

The Church, part 3

(1 Timothy 3:1-2)

(preached Pine Grove 6/25/17; Sunday PM)

Introduction

To be considered a Navy SEAL candidate, here are the minimum requirements...

A 500 yard swim in 8 minutes followed by a 10 minute rest followed by...

100 consecutive pushups followed by a 2 minute rest followed by....

100 consecutive sit-ups followed by a 2 minute rest followed by...

20 pull-ups followed by a 10 minute rest followed by..

A 1.5 mile run in 10 minutes...

Now, understand this...

These are just the requirements to be a candidate to try to become a SEAL.

This isn't the actual test to be a SEAL, only to be considered a Navy SEAL..

Once a candidate passes these basic minimum standards, he will be given a Navy SEAL contract to go for further training..

The SEAL prep school is in Great Lakes Illinois, where the physical tests increase to a timed 4 mile run and a 1000 meter timed swim...

This lasts 8 weeks if the candidate can make it, then he will head to Colorado for 24 weeks of more training..

In Colorado, SEAL candidates will be pushed even farther physically and mentally..

In fact, only 1 in 4 who make it Colorado make it through this stage...

In this stage, candidates learn how swim while bullets are being fired at them...

They learn to scuba dive...

They learn to shoot from the water...

They will learn to swim while having their hands or feet bound..

They will learn to stay alive in ice cold water and then run 4 miles in wet clothes and boots..

In the final 7 weeks of this 24 week training, only the best of the best survive...

One part of the final 7 weeks is to stay awake and physically and mentally sharp with only 4 hours of sleep over 5 days..

Those who make it through these 24 weeks go on to be training how to use scuba gear to swim miles underwater...

They then learn hand to hand combat with a variety of weapons..

Then will then head to parachute jump school in San Diego...

That is followed by 26 weeks at SEAL qualification training as you being to train with your team...

Followed by graduation, and then more training in a specialized field within the SEALs like language, sniper, explosives or some other specialty.

This could last 18 months in addition to the time you have already put in..

Now, that is a long list that took a while to get out, but I think the point is clear...

Navy SEALs are the best of the best...

Along with other specialized soldiers like the Army green berets or Army rangers or Air Force Special tactics team or the Marines special forces team..

Then above that, there are teams of special forces that work for the CIA or FBI, who are composed of the best of the best of the best..

And look, I am grateful for men and women who make up these special forces teams and I want them to be highly trained so that they can keep evil people in check...

I dont want someone like me walking in the Navy recruiting office tomorrow and then being sent to Afghanistan tomorrow to fight against evil..

That would make no sense at all to anyone...

Yet, guess what?

We will put people in pulpits and in leadership positions in churches who simply say that they want to serve and we won't ask them to pass any qualification standard at all...

I have seen men step up behind a pulpit and be given the reigns to lead the church and all they had to do was say they wanted to lead...

Look, the Bible says that an internal desire to lead the church is a qualification to leadership, but it is not the only requirement or qualification..

The Bible also describes an external standard as well...

The Bible gives external qualifications as well that must be met before they can be considered for leadership positions in the church..

Let me put it this way, I can have a strong desire to be a Navy SEAL, but my desire is not enough to make me a Navy SEAL...

There are tests designed to see if I qualify that I must pass in order to be given the position...

And think about this...

If we require standards to serve our country and we ask men to meet those standards, why ignore the biblical qualifications to serve the Lord?

Yet many churches have ignored the standards and suffered because men who weren't qualified to lead the

church were allowed to lead and that never has a good outcome...

So, what I want to do over the next two weeks is present the biblical qualifications for church leadership found in the Scriptures...

I want to present the high standard for serving the Lord's church, and I want us as a church to get a clear understanding of it...

Now, to remind you of what we are doing on Sunday nights this summer...

We are an overview of the church....

I am going to present nine characteristics of a church that honors the Lord and his word...

Two weeks ago, we finished up a look at Biblical preaching...

Which is the idea that the preaching ministry of a church drives the direction of the church...

And that preaching ministry must be centered on the people of the church being taught the Scriptures...

Not only taught the Scriptures, but taught in a way that the Bible makes sense to them...

And can be applied to their lives to drive them to salvation or grow in their way with the Lord...

I talked about the importance of expository preaching that carries us through books of the Bible and helps us see the big picture and then application to our lives...

And thought there are other forms of Biblical preaching, I told you of my commitment to doing that, even though I know that topical preaching like tonight is helpful too...

And so if we glance back at our list of these 9 characteristics of healthy churches, you will notice that the second trait of an effective church is not only biblical preaching but qualified leadership...

And so what we going to do over the next 2 weeks is look at this very important characteristic of a healthy church and that is how it is led...

Tonight, we are going to begin to look at the biblical qualifications and talk about them...

And then we will follow that up with how leadership in a church should be structured....

Now, how can we benefit at Pine Grove from looking at this over the next few weeks?

A couple of thoughts here of why you should be listening and why it is important to consider the leadership of a church...

First, you need to know about leadership qualifications because you need to know what to look for in leaders...

Because the church is to be protected from unqualified leadership and the only safeguard from that is a well-informed congregation...

If the gatekeepers don't know who to let in and out of the gate, then the castle is in trouble...

Now, there are other reasons to be attentive over the next few Sunday nights as well...

Here at Pine Grove, we have to solve a few problems with leadership...

First, there are bylaws in place that spell out how leadership is structured here, but the problem is that they haven't been adhered to in some years...

So, we need to think about what type of leadership structure that we want...

There are couple options...

First, we can keep what we have and simply put it into practice...

Second, we can modify what we have...

Third, we can go with a new system of church government all together...

But the starting point for all of that is to see what the Bible says about qualified leaders and the new will look at what system seems to work best...

So, where do we find the qualifications for church leaders?

Well, there are 2 main passages and 1 other passage in the NT...

The 2 main passages give the qualifications and the 3rd passage goes on to describe how leaders are to lead...

Let's start in 1 Timothy 3, where we find the first list of qualifications in verses 1-7...

I. The Qualifications of Overseers (1-7)

Before we begin, let me set the stage for the book of 1 Timothy..

Paul wrote this first letter to Timothy to help him as he pastored the church in Ephesus...

Now the Ephesian church was a very influential church...

Paul had spent 3 years there...

John would spend some time there later in his life, but in between those 2 giants of the faith, Timothy pastored the flock in Ephesus...

Now Timothy was a young man in need of much wisdom, so Paul sat down and wrote Timothy an instruction manual for the church under the inspiration of the the Lord...

So what we have in 1 Timothy is God's way to do church...

And a vital part of any church is the men who lead it...

Now the Ephesian church was suffering from poor leadership, so Paul is clear with Timothy about what type of men who'll lead the church...

And he begins this list of qualifications right here in the 3rd chapter of the 1 Timothy....

So, let's read through these verses and we will see how far we get and we are going to get a look at the high standard to be in leadership of the the Lord's church...

Let's begin in verse 1 of 1 Timothy 3...

Where we see what I believe is a qualification of a church leader and that is desire...

#1 - Passionate

Verse 1 of 1 Timothy 3....

1 It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of [a]overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.

As God inspired Paul to write this letter, he caused Paul to use two different but closely related words to begin this list of leadership qualifications...

The words were aspire and desire....

Aspire means to reach out...

Desire is an inward drive...

You see, men who lead the church have a desire within them to do it, and a that causes them to reach out and take hold of it...

In other words, church leaders are driven to action by an inward passion to lead the Lord's church...

Now, here is why this is important...

Because I have seen men who had no desire to lead push into the office because they "looked the part."

I have seen successful men recruited to lead the church because they had built a successful business...

I have seen wealthy men pushed into church leadership roles because people figured the church could use some financial wisdom...

I have seen young men cornered into taking a leadership position because they were young and passionate, but still were not spiritually mature enough to lead and serve the church in that capacity..

Let's be clear here because I think the Bible is clear here...

A desire to serve the church can be given to someone else or forced upon them...

Only God can direct the heart and change the heart, so we better be careful of becoming someone's Holy Spirit in matters of church leadership...

Look, it is perfectly fine to simply be faithful and serve the church and support the church and never be in leadership...

God doesn't call everyone to do it, and there is no shame in not doing it...

There is one body with many parts and we all work together to move the church forward....

This is why it is important for churches to be wise here and not to lay burdens on men to serve where the Lord hasn't put a burden in their heart already...

Ultimately, we trust the Lord to put the men into the positions He wants them in...

Not in the positions that we want them in...

And if that means that a church only has 2-3 leaders fore every 100 people that is okay, and if the Lord wants 12 for every 100 people, that is okay as well...

Because the worst thing a church can do is have men in positions where they have no desire to serve...

That is a recipe for disaster...

Let me give you the best scenario for choosing men who are in leadership in a church...

The best scenario is to let them approach the current leaders due to the strong desire in their life to serve the church...

And then let those current leaders determine if they meet the qualifications based upon the next set of verses that we see here....

So, let's look at these qualifications that begin in verse 2...

2 [b]An overseer, then, must be above reproach...

Now, before we get to the first qualification of being above reproach, we have to figure out who we are talking about here...

And here is where it gets real confusing for Baptists, who refer to our overseers as deacons...

Now that creates a problem because overseers are not deacons...

In fact, the qualifications for deacons are going to follow this qualifications for overseers in the next section of chapter 3...

So, what is an overseer?

An overseer is another word for elder or even for bishop in the NT...

The overseer is a position of highest authority in the local church...

Pastors are overseers of the flock but they are one overseer among many...

You see, the model for church government is to have overseers and then under them are deacons who help them carry out the ministry of the local church and then have the people of the church...

Now most Southern Baptists call their overseers deacons, which makes it real confusing because deacons are really servants of the overseers...

In recent years, however, it is getting better as many Baptist churches are now calling their overseers elders and then correctly filling the office of deacons, which simply means servant, with folks who simply serve the elders to carry out ministry...

You see, Pine Grove has 5 deacons and 3 deacons in training, but they are better describes as 5 overseers with 3 overseers in training...

And then I would simply be another overseer to give us 6 overseers and 3 in training.....

We will talk about this more later, but proper terminology is important because the qualifications for overseers and deacon are very similar but different...

Men can be qualified to be a deacon but fall short of being an elder, so we have to be clear with our words to avoid confusion and lead to problems in the church...

For now, let's simply begin to look at the qualifications to be an overseer or elder in the church...

Now, let me make one more point here...

There is no age restriction on these men...

There are young men who are more spiritually mature than men who are much older than them...

So, we must be careful not to disqualify someone because of age...

A lot of people hear elder or even overseer and automatically assume that they must be older, but that is not what elder means here...

So, let's get back to our text....

Once a man shows an inward and outward desire to serve and reveals that desire to the church, he must then prove himself to be qualified...

And the first qualification is to be above reproach...

And the meaning of that is this...

No one can bring a charge against him...

Now, this does not mean sinless or no one would be qualified to serve...

The interpretation is that he has no on-going sin in his life where someone can say that man is a adulterer or liar or crook...

Though he sins, sin is not a pattern of his life...

He is above reproach in that no one can establish a pattern of sinful behavior in his life...

In short, people see him as an upright, trustworthy person...

Wee then move on in verse 2 to this qualification that causes all sorts of issues, but I think is real simple to interpret....

Let's read it first..

2 [b]An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife,....

The qualification issue here is this...

If a man wanting to serve the church is married, he must be a one woman man...

He can't be considered a flirt, a womanizer, etc....

He must be morally and sexually pure...

Now, does this mean a single man can serve as an overseer or deacon?

And I would say yes, but he must remain pure...

Now, does this exclude a divorced man from serving?

And I would say no as long as he remains pure while single...

Now, does this exclude a divorced and remarried man from serving?

And I would say no...

There are biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage, so it doesn't necessarily exclude a divorced man from serving...

The focus of the second qualification is sexual purity in whatever marriage status a man is in when he is filled with a desire to serve...

There is more to be said there, but if you have questions about that qualification, come see me...

The next qualification is also found in verse 2...

2 [b]An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate....

Some see this as a call to no alcohol since the Greek word means 'wineless,' but that isn't the focus here since Paul will deal with alcohol in verse 3...

Temperance here is the necessity of a church leader to be level headed and a clear thinker...

The reason Paul chose this word is that wine fogs decisions making...

But an overseer or elder must not be known for clouded judgment...

This is the idea of a balanced man...

One who isn't likely to make rash decisions and act under emotion...

And let me say, there are emotional men who let their emotions lead them, but a biblically qualified man is level headed and not impulsive...

He is clear thinker...

He isn't under the influence of emotions or the impulses of his own flesh, but he can think biblically and be level headed under pressure...

Now, we move to temperate to the next qualification in verse 2, which is this...

2 [b]An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent....

The idea in our language of prudence is carefulness, and that gets part of this idea...

But the point here is that an overseer or elder takes his responsibility seriously...

He is serious in caring out his role of leadership....

He takes care to do his job right, which speaks of organization and have the right priorities...

In other words, his ducks are in a row and serving the church is a high priority...

This doesn't mean a man who laughs and kids around is disqualified...

It simply means a qualified leader knows when to be serious minded and then takes care to do what is asked of him with excellence...

The opposite of prudence would be a man who is reckless with his role in the church...

Who doesn't care and is unorganized and jokes about his lack of care for the job....

A prudent man takes care to fulfill his calling with all seriousness because he is serious minded about the job that God has called him to...

Next on the list is this...

2 [b]An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable,

...

Many see this as have character or being a respectable person, but the Greek word that Paul chose is related to the idea of an ordered life...

The idea is this....

An overseer or elder has an ordered life that brings respect from the people who know him....

In other words, his life is not out of control...

It is not chaotic...

And the point is simple..

If you can't order and manage your own life, how can you be expected to manage the church?

Let's finish out these last 2 qualifications in verse 2 and we will stop for tonight...

The next qualification is this...

2 [b]An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable.....

We lose the meaning here but hospitality is not just showing love to those who we know...

It is not just opening our homes and hosting others that we know and like...

Hospitality is welcoming the stranger as well...

It is caring for people you don't know as often as you care for people you know..

And why is this important in an overseer and elder?

Well, you see the church is made up of all sorts of peoples and cultures and levels of income....

If a man can't show hospitality to all, he can't lead the church that is made up all sorts of people...

The church isn't just white middle class people...

It is asian and african american and hispanic and everything in between...

And if a man can't open his home and be kind to all of God's people, he can't serve God's church...

We make hospitality into showing love to people just like us, but biblical hospitality is loving your neighbor

regardless of skin color, size of bank account, or family tree..

A man who wants to lead the church must love all the people of God...

A final qualification of verse 2, and I will offer more on this next week, is this....

2 [b]An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,....

Men who desire to be overseers/elders must be qualified to teach...

Now, this doesn't mean they have to climb in the pulpit and preach a church service, but it could mean that if an emergency arises...

Long story short, overseers and elders know the Scriptures well enough to teach them to the flock...

It doesn't mean it is a perfect lecture or perfect sermon but it does mean that it is based upon the Scripture and helpful to the people of God....

This is the only qualification that separates overseers and elders from deacons...

Overseers and elders are those that can handle the Word of God well enough to give it to others...

We will talk about that a little more next week...

Let me end with this....

Conclusion

Church leaders are not those seeking to climb the ladder of success by stepping on people but a place to head to the bottom of the ladder by serving others and holding them up...

Being in leadership at church isn't to pursued to gain recognition by man but to serve the Lord...

Church leadership is not a contest of popularity by a reflection of spirituality...

Church leadership is unlike any other position of leadership in the world because the church is unlike any other organization in the world...

The church isn't a business..

It isn't a community organization or a charity...

The church is the bride of Christ and contains God's representatives in the world...

Therefore those who lead it must know God and love church and His church....

Church leadership is not about personal gain but kingdom gain...

Because ultimately...

Church leadership is unlike any other position of leadership in the world because the church is unlike any other organization in the world...

Let us pray....