

**1 Timothy 3: 7; "A Good Testimony with Those Outside", Sermon # 18
in the series on the Eldership", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
August 8th, 2010, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

We have come now the 16th and final qualification for an elder. As I mentioned last week, these last two qualifications have a peculiar reference to the work and activity of the Devil and his opposition to the advancement of Christ's kingdom. A man must not be a novice in that he may fall into pride if he has discernment over many doctrinal things and a gift to be able to teach, and yet he has not been brought to a complete humility over what he like apart from the grace of God. Pride is the very sin which the Devil fell into in the Beginning. He was exalted with a sense of his own power and beauty and actually thought to become like the most High; to take the place of God; to exalt his throne above the stars of heaven. And he would very much like to see potential ministers fall in this same way. The text says that he must have a good testimony with, or among, those outside the church, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the Devil. This means the reproach of men who, seeing the moral inconsistency in a man who is a minister, who is a potential minister, or even any professed Christian, would come to speak against Christianity. We are speaking now of those persons who behavior and conduct are inconsistent with the gospel and the truth of the Bible. To do any service for Christ and for the advancement of the kingdom of God, people outside the church must be able to see that person and know him to be an honest and upright man if he is to influence them for Christ and persuade them to hear the gospel or come to church. The snare of the Devil is to attempt to trap and entangle ministers in areas of their character and conduct where they may be weak morally; to test and to see if they will be true and faithful to the Scriptures in the presence of those outside the church. People inside the church may not know what the prospective pastor is like, just as much as those outside the church who rub shoulders with him every day. So a good testimony with those outside is necessary, even vital, to the forward progress of truth and righteousness both inside the church and in the community where this church is located.

A testimony is a declaration of the character and qualities of a person; hopefully a tribute to his outstanding worth. The witness or testimony of those outside the church consists in the evaluation they have, of how he has lived among them. This afternoon I want to use Abraham as an example of the believer and show how those around him testified of his character. He lived among them, and their testimony concerning him was a good one. He was not an elder, or a pastor, but he was the father of all who believe. And the testimony of those around him we would hope would be the same for any man aspiring to the ministry. I would like you to turn with me to Genesis Chapter 23, and we will see –

1st of all – The testimony of Abraham's neighbors was that he lived among them as a prince of God. (Verses 1-14)

"Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah." "So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." "Then Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, 'I am a foreigner and a visitor among you.' "Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." "And the sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, 'Hear us, my lord: You are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places.'" "None of us will withhold from you his burial place, that you may bury your dead." We see here that Sarah had died, and Abraham had no land to bury her in. God had given him all of this land, but he actually owned not a foot of it, in the sight of other men. He had been a stranger and a sojourner earlier, but now he was residing in tents. But he was no stranger to the sons of Heth; the Hethites or Hittites. He says to them that he needs property for a burial site. And you notice that their response was this: "You are a mighty lord; you are a prince of God among us" is how it is literally translated. He was, as one commentator says, not only a great man, but he was a good man among them. Our first and best testimony is in relation to God Himself. They are acknowledging that they see that God had blessed Abraham, that God was with Abraham; that there was something unusual and special about Abraham and Sarah. They no doubt had heard about their child Isaac, born so many years after Abraham and Sarah had thought that they would never be parents. They saw what God had done. Perhaps they knew or had seen Abraham's faith and had been recipients of his prayers. They respected his relationship with God and perhaps had been won to it themselves. This is what the candidate for the ministry should have. He should have a good reputation with those outside; that they would see him and know him, and acknowledge him as a man of integrity and faith; full of good will, and a patient, kind, and loving man. He would be a man who would hold to his convictions concerning the truth of the Word of Truth which has been revealed to him, but he would hold those convictions graciously, so that those who are looking at his life; even if they disagree with those convictions, or if they did not embrace those convictions themselves, would still respect him because they could see that God was with him.

The evaluation of whether a man is a godly man in relation to those outside the church should be considered from the vantage point of the evaluation of people who themselves are generally moral people. People who are wicked and opposed to the gospel entirely, and prejudiced against true Christianity should not be consulted in this evaluation. They would no doubt not want to see the goodness of the man at all. But Abraham had lived long among these men, and they had a true evaluation and view of him. He was a "prince with God". He knew God, walked with Him and talked with him, and spoke of Him in all seriousness to others, with a view of winning them to the true knowledge of God. This is what every Christian

ought to strive for, but it ought to be evident in the life of one who is a candidate for the ministry. Abraham was not a proud man. He was a humble and loving man who truly cared for people around him. And so when it came time for him to make a request for land to bury his dead, these men were very much for listening to it. And this leads me to say:

2ndly – That he lived among them as one who engaged in fair business dealings. (Verses 7-13)

In verses 7-9 Abraham makes his request for the cave of Machpelah which belonged to Ephron the Hittite. "Then Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth." "And he spoke with them, saying, 'If it is your wish that I bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and meet with Ephron the son of Zohar for me, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he has, which is at the end of his field.'" "Let him give it to me at the full price, as property for a burial place among you." Now listen to what it says about Ephron and how he responded to this proposal. Verse 10 – "Now Ephron dwelt among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the presence of the sons of Heth, all who entered at the gate of his city, saying, 'No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people.'" "I give it to you." "Bury your dead!" See what a great regard that these men had for Abraham; how they consider him as one of themselves. The man who would be an elder must have a good testimony from those outside. He studies to draw close to people in the community, to become one of them without compromising his walk with God. He does not sponge off of them financially or take advantage of them however. He shows them that that he regards them highly. Verse 12 says, "Then Abraham bowed himself down before the people of the land; and he spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If you will give it, please hear me." "I will give you money for the field; take it from me and I will bury my dead there." He is not engaging in flattery here or false worship when he bows himself down before the people of the land; rather he is giving honor where honor is due. Here was Ephron the Hittite loving his neighbor as himself. But Abraham will still offer to pay the full price for the land; which he perseveres in, until his money is taken. He was an honest man, who engaged in fair and right business dealings.

But lastly – We see from this text that Abraham had lived among them as a friend. (Verses 14-20)

Notice Ephron's words again in verse 15 – "My lord, listen to me; the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver." "What is that between you and me?" "So bury your dead." The land was worth four hundred shekels of silver, currency of the merchants. "What is that between you and me?" You see, Abraham had grown close to Ephron as a friend, or Ephron would not have put it this way. Money and the value of small amount of property became insignificant because of the close friendship between them. You see, even though Abraham was a foreigner and a visitor among them, he did not isolate himself from people around him. He got to

know them; they got to see his life up close. They got to see his religion in action. He did not push an agenda with them. He knew that it is only God's grace that chooses a man and saves a man, and brings a man into right relationship with God. But his evangelism and his testimony to them were of the very best kind. They knew him as a man of integrity, a man of faith, a man of love, a man of God. An elder must be a man who a good testimony with those outside. Let us understand that the man who would become an elder must show himself friendly and actually have friends. In Luke Chapter 7, verse 34, the Lord Jesus says of himself, "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber and a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" "But wisdom is justified by all her children." And he also said in Luke 16: 9, "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon that when it fails, they may receive you into an everlasting home." Let us not ever think that having and holding on to money is more important than making and having and holding on to friends. Let us resolve that we will have this kind of testimony with those outside; that we truly consider God's will first, and then we lovingly consider them. Let us be first of all the friend of God, and a princely servant of Him; and men will then come to see that we are kind and gentle, loving and patient with them, and they will want to be our friends and learn the wisdom of God which comes from above and not from ourselves. That wisdom is found in the Scriptures, and if we live them out, it will be found to result in a good witness to people around us, and good reputation with those outside of the church. Let us pray that it will be so with each of us who names the name of Christ.