

1 Timothy 3: 2 a; “An Elder must be Blameless”, Sermon # 2 in a series on Elders and Deacons, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 7th, 2010, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

An elder must be blameless. We have moved from the desire of a man to the qualifications of the man who desires this office; who desires this good work. Those who would hold office in the church must pass the test of scrutiny. There should be a looking into the way that their character is manifested in various situations of their public life as seen by the membership of the church, and an examination of how they live their lives; before they are raised up to this position. We, as a church, I believe, need more office-bearers: We need plurality of elders and deacons if we are to function in the way in which the New Testament describes. We need to pray that the Lord would send forth laborers into His harvest. We need to, together, to recognize those men among us who meet the qualifications and are willing to serve. You will notice that this whole list of qualifications revolves around the character of the man; his manner of life, behavior, and attitudes, with very little emphasis on his gifts. We are prone to think that if a man has great gifts, the he will make a great pastor or elder, but this not what the Lord thinks. A gift of teaching, or the ability to preach and apply the truth is essential to the work of a pastor, but good character and reputation are far more important than an impressive gift. The question we will ask this afternoon is this: Why is there a “must” in regard to the prospective elder being blameless? And I believe that we can answer this by saying; there are two reasons why it is so crucial in God’s mind, and in the mind of the Apostle Paul.

1st – Because the Lord has a high standard for those would hold this office.

The elder or pastor “must be blameless”. He must be above reproach. No one should be able to charge the elder with an obvious fault in relation to all the qualifications listed after this word “must” is mentioned in the text. We should note that all Christian men are to pursue after all the virtues and qualities listed here, but the elder must meet them, and have them, and maintain them. Just as a side-note to what we are talking about here this afternoon; you may be asking yourself; why is it that a woman could not be considered for the pastorate or the deaconate? We could preach a whole sermon on that subject, but let me give you the short answer. It is found in verse 11, of Chapter 2; the words that immediately precede those that we are studying this afternoon. “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.” “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” “For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” This is the reason that women, even the most capable of women, are not under

consideration for leadership in the local church. It is because of God's designated role for her to fulfill in relation to the man; that she was formed for the man's sake; Adam being formed first. She was formed to be his helper; not his administrator or ruler. And then secondly, it is because she was deceived by the Devil in the beginning, in the temptation in the garden, and fell into transgression being deceived; whereas the man was not deceived, but yet he fell as well. And he fell by listening to her voice. It is for this reason that the Apostle Paul states very clearly and categorically that, in the church, a woman is to learn in silence with all submission. And that Paul's regularly stated policy and practice in regard to the raising up of leadership in the local church was; that he would not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." These are the reasons that we as a church do not have a woman pastor or deacons. It is because, clearly, it is not the will of God that it be so, for the reasons that are listed here. In our generation which has promoted women's liberation; turning women away from the truth of the Bible which speaks of these things; a woman becoming an elder or a pastor is a commonly accepted thing. But it is strictly against the Scripture. A woman who is seeking to become a pastor is seeking to go around the direct commandment of the Bible when she seeks leadership in the local church. She is hoping to be raised up to do a work that God has not promised that he will bless her in; God having not ordained that a woman should hold either of the offices that he has appointed in the church.

Getting back to the qualifications for any man seeking the office; being above reproach is being blameless in the estimation of fellow church members. He is a man to be trusted in ; confided in ; a man of integrity. No one can "take hold of him" to charge him with sinful actions which would dishonor God, or be a bad testimony before men. Job was spoken of by God in Job chapter 1 as this kind of a man; a man of integrity. In Job Chapter 1, verse 8, God says to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" Here we find the definition of what it means to be blameless. It is a man who fears God and is shunning, or turning away from evil. It doesn't mean that he is perfect. It is to be hoped, that the man knows well his own imperfections and is able to see a good many of his own faults. But he fears God; he has regard for all of God's will and God's word which defines His will. And he is consciously shunning and turning away from evil; not just when he sees it in others; but also, and most importantly, when he finds it in himself. Being blameless does not mean that a man will never make a mistake, or that he does not sin sometimes in his heart, or that he does not have to do battle with sin. It does mean that grace has produced a proven, dependable character which is confirmed in the minds of many, both inside and outside the church.

But being blameless, although it does not primarily refer to giftedness, it does relate to how the man uses the gift or gifts that the Lord has given to him. Here is a man, as you look at him, who is faithful in regard to God's truth. Turn with me

over to 1 Timothy Chapter 4, and verse 12. “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” “Till I come, give an attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.” “Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that you progress may be evident to all.” “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine.” “Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” You can see that if this is Paul’s exhortation to Timothy, who was already an evangelist and a missionary pastor to the congregations to whom he ministered, that these are the character qualities which should be found in those who are seeking to be an elder or a minister. Here is a young man in the ministry who is told that he should give attention to the Word of God and to exhorting others concerning the truth of it. He is to be meditating not only on the Word itself, but also studying to be able to make progress in becoming a doer of the Word. Ask yourself if you desire to be a leader, either as an elder, or as a deacon. Am I taking heed to what I am like as a person and how I am spending my time. Is it profitable for the kingdom? Is Christ, who is looking on, pleased with me in this regard? And then when other people look at my life; am I continuing on in the Word, in true doctrine, and in trying to persuade others of the truth of it? This is what it means to be blameless in that regard; being a good example in word, in conduct, in love, spirit, in faith, and in purity. Whether you have a gift of teaching and aspire to the eldership; or whether you do not have the gift of teaching and wish to become a deacon; this the mindset of blamelessness that you must have; and which you will strive to make progress in .

Secondly – There is a “must” in the text because the church must put her best men forward to see Christ’s kingdom advanced.

When we think of the word “blameless” we often associate it with things that may be wrong in a man’s life. But I think as we look at the list of qualifications we find, there, things that indicate certain virtues in the soul of the man which have been produced in his life by the Holy Spirit over time. These we hear the old theologians like William Ames calling them “cardinal virtues”. Let me tell you what he says on this subject. He says that virtue is “the condition or the habit by which the will is inclined to do good.” The word “cardinal” is a rather extravagant, but descriptive word. It means “of great importance; chief, or fundamental”. There are 4 virtues, he says, which are well developed in the candidate; or they should be, if he is to be a pastor or deacon. The 1st is a well-defined sense of justice or the sense of rectitude or uprightness. It can be seen in Philippians 4, verse 8. Turn with me, if you will, to this familiar verse. What must be seen in an elder is also something expected of all true Christians, but in the elder it stands out. “Whatever is true, noble (or honorable), just (or upright), whatever is pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and worthy of praise – this man’s mind and heart are dwelling on these things. It is not enough that he meet the qualification of what an elder should not be. He has cultivated his mind and heart to be set upon good

things, right things, true things; as they relate to God and to other people, what God expects; what he commands. I will develop this more in coming sermons, as we go down the list, but suffice it to say that his mind is fixed on the great and good matters of righteousness and purity and truth; not only for himself, but also in relation to Christ's people.

The 2nd virtue to be seen in a blameless man is prudence. Prudence is the right judgment and discernment of spiritual matters with a view to doing what is right, what God expects; what He commands. This a virtue of the mind; the mind's eye of the spirit-illumined man is filled with the wisdom and understanding of the Word of God, and then the mind directs the will towards doing what is right, and towards decisively shunning the wrong. Listen to a few verses – 2 Chronicles 2: 11 and 12 – “Then Hiram king of Tyre answered in writing, which he sent to Solomon: Because the Lord loves His people, He has made you king over them.” “Blessed be the Lord God Israel who made heaven and earth, for He has given King David a wise son, endowed with prudence and understanding who will build a temple for the Lord and a royal house for himself.” You see; when the Lord loved His people, He filled Solomon's mind with His wisdom; that wisdom which comes from the Scriptures and from the Spirit's working, is used to build the church of God using skilled workmen. Similarly in the New Testament temple, the Lord Jesus, in building His Church uses the pastors as workmen to build upon the foundation which Christ has laid. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 3, verse 9. “For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.” “According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds upon it.” “But let each one take heed how he builds on it.” “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” “Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it; because it will be revealed by fire; and fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.” “If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.” “If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet as through fire.” The work of the pastor is to so present the truth of the Word of God, and Himself live it out as an example; that he is building into the lives of others with the teaching of good doctrines; building into the people who he ministers to; the character qualities of virtue in people that he ministers to; so that he will have a reward in that Day when Christ shall return and judge all of his people. Christ will judge His people, not to send them to hell; but to reward them according to their work. One who would be considered for the pastorate or the eldership should have this virtue of prudence.

Two other verses that we should consider; Proverbs 12: 16 – “A fool's wrath is known at once, but a prudent man covers shame.” The foolish man has a short fuse; he must react immediately to defend himself or promote his own interests, but the prudent man will cover shame. That is; the prudent man, as John Gill says, “conceals his anger and resentment when someone does something or says

something against him.” (Like a man putting a fire out with a blanket) He is prudent because he is putting down the impulse to sin, taking up the interest of virtue, goodness, and truth which glorifies God. And also Proverbs 12: 23 – “A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims foolishness.” A prudent man conceals knowledge in that he does not boast of it or use it to gain attention to himself; whether it is knowledge of the Word or the knowledge given to him people in confidence. He sees knowledge as a sword and the sword must be in the sheath much of the time. But a good soldier knows when to pull it out and how to use it. A prudent man realizes that true Christianity is a battle of the mind. It is struggling to use knowledge rightly in order to be effective for God’s truth.

The 3rd virtue seen in a blameless man is perseverance or what William Ames called fortitude. He does not quit when obstacles or difficulties arise either personally or corporately. He is a man of valor. There is a moral courage and perseverance at work in his heart to continue on in well-doing and in promoting the truth. This quality is something which God expects of all Christians, but it is not seen in all Christians. For a good example, we find that the Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31: 10 was a woman of valor – “She girds herself with strength and strengthens her arms,” it says there. If this is a quality to be seen in a virtuous woman; how much more so in a virtuous man who be an elder. He will by God’s grace strengthen himself to overcome sins and faults in himself and obstacles in the path of the church he shepherds. He does this for the glory of God. Revelation 2: 26 says, “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels—I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.” The man who would be an elder must have this perseverance evidenced in his life before he is considered for the eldership.

The 4th and last virtue seen in a blameless man is temperance or self-control – “It consists in the restraining of himself from all those desires that would divert a man from well-doing.” He must be sober. 1 Peter 1: 13 says, “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” To be holy you must be sober; you must be serious and watchful. 1 Peter 5: 8 – “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Resist him, steadfast in your faith...” The elder to be is to be a man who is watchful over himself, over others in caring careful way, and watchful against the schemes of the devil. He must also be temperate. 1 Timothy 1: 5 says, “Now the purpose, or the end, of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from some having strayed, have turn aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.” In other words, “Temperance keeps virtue uncontaminated.”

There is purity and sincerity which are in the motives for what the man desires to do for Christ.

Self-control is a watchfulness, first of all, over one's self. The man who would be an elder has a sincere faith and a simplicity of focus to hold fast and hold forth God's Word.. To teach others, he must be taught himself by God to deal with his own sins, to learn a watchfulness over his own soul in the fear of God. Then he will be able to watch over the souls of others. All of us should add to our faith moral excellence (or virtue), and to our virtue knowledge and to our knowledge, self control. "Virtue is that condition or habit by which the will is inclined to do good", as I said to you at the beginning of the sermon. The elder must have, and must be, a just and prudent man. He must have that fortitude of spirit and self control in order to be blameless. Let us determine in coming months to look out from among ourselves to see if we can see men who have this character quality of being blameless; blameless in that we cannot lay a charge of sin or neglect at his doorstep. And blameless from the standpoint that he is a man of sterling character. May God grant that we all be full of the Spirit and wisdom to see and to know those who would be a good fit for this important office of an elder.