place. ... AND SO we have 1 Timothy chapter 3... which we open today.

Now before I plunge into this text... it's worth reminding ourselves that the biblical terms "overseer"... "shepherd"... and "elder" are synonymous. They are used interchangeably – even within the same verse. A shepherd... is an elder... who is an overseer. Whenever we see these titles in Scripture... they all mean the same office in the church.

So... in Scripture we have an authority that is synonymously called "shepherd"... or "elder"... or overseer." But where do we get the term "pastor"? Is it a scriptural office in the church – as Elder and Deacon? (The verses that follow our passage today... will discuss deacons.)

Pastor is simply the Latin word for shepherd. That's all. ... 1 Peter 5:2 tells us: "*Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving **as overseers** ...*" So Biblically speaking... Jesse... Dave... Harvey... and I are all pastors of Living Water (or you can simply call us "shepherds.")

So who should be admitted to this office of pastor / shepherd / elder / overseer? ... In January... church members will be asked to affirm Jesse... Dave... and Harvey as being qualified and called to this office. ... They will place their names before you to evaluate them by the standards we come to in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. So today I want to discuss this standard with you... and explain how we should use it. Here it is...

1 Timothy 3:1-7

Let me begin with four general observations... that are very important... as we dive into these verses. The first thing to detect is...

1. The **un**exceptionable character of most of the entries. Look at them. You're not supposed to get drunk. "Oh, great! Doesn't sound like a very high standard to me." ... You're not supposed to be violent and beat up on people. ... You're supposed to know how to bring up your own family.

It's really quite a remarkable list for being **un**remarkable!

Nothing here about stellar patterns of leadership. Nothing here about a Master's degree from seminary. ... Nothing here about stellar ability to handle both Greek and Hebrew. ... (However)... be patient! ... What we must initially understand is how **un**remarkable all the entries are... that these entries are **all** ordinary. ... They're ordinary in the sense of being imposed on all believers. ... You might notice there are two entries where (in some measure) you could say that they're not mandated of other people. ... But (for the most part... they all are.)

But they're **not** ordinary in the sense of being commonplace... because although they're imposed somewhere in Scripture on all believers... they're **not** all that commonly followed by all believers. ... That brings me to the second observation.

2. The chief characteristic of the shepherd / elder / overseer - is that with his whole heart **HE** constantly endeavors to reflect the Christian virtues that are mandated of all Christians. This is of fundamental importance. Because ... if somebody desires their life to reflect every one of these character traits... this could be an indication of the birth of a call to eldership. ... Now this leads into our third observation...

3. We need to see leadership as a calling. Church leadership is not a political position to be sought for oneself. It is a burden that God places on the heart of Christian men that they must accept. It is a pressing desire to reflect Christian virtues and to lead God's church. Leaders are not determined by popularity. They must be the kind of men profiled here by Paul to Timothy. And the church must recognize who they are.

4. No shepherd ever feels that he is all he ought to be (that he meets all of these qualifications perfectly) and the rest of the church needs to pray for him constantly. While the job description doesn't call for moral perfection or superhuman spirituality... a leader must be one who strives to embody the qualities... (And) the church should be able to see that he sincerely peruses them for his life.

Let's go back now... and examine each virtue.

1 Timothy 3:1

Elders have aspirations. Did you see it there in the verse? They aspire to the office. They desire this. "*What kind of man doesn't want power and authority?*" ... Church leadership can attract people with mixed and sometimes outrightly sinful motives. ... The seeming prestige of spiritual leadership attracts some. ... The lure of power draws others. ... The spiritual directing of others' lives can be heady stuff. ... Some (I think) like the idea of having access to the supposed mysterious inner workings of the church.

But that's not God's call of an elder. God's call of an elder is not power and authority. Ambition seeks to gain and wield power for the sake of self.

Aspiration (on the other hand) cares less about the position than about becoming worthy of it.

(You see)... The call of an elder is death... sacrifice... servant... and slavery. ... In case you don't believe me... Let me take you to Matthew, chapter 20, verses 25 through 28. Jesus was teaching His disciples who got a little bit power hungry.

Matthew 20:25-28 (ESV)

²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Second Corinthians 4:12 says it this way. "So death is at work in us, but life in you."

Chuck Swindoll writes:

Do you hear the call? The call doesn't have anything to do with power. The call doesn't have anything to do with authority. Is authority granted to the elders? Yes. Why? Because they're the type of men who so love the local congregation and have so experienced the grace and mercy of God they're going, "I'll die for these people! I'll sacrifice for these people! I'll give myself to these people! I'll lay down my preferences for this group!"

The type of man who makes a good elder is the man who has answered the call to come and die, to give himself to the church for the church for the maturation of the people in the church for the glory of God. The cynic in us would look at power structures and go, "They can't be trusted." Life has taught you this? In the end, we've been trained to doubt authority, believe unchecked power leads to those in power taking advantage of those who are under them.

If he's not willing to sacrifice for you, he has no business leading you. If he's not willing to give of himself so you might grow, then don't trust him. He has aspirations unto death, not aspirations unto power. A brother who wants to be in the elder room because he thinks it's going to get him power needs to get washed out in the process of a man becoming an elder.

Yet Paul says it is a **noble** work... an honorable work which has a definite dignity and attractiveness... Why? ... Because it is performed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ... and brings about the welfare of the whole church.

1 Timothy 3:2

More is required of an overseer than mere willingness to serve. ... *He is to be above reproach.* ... This word literally means “*nothing to take hold upon*”; that is... there must be nothing in his life that Satan or the unsaved can take hold of to attack the church.

This requirement does not demand sinless perfection (or else we might as well go home now and be done with it.) But you should be able to say to the church body: “*This guy is going to be an elder,*” and have **no one** in the room think (or say), “*No way. No way.*” ... John Calvin paraphrased this qualification as “*not marred by disgrace.*” ... This character qualification summarizes all the other elder qualifications that follow. ... And “the husband of one wife” is next.

The phrase *husband of one wife* translates he's a one-woman man. That is what the Greek says – “one woman man.” Although there are arguments, I don't believe this means an elder must never have been divorced in the past.

Before I became pastor here... I was asked my view of what this qualification meant. One man on the pastoral search committee (I knew) graduated from the same seminary that I did... and he was adamant that pastors and elders could not occupy the office... if they have divorce in their life.

I reminded him that the Greek does not say that... and I reminded him that the qualifications that Scripture gives are all **CHARACTER** qualifications. Why do you want to *lift this qualification out of this context* and make it a **HISTORICAL** qualification? (“*Your history must have no divorce...*”)?...

You lower the bar of this standard very near to the ground... with your view. You make it possible to have a skirt-chasing womanizer... (who has affairs) in this office... so long as he has no divorce in his history. No... lets keep the bar high – as a **CHARACTER** qualification.

When we keep the context of character qualifications... a one woman man... is dedicated to only one woman – his wife. He thinks about that one woman. He’s *for* that one woman. He’s *with* that one woman. He isn’t caught-up with *fantasies* about other women. He doesn’t *flirt* with other women. He is a one woman **KIND** of man.

Our next qualification is that the elder must be **sober-minded**. This means something like clear-headed... well balanced... not an extremist... not constantly running off in some half-baked (harebrained) extreme. ...

Temperate means he has discipline enough that he’s not controlled by things... including *good* things. He’s not a glutton... although he likes good

food. ... He works out... but he hasn't built his whole life around getting six-pack abs. ... Desires don't rule him. His love for the Lord rules him.

Self-controlled is our next quality. I probably don't need to say much about this one. This one suggests: being reasonable... sensible... and having sound judgment.

The next one (**respectable**) has some interesting nuances. The root of this word is Kosmos... and yes... that is the Greek word for "ordered universe." (Carl Sagan... an agnostic scientist had a television show for years called "Cosmos." He would discuss the wonders of our universe.)

Because the root of the word that we translate as "respectable" is kosmos... a good word to use for this quality would be "orderly." An elder must be orderly. He should be organized in his thinking and living and teaching.

Hospitable is our ensuing quality for an elder. The word implies far more than having friends over for dinner. The phrase "*Hospitable*" means, literally, "*loving of strangers.*" ... He loves lost people. He loves to minister to people. ... All hospitality really is... (I'm sorry Martha Stewart)... is saying, "*I have a genuine concern for your soul, and I'm going to show it. I want us to connect. I want to know what's going on in your heart.*" ... That's hospitality. ... It has nothing to do with how you decorate the dining room table in season.

Able to teach speaks of a leader's ability to handle the Scriptures. This just means they can answer you from the Word of God. If you have concerns...

if you have questions... they can open up the Word of God and explain to you and show you why and how. ... They don't have to do it publicly as in a class setting. It can be done in private. ... But to be able to teach presupposes two things: some knowledge... and some ability to communicate it. ... (Some people have lots and lots and lots of knowledge... and their communication skills are zilch. They are **dis**qualified to be an elder.)

Four negative phrases follow. We see them in verse 3.

1 Timothy 3:3

“Not a drunkard” is literally: *“staying near wine.”* It describes someone who habitually has alcohol nearby or cannot be far from it. (That sounds like a no-brainer... but it apparently needed to be in here.)

They can't be addicted to wine. The fact that Paul advised Timothy to use wine for medicinal purposes (1 Tim. 5:23) indicates that total abstinence was not demanded of believers. ... Sad to say... some of the members of the Corinthian church got drunk... during church! ... It was at the love feast that accompanied the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:21). The quality for an elder is that he is not to drink in excess.

The next words pretty much describe the same quality... so I will take them together. ... ***They are not to be contentious*** (my Bible reads ***“violent”***... but I think contentious is more of the idea)... ***but they are to be gentle... and they are to be peaceable.***

Not contentious. There are some who are very concerned to contend for the faith by being contentious about the faith. It's not only that they contend

for the faith, and they may even be largely right on the issues which concern them, but they do it in such a way that at the end of the day you have a sneaky suspicion they just love to fight.

What every church needs are men who don't like conflict... but aren't afraid to get into it if they have to. ... (Are you tracking with me?) ... They don't want confrontation ... but they'll go whenever it is necessary. ... If you get guys who just love conflict... then you're going to get a kind of Gestapo... that's always looking at everybody in the church... waiting to pounce on them for their imperfections.

But you don't want the other extreme either. If you get a guy who is so gentle that he won't shoot a wolf... then the sheep are going to get hurt. ... The church needs men who don't like conflict... but aren't afraid of it. That's what those words in verse 3 (all put together) mean. An elder will shoot the wolves... kick out the dogs... and love the sheep.

The fourth negative we see in this verse is “**not a lover of money**.” This applies to anyone with a lot of money... and anyone who doesn't have very much. (LISTEN!) It can be very hard to have a lot of money - and not love it. ... But it can also be very hard to be poor and not love money. (Both the rich and the poor can covet it.) ... This describes a disposition that is not overly motivated to pursue material wealth. An elder cannot put confidence in wealth.

1 Tim 3:4-5

Here's what the Bible teaches about the home. Are you ready? ... The home is a proving ground for ministry. ... Why? ... Because few things for a man, according to the Word of God, are going to put the man against his

flesh like the call to be a godly husband and a godly father. Here's the proving ground of ministry.

Success in a family may well indicate success in a church. Likewise... failure in a home raises a red flag about one's ability to lead in a congregation.

Yet we all know that our kids are their own persons. God gave them a free will and their own unique personalities. They often rebel and spin out of control. Does a wayward child disqualify a man from being an elder?

Maybe not. But if most (or all) of his kids turn away and live unprincipled lives... then he is probably disqualified. ... We should ask: *Does the man create a calm... structured home environment? ... Does he hold his children to reasonable expectations that instill a sense of personal dignity? Do most (or all) esteem him and show him honor? ... Are his children on the right track to becoming fine young men and women... or do you see them headed for trouble?*

1 Tim 3:6

Satan enjoys seeing a young pastor (in the Lord) succeed and get proud. Then Satan can tear down all that has been built up. I'm thinking of a young pastor (a man saved out of the world) who went to the same seminary I went to... He planted a church in Seattle. It quickly grew to be Seattle's largest church. He had so much international attention. His church was so cool! ... It was a mega-church and a lot of ministries wanted to copy everything he did. He was a guest speaker in one of my doctoral classes once... and I could not WAIT for the class to end. He wreaked

more PRIDE than nearly anyone I've ever been around in my life. ... Not long after that... he quit ministry and will probably never return.

This quality in verse 6 literally means “one newly planted,” referring to a young Christian. Age is no guarantee of maturity... but it is good for a man to give himself time for study and growth before he accepts a church. ... The overseer's role calls for stability — roots planted deep in the soil of the New Covenant... fed by Scripture... nurtured by the Holy Spirit... tested by wind and seasons of drought. ... (In other words)... this proven ability to live the gospel and lead others in that life... cannot develop overnight.

1 Tim 3:7

His reputation again! The final qualification takes us full circle back to the matter of one's reputation... which is where we began. ... Does he pay his bills? ... Does he demand his rights... even when wronged...? Is he patient and kind...? Does he have a good reputation among unsaved people... who don't agree with his politics and moral convictions...?

People outside the church appreciate honesty... fair play... integrity.

Do you know what integrity is? ... Integrity is nothing more than being on the outside what you are on the inside. That is all it is. ... That is what Jesus is after when he insists that we be single-eyed. ... It's what James is after when he warns that a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. We see people in the church (you know)... who have an outward show of things... but inside they're something else. They are a seething mass of lust (perhaps)... or terribly greedy people... or they may be nurturing anger and harsh bitterness. But they look so civilized... They are so restrained.

Let me tell you who can sniff out the hypocrites. It's the outsiders! ... Having a good reputation with those outside the church (generally speaking) says a lot about a man. ... [P A U S E] ...

This is a challenging list of qualifications... isn't it? As we close this morning... allow me to consolidate all of them into three considerations we need to keep in mind... as we determine who God has called to be elders.

First, **does his inner life match his public image?** A man can speak well in public and carry himself with an impressive demeanor... but what about behind the scenes? ... Does he have a spiritual life that he cultivates away from public view?

Second, **would his wife and children verify that he is qualified?** Would the suggestion draw a sarcastic chuckle from them... or would they affirm him as a capable... authentic spiritual leader?

Third, **would the general public—his colleagues and business competitors and fellow gym members—affirm him or express concern about his qualifications?** This is not a popularity contest... but elders should maintain a good rapport with those outside the church. It's not a good sign if a nonbeliever expresses concern about his honesty... or purity... or some other matter of character.

But let's not just see these as qualifications for an elder. These are Christian virtues we are all to exemplify.