

1 Timothy 3

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[0 : 0 0] The key verse of 1 Timothy 3, I think it's verse 15, where he says this, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Paul says this, I write these things, I hope to come to you soon, I hope to come to see you soon, but this is how you ought to behave in the church of God. Now the key word in verse 15 is the word household. And I think that is a very key thing, a very important thing to understand, that the focus of this chapter is all about leaders, isn't it? And how do you recognise leaders in the church? But you will never recognise leaders in the church until you recognise what the church is. The church is God's household. And now, the church isn't God's house. The church is God's household.

Have you seen those things, isn't it, where occasionally, you've seen in a film, isn't it, there's a little child or two children running through a Roman Catholic church, and the priest turns into them and says in hushed tones, behave yourself in the house of God, or something like that. Behave yourself in the house of God. And occasionally, we talked about that, you go to churches where they talk about this is God's house. Well, this isn't God's house. This is Drayton Manor High School, isn't it? And when we get our new building, God willing, in 2043, it will be a wonderful thing. But what is it, theologically? Well, it is an umbrella, isn't it? It's an expensive umbrella, to keep the rain from beating down on your heads. This isn't God's house. We are not Roman Catholics. This is the place where we meet. But look around you. We are God's house. We are God's house. And that is such a crucially important thing for us to grasp. And I think particularly as Presbyterians.

There needs to be a mind shift. We do not go to church. We are the church. And also Paul is saying here to Timothy. Some people have taken 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus as kind of a handbook on church for polity. The Bible's BCO. But that is not what this is about at all.

Paul is not telling you how to behave when you come to a church building on a Sunday. When you turn up to Drayton Manor High School or you've got a drink in green of an evening. That is not what these letters are about. The word household is exactly the same word that is used earlier on in the chapter to describe the family.

Where he says, so for example, in verses 4 and 5. He must manage his own household. With all dignity, keeping his children submissive. For if somebody does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? And then you get it again in verse 12. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

[2 : 5 7] Now, so he talks about when you look for leaders, when you are choosing leaders, you need to look into a man's family. How does he perform there in his family? Does he manage his own household well? And it's the same word that is used about the church. You will never find the word church described in the New Testament as a builder that you come to. It is a household.

It is the family of God. And that is vitally important. That when we're thinking about leadership in the church, it's vital. Because running a family is very different, isn't it, to running a business. And many churches in the U today have kind of adopted a business model for church life. So the pastor functions as the CEO, and the elders are replaced or called a board, a board of directors. And the worst case scenario is that people are often manipulated and used.

But the church is not a business. And the church is not a building. It is a family. It is a household. So, John Piper wrote a wonderful little paperback for church leaders where he calls it this.

He says, brothers, we are not professionals. Brothers, we are not professionals. We are not professionals. Now, don't misinterpret me. It's not that we don't want to do things professionally. It's not that we don't want to do things efficiently and effectively. Of course we do. But the point he's making there is that if you think that spiritual work can be done by corporate power, then you need to think again. You need to go back to the Bible because essentially we are 24-7 the household of

God. We are not just church when we turn up here on a Sunday. We are 24-7 God's household. And Paul says, I am writing so that you may know how people ought to act in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth.

[5 : 05] So given that definition, that description of the church as God's household, what kind of leaders are we to look for? And of course the answer is we do that prayerfully and scripturally.

So how do you look for leaders? How do you choose the kind of leaders that we need in God's household? Well, in 1 Timothy chapter 2, we looked at world leaders, didn't we? We are to pray for rulers and kings and governors. And how are you to pray for world leaders?

You are to pray for world leaders so that the gospel will spread everywhere. That's the purpose.

And in 1 Timothy 3, we're looking at church leaders. We're looking at the spiritual oversight of God's household. In fact, the word that is used there, the word overseer, is the Greek word episkopos, from which we get the word bishop. It is used interchangeably in the New Testament.

Presbytus, which means presbytros, which means elder, elders, bishops, overseers. The elders you saw up here, they are the bishops of West Enoch, alright? Elders, bishops, overseers.

They're used interchangeably, if you like. And they are the ones Paul is talking about in the first seven verses. And then you'll see he goes on to talk about deacons, about the diaconate. And again, very often in the Presbyterian churches, we equate the diaconate with a kind of management board. The diaconate is what? Well, it is actually, is a sort of support to ministry role. What does the word deacon mean? Diacrist? It means servant. It is a serving role. It is a pastoral ministry. It is, at times, a social welfare ministry in the church.

[6 : 53] And so what we have here is this two-fold leadership pattern that is being described for us. And I want to say three things. I will come back to this chapter in the autumn. But notice what he says in verse 1. He says, this is a trustworthy saying. And I think that should make you sit up and take notice. The Apostle Paul says that three times, only three times in the letter.

Do you notice that? He says it in the first slide in chapter 1. He says, this is a trustworthy saying. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. That is our trust need. That is what we hang up on to. That is worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. And then in chapter 4, which we'll see in a few weeks' time.

Chapter 4, verses 9 and 10. This is a trustworthy saying and deserving of full acceptance.

The living God is saviour of all people, especially of those who believe. So you see the trustworthy statements. You've got a sandwich, haven't you? You've got two statements. Two great gospel statements that God is the saviour for all kinds of people. And then in between those two gospel statements that God is saviour, you find verse 1 of chapter 3. If anyone desires to the office of an overseer. If anybody sets his heart on being an elder, he desires a noble task. And does it seem so out of place?

If I was asked to be one of the three great truths of Christianity, would you have come up with this? But what Paul is saying to you and I is who our leaders are matters. And how we recognise our leaders is crucially important. Leadership in Christ's church is not a secondary issue. Can you see that? It's not just a matter of church quality. It's not just a matter of organisation. You make up your mind, whatever best suits you. No, it is a gospel matter.

It is a gospel issue. And as far as Paul is concerned, and he's not just talking about leading, is he? He's talking about wanting to be a leader. And as Brits, we are a little bit suspicious of that, aren't we? We like our leaders to kind of be reluctant, don't we? They're the kind of leaders we need. We are very suspicious of somebody who puts up their hand and wants to do something. We're suspicious of those who aspire to leadership. So very often in church life, some of you say, I really wanted to do that, but I just didn't, you know, what would people think if I did it? I didn't want to be seen to be putting myself forward. And we like reluctant leaders, oh, go on, I'll do it then. Is that the kind of thing? Do you want to be a deacon? Oh, no, of course, I'd never want to do that. But then all you twisted my arm or something hurt. But Paul says a desire for the work is a noble thing. It's a good thing. And so I think that is a key, there is a key thing when we talk about leadership in our congregation. Where are we going to find leaders in the future of this congregation? Well, the first thing you find is you've got to look into a person's heart. You look around a congregation because there will be people who are here already doing the work of eldership. That is how you recognize elders. That is how you recognize elders. They are a gift from the ascended Lord Jesus

[10 : 36] Christ through his church, and they are already doing the work. And so you don't primarily train elders. You don't have a leisure course where you primarily train them, and you set them

through different tasks and give them various training. And at the end, hey, presto, they're an elder. No, they are a gift from the ascended, risen Christ through his church. And so an elder will already be doing the work of an elder without the title. That is where you look. You look for people who, they don't want the status of being an elder in the Presbyterian church, but people who are actually loving people. And they're looking out for them. And they teach them God's word, and they care for them. And they are men who are at the prayer meeting and are committed praying. Those whose desire, whose heart is set upon the work of overseeing the church.

And so look around you. See people who are pastoring, teaching, praying. Now three points this morning, okay? Three reasons why this is so vital. And if we screw up here as a church, we will lose the church in the next generation. Three reasons why this is so critical. Number one, because the world is watching us. Number two, because the enemy is waiting. And number three, because the church is witnessing. Number one, because the world is watching us. And that is why we have to be very, very careful with the elders we appoint in a gospel church.

And as you can see, the world is watching us. Notice how Paul begins the list of qualifications for Elshea. Look at verse 2, chapter 3. And then look at verse 7. The overseer must be above reproach. The King James Version says blameless. Now that doesn't mean blameless in a kind of pharisaical way. Paul said that when he was a Pharisee, he was blameless. He kept the law to the latter of the law. The word means unimpeachable. So leaders are in the shop window. If I can put it that way. And leaders either commend the gospel or they will obscure the gospel. Ellen Glasgow, in her biography, talks about her father who was a Presbyterian elder. And she describes him in this way. She says he was full of rectitude and rigid with duty. He was entirely unselfish and in his long life he never committed a single pleasure.

Is that the kind of leadership you want in church life? Is that the kind of people you want in the shop window? Is that kind of rigid, joyless religion, is that the kind of leadership that commands the church to the world? Mark Twain talks about church people who are good in the worst sense of the word. Cold, cynical and correct. Is that what Paul has got in mind here? No, of course not. He is concerned with the reputation of the church in the world.

[13:44] Our reputation must be blameless and above reproach. And so in verse 7 he says he must be well thought of by outsiders because the world is watching. And what does the world see when he looks through the world see? What kind of reputation do our leaders have in this era?

Those are the sorts of questions that we need to be asking. Now I think it's fair to say that is not the first thing that we think about. Maybe, why is that? Maybe it's because we don't share the same concerns as the Apostle Paul. You see, Paul's primary concern in 1 Timothy 3 is not ecclesiology, the study of the doctrine of the church, it is evangelism. Paul's primary concern is not how the church should be ordered, it's how the church should reach out. And that is his primary concern as we saw in 1 Timothy 2. We want godly leaders. Well, what is godliness?

What is godliness? Godliness is wanting what God wants. Isn't it? What does God want? 1 Timothy 2 verse 4. He wants all people everywhere to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. And so we need leaders at every level of the church, especially at the local level, who share God's passion for the world to be one for Christ. That is what godliness is.

And that is what we need in elders and in deacons and on the building committee. We need gospel-hearted and gospel-minded men and women who are in line with God's great passion of seeing the world one for Christ. And so the agenda of the church, of every session meeting, of every deacon's meeting, well it must be, mustn't it? It must be, how do we win this town for Christ? That's what leadership is about. That is what leadership in Christ's household is all about. That is what we're here for. Now let me come at it from a different angle. A paratious born of the Scottish 19th century man said this, I looked for the church and I found it in the world. It's good, isn't it? It's where the church is meant to be, being salt and light in the world. But then he went on to say, I looked for the world and I found it in the church. Now that's not so good, is it? If the boat's in the water, that's great, it's where it's meant to be. But if the water gets into the boat, it's sunk.

[16:17] Paul writing to this church in Ephesus, they were sinking. Why were they sinking? Because worldly men, who didn't even command the respect of those in the outside world, were leading.

Men who were interested in genealogies, I admit they were very religious. And they were proselytizing one another rather than evangelizing the world, as we saw in chapter 1. And that has been the mistake that denominations like ours have made historically. That we put the wrong

people in leadership. And we must never, ever make that mistake again. Because if we do, we are sunk.

Seriously. Look at verses 2 to 7. I've been said all that. I just want us to glance at these verses. Here are the qualifications for a leader in Christ's church. You know, sometimes when I've spoken about this, people say, well, I could never live up to these qualifications in 1 Timothy 3.

Just look at them. Have you ever read 1 Timothy 3? He says, if you've got a point in Elber, make sure he's not a violent man. And make sure that he's not giving to too much drink.

I don't think Paul is raising the ball very high, is he? These are the sorts of things, aren't they, that you get thrown out of a pub for on a Saturday night? He's not exactly raising the ball very high.

[17:45] What does he say? What does he mean? Well, let me put it like this. You see it in our societies. You see it particularly with newspaper journalists. That journalists, they recognize a standard of behavior, don't they? They recognize a certain standard of behavior. They don't live up to it, they know that. But they recognize a certain standard of behavior, and they expect their leaders to live up to that standard. And when church leaders don't even live by the standards of society at large, then the church loses all credibility before a watching world. And that is what Paul is concerned about here.

If you read the commentators, they will tell you that this list of qualifications is just like the virtues that are commonplace in that society of today. There's nothing particularly spiritual or moral. It is just plain decency. These are the standards people expect. And Paul is saying, if you are going to put leaders in the shop window, if you are going to put people in the shop window, just make sure that they are not a stumbling block to the watching world. The world is looking on. And the world is watching.

And we must not lose our credibility by putting the wrong people in the shop window. The world is watching. Secondly, the enemy is waiting. The enemy is waiting. Because not only are our leaders in the shop window, this is probably a word for any of you who are sitting there thinking, well actually I would like to be a leader in Christ's church. I do desire the work. Well, what you need to do this morning is count the cost.

Because not only are leaders in the shop window, they are in the front line. And they are in the firing line. So look at verses 6 and 7. Look what he says about potential leaders. It says, he must not, he must not be a recent convert.

[19:47] Or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Peter. Do you know how he describes the devil?

He describes the devil as a roaring lion seeking to devour who he will. And in verse 6, oh what a tasty snack for the devil. Isn't he?

Verse 6, a new convert. He's made too much of too soon. He's thrust into prominence. He's puffed up with pride. And you can almost hear the devil smacking his lips.

But we've got to be very careful about this, particularly in our circles today. In pushing young men into church ministry too soon. There's a great movement in the UK if you read even on top of the newspapers you'll see that.

That it's doing a great job in attracting young guys maybe straight from university in their early 20s for ministry. There's a church planting movement which is recruiting many young men to be church planters.

[20:59] but they've actually not been tried and tested. And I think there's real danger in that. I speak to somebody who became the pastor of this church when I was 26. There's huge danger in that isn't there?

The devil gobbles them up. Like that for breakfast. I think of my friend a good friend of mine we grew up together he was in the ministry he actually preached to he was a very, very able man. He became the kind of great hope. of kind of the reform movement in the UK in many ways. He spoke at conferences he wrote books. He was very, very influential. The devil gobbled them up. And the shipwreck of him. Now it's not a matter of age is it? Don't think that. But of maturity. And so when the apostle Paul was planting churches around the Mediterranean he went around and he preached the gospel he planted churches he gathered a congregation and probably been 18 months to two years he returns and he appoints elders in those churches of men who were only a couple of years old in the faith.

And so the question is not that of age but of maturity. Spurgeon put it like this some men are born with their beards already grown. And I think that's the point.

[22 : 18] It's not really the age thing. Do you know what? You can have a 70 year old who's still a novice. You can be a Christian who's been in church all your life and yet you've never grown to maturity. And yet you can be still a baby in Christ.

You can be a young man who God has taken hold off like a Whitefield or a Wesley. Those men who are preaching to thousands in their twenties. Spurgeon was ordained at the age of 16.

He led his first church in London and his only church in London at 19. And Paul says to Timothy doesn't he don't let anyone despise you because of your youth. It's not really an age thing it's a maturity thing.

So not a novice because we're in spiritual warfare. It is a battle and leaders are in the firing line and so the areas the devil attacks if you notice if you go through this chapter what are they?

There's three areas where the devil attacks church leaders. The first is in the area of sex and purity and faithfulness for his wife. The second is in the issue of money and not being greedy.

[23 : 21] And the third is not being of power being quarrelsome. Money checks and power. Not being quarrelsome not having a temper not losing it not losing control.

And there are three areas where the devil really goes at church leaders. That of purity that of handling money and that of power and control.

And it's a warfare. It's a spiritual warfare. In Ephesians 6 Paul exhorts the church to put on the whole armour of God and stand against the wiles of the devil.

And the whole context is interesting, isn't it? Do you remember the context in Ephesians 5? It's the home. And husbands and wives and children and bosses and workers.

And Paul says you are not working against you you are not fighting against flesh and flesh. But what? Principalities and powers and dominions.

[24 : 25] That is where the devil attacks the church. Where will the devil get leaders of this church? He'll get us in the area of relationships and of our marriages and in our parenting and in our workplace.

So I read recently the biography of Fesco Kibingeri the little book that's been brought out. He was the Archbishop of Uganda. And at one time he told this story about himself. He said once when he was going out to preach on the way out of his house he had an amazing he had a blazing row with his wife and he was late and yet the congregation was waiting for him it was Sunday morning.

He was about to preach at the cathedral and as he left the house he said I heard the Holy Spirit whisper in my ear okay you go to church I'll stay with your wife. It's interesting isn't it?

If you go for a secular job interview let's say you're going for a job interview as an architect they're not going to ask you about your private life. They will not ask you about your sexual purity.

There are probably laws against that. All that matters is that you get the job done. But when it comes to leadership as a household of the Lord Jesus Christ what matters is not is he good up front it's not what matters it's not can he tell a good joke and give people a laugh not is he popular not can he put on a good show what matters is what's he like at home.

[25 : 48] What's he like at home in his closest relationship with those who know him intimately because let's be honest if we fail there we will be casualties of the spiritual warfare and we'll be no good in spiritual leadership in the church.

it is a spiritual warfare and if you come into the leadership of the church you're in the firing line. The devil hates Christians the devil hates you do you know that?

He hates you but he hates Christian leaders in particular and your home and your family will be under attack. And there are lots of different ways he does that one of the ways he does that is the caricature of Christians to say have you noticed that?

You watch Dad's Army those endless repeats the ineffective effeminate namby pamby vicar that's the devil's caricature isn't it?

I remember Dick Lucas telling me he was visiting a hospital in Canada and he was looking for the facilities bathroom and when he went found the corridor last he found three toilets one for ladies gentlemen and clergy that's the devil's caricature isn't it?

[27 : 00] What is a clergyman? Is he a man or a woman? I don't know so choose carefully Paul is saying when you choose leaders for God's house look into the heart does he have a desire for the world?

Does he have a heart? Look into the head has he got a firm grasp of the truth? Is he able to teach others and handle the faith? Is he already doing that one to one? Is he getting alongside new

converts?

Is he discipling people and praying for people? Look into the heart look into the head and look into the home? Does he manage his own household? Because if he can't look after his family his own family how can he be trusted with God's family?

The world is watching the devil is waiting last thing quickly the church is witnessing look at the end of the chapter verse 14 and 15 he says this he says I hope to come to you soon but I'm writing these things so that if I delay you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God which is the church of the living God a pillar and a buttress of the truth Spurgeon says the church is not a salad to conceal the truth it is a pillar to display the truth the truth as it is in Jesus and that is what verse 16 is about verse 16 is a summary of the gospel it's one of the great three sixteens of the bible isn't it?

I talked about earlier on in the series that the church is like Nelson's column in the middle of Trafalgar Square that statue of Lord Nelson standing on a column 185 feet high it's a gathering place isn't it?

[28 : 29] for tourists and for pigeons and it was erected in the mid-19th century and it was erected to honour a famous man and to commemorate a famous victory and Paul is saying that is why the International Presbyterian Church of Eden exists it is to commemorate a famous man and to celebrate a famous victory and we are here to hold up to the watching world Jesus Christ and him crucified we are here we exist as a church to point people away from ourselves to Jesus because God's desire is that all people everywhere might be saved and come to acknowledge the truth so let me ask you as you close are you on for this?

are you part of God's household? as I come back to where I started I'll repeat myself again because I think it is absolutely crucial that we get this if we're going to grow as a church we need a mind shift we don't come to church we don't leave it to the minister don't just hire another minister don't just hire more church staff you are the church how often have you heard people say this well why don't they do something about it?

who are they? it's you and when we gather as we gather here on a Sunday do we gather as God's house do we take ownership of what is happening here on a Sunday?

why don't they open the windows? I say that who are they? why don't I open a window for goodness sake? do you desire to have a ministry in this congregation? what about visitors in this church?

we are amazingly privileged this morning as pretty much every week we have visitors who is welcoming them? you don't have to have your name on the router to be a welcomer you really don't you little you can take that initiative it's your house it's your family you are part of it do you know what I'm saying?

[30 : 43] so what are you aspiring to as part of God's house or what a privilege it is to be part of God's family I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of wickedness a doorkeeper do you know what you can do better than that?

a doorkeeper you can do better than that you're not on the door you're in the door you are part of God's household once you are prodigals far from home and God has brought you home into his family let's be family let's not just go to church let's not just roll up on a Sunday morning let's be the church and if God has brought you into this family what do you aspire to?

you see there is nothing in this chapter that is not required of all God's children I don't know when you pick that up I hope you don't read 1 Timothy chapter 3 and think oh I could never be an elder thank goodness I'm not a leader I'm glad I don't have to worry about gentleness and patience and faithfulness to my wife I'm glad I don't have to discipline my kids I can leave that to profession it's ridiculous if you are part of this family like you see well you can teach you actually do you remember what the writer from the Hebrews says the writer from the Hebrews says by now we should all be teachers even the ability to teach you don't have to go to theological college to be a teacher we should all be teachers in the Bible and that is the vision we are given of this church in 1 Timothy 3 somebody has said very helpfully that the only ability God needs is availability and I suppose what I'm asking you is this will you make yourself available or will you just leave it to others we are a family not a business let's pray a business

Thank you.