

What are the elders supposed to be like?

4/17/2016

(Why elder search now? In the plan since the Fall.)

Once we are clear about what elders are to be doing, and we begin to identify men who are doing, or who have the capacity and potential to do those things, then we need to place ourselves where Timothy and Titus found themselves, receiving a letter each from Paul telling them what to look for in the men they were supposed to... appoint?

That's what Paul and Barnabas did on their way back to Antioch during their first mission trip to the Gentiles-

Acts 14:21-23

²¹ They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples.

Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.

“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.

²³ Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

Apparently that's something Timothy and Titus were also supposed to do as evangelists-

Titus 1:5

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.

I think in our fear of over-empowering
our full-time staff in churches of Christ,
we tend to skim over what is being said here.
(...but I digress here...)

As we study the early church,

We can observe decisions being made based on

1. the “casting of lots” following prayer, (Acts 1)
2. A nominating or selection process, (Acts 6)
3. Group consensus, (Acts 15)

Maybe it’s good news that the process of

HOW elders were to be selected

was not completely spelled out in Scripture,
so that the “how” of appointing elders could vary,
depending on local conditions on the ground.

Culture changes, sensibilities change-

1. some cultures are more democratic,
2. some more autocratic.
3. Some are very individualistic, some very communal.
4. Some are based on huge extended family units,
each with a patriarch or matriarch.
5. Today, we have small, nuclear families,
or single adults, single parents trying to raise kids...

Whenever folks were selected for tasks,

there DOES seem to be the common denominator

that certain qualities were to be looked for,
that would equip that individual or group of individuals
to accomplish their task.

Last week I suggested that we look for
men that are already shepherding,
that are doing what Jesus told Peter to do, to

1. Feed my lambs,
2. Take care of my sheep,
3. Feed my sheep.

What relational tools would they need in their toolboxes
in order to successfully accomplish that?

And is there a summary statement,
kind of an overriding, guiding principle
that should shape the process
of what kind of people to be looking for?

I suggest that Paul says “Yes, actually there is.”

I Timothy 3:1

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart
(Lit. Reaches out, as when you reach out your hand)
on being an overseer, he desires a noble task, or work.

² (“Now the overseer must be above reproach...”)

Not one qualification or condition among many.

I would encourage you to read where Paul starts
as where WE should start as we think about
men serving as our shepherds, our elders, our overseers.

Are these men people that other people can and will
respect enough that they will follow them
as sheep follow a shepherd?

Are they above reproach?

In the NT it occurs only in 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:7-
 one who cannot be attacked (even by non-Christians)
 because of his moral conduct.¹

What follows are examples of this principle,
 ways or areas where elders show that they reflect well
 on Christ and on his Body, the church.

If people don't respect or trust the shepherd,
 when they hear his voice, they won't follow.
 The passage from 1 Peter 5:3 that we looked at last week
 said that in contrast to "Lording it over the flock,"
 they are to lead by example.

And so if the example isn't there, if there is no trust,
 then bullying and demanding, manipulating,
 coercing, shaming-
 these become the strategies
 leadership has to use to accomplish its purposes.

(And yes, many of us have lived through
 this kind of supposed leadership in the church.)

But Jesus is clear.

To the disciples jockeying for positions of prestige,
 he will say

¹ Kittel, G., Bromiley, G. W., & Friedrich, G. (Eds.). (1964–). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed., Vol. 4, p. 9). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Matt. 20:25-28

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant (deaconos),²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave (doulos),²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

He is talking to the 12 apostles

who want to sit on 12 thrones,

and judge the 12 tribes of Israel.

But if you are going to function

as an overseer, as an elder, as a shepherd,

you must see yourself first and foremost as a servant,

as a slave... just like Jesus did,

who emptied himself and took the form of a slave.

(Phil. 2:7)

So before any other characteristic or quality,

as a summary over all the other qualities,

an elder must be “above reproach”... blameless.

Typically, when we are preparing to appoint elders,

we just plow into the list at this point.

But let’s look at one more passage that I think

helps us to interpret what to do with the “lists”

in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

After all the conversation about

elders and deacons and the women and all of that,

in I Timothy 3:14-15, we read-

¹⁴ Although I hope to come to you soon,
 I am writing you these instructions so that,
¹⁵ if I am delayed,
 you will know how people ought to conduct themselves
 in God's household, which is the church of the living God,
 the pillar and foundation of the truth.

So that IF Paul is delayed
 by being imprisoned for the gospel in Rome,
 people will know how to conduct themselves...(where?)
 In God's household, which is the church of the living God.

So what Paul has just been describing
 is how people can conduct themselves in God's household,
 based on leadership refined in their own households.

Listen carefully to Paul's rationale
 as he continues describing a "man above reproach"-

Now the overseer must be above reproach,
 the husband of one wife (lit. a one-woman man),
 temperate, self-controlled, respectable,
 hospitable, able to teach,
³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle,
 not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

⁴ He must manage his own family well
 and see that his children obey him with proper respect.

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

Can we listen to what Paul is teaching us here?

The proving ground for a person's aptitude as a shepherd
is their own family-

how they interact with their wife and children.

Titus 1:6 reads-

⁶ An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife,
a man whose children believe and are not open
to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Manage YOUR own family,

Be above reproach with your own family-

temperate, not abusive, violent or quarrelsome,

not given to drunkenness...

Then maybe,

you will deal well with God's family, God's household.

In I Timothy 3:6-7, Paul will add will add

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

⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders,
so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

In Titus 1:7-9, Paul will add

Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work,

(v.7) he must be blameless-

(yes, he says it TWICE, in Titus 1:6, and again in verse 7...

Interesting. Think maybe he's trying to make a point?)

- not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to

drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

⁸ Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good,
who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

⁹ He must hold firmly
to the trustworthy message as it has been taught,
so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine
and refute those who oppose it.

If you study the two lists carefully,
there is a whole lot of overlap, but they are NOT identical.

Perhaps Paul didn't intend for these to be
exhaustive checklists, or maybe checklists at all.

Maybe they were intended to be illustrative,
about what it might mean for someone to be
"above reproach," examples of areas to think about,

What's the takeaway?

Are there men who are already shepherding,
caring for the sheep, able to teach,
above reproach- not perfect,
but not bringing a bad reputation on themselves,
their family or the church?

Are there men who can lead by example?

Are there men people would be willing to follow,
because of the quality of their spiritual example,
lived out first in their home,

and then before the congregation,
and finally, before the world?

Doesn't it make sense,
as we strive to become a family after God's own heart,
that we strive to be led by men
who have demonstrated in their family,
and then demonstrated in service to the congregation,
that they are, and want to become even better,
men after God's own heart?

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1. Study the lists.
 2. Work to understand the lists.
 3. More importantly,
try to incorporate these qualities
into your own lives,
because these are exemplary qualities for any
believer.

Let's ALL try to live lives that are blameless,
above reproach, and that will draw people to Christ.

As we look for additional shepherds, and then deacons,
these are the kind of people we should seek.

Amen?

Thoughts About Leadership #7

Qualities or characteristics of Elders, part I

I Timothy 3:1-7

The saying is trustworthy:

If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.
² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Titus 1:5-9

⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— ⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

(I think) the bracketing terms-

“above reproach” and “good reputation with outsiders.”

One against whom it would be impossible to bring any charge of wrongdoing such as could stand impartial examination.”

(Expositor's Greek Testament)

Temperate (nephalios) = “not mixed with wine,” sober-minded, or balanced, not given to extremes.

Self-controlled (sophronos) = not controlled by others or their passions.

Respectable (kosmios) = orderly, honorable, able to summon respect from people.

Hospitable (philoxenos)= a “lover of strangers,”

Able to teach (didaktikos) = “Not merely a readiness to teach is implied, but the spiritual power to do so as the outcome of prayerful meditation in the Word of God and the practical application of its truth to oneself.” (Vines)

Not given to (much) wine (paroinos) = “beside wine, lingering with the cup,” translated sometimes as a drunkard, tipsy or rowdy from Aristotle.

Not violent (me plekten) = not “a striker,” with either words or fists, but gentle, bruiser, ready for a blow.

B. a pugnacious, contentious, quarrelsome person.

9. Gentle (epeikes) = sweet reasonableness, gracious, kindly, forbearing, considerate, magnanimous, genial (Matthew Arnold).

Not quarrelsome or promoting conflict (amachos), but peaceful.

Not greedy for gain, or a lover of money (philargyros)

A lover of good (philagathos)

Upright (dikaios) as opposed to twisted, warped, manipulative or easy to manipulate, law-abiding.

Holy- (hosios)

“what is right and good before God and man...”

Disciplined- (enkrates) = managing the passions (see also Gal. 5:22-23)

“Not a recent convert...” (neophytos) = “newly planted”

Having respectful, well-managed, believing children...
