

July 25, 2010

## Church Matters – Selection Matters

Alright – well open your Bibles with me this morning to 1 Timothy chapter 5. Grab your message map and let's get going together.

You know Jesus only founded one organization when He was here on earth. Any guesses on what that was? That's right – Texas A&M University – Gig' em Aggies. Actually, no – though I understand if that was your first thought. No the only organization, organism, institution that Jesus founded and the only one he promised to bless was his church. He said "I will build my church." It is his church that is the fullness of his plan for this world.

The church – when it fits God's blueprint for it – is designed to have a purity and power that can penetrate the kingdom of darkness and rescue men and women into the kingdom of light. The church is to be the living body of Christ – the visible manifestation of Christ in the world – to reveal all his attractive glory and thereby to draw men to Jesus. The church is to be the model and example of godly virtue in the face of an ungodly world in order to draw men out of sin and into his righteousness.

Peter summed all that up when he says of and to the church in **1 Peter 2:9**: *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*

The effectiveness of the church in advancing the name of Jesus and the glory of God is largely related to its leadership. Those who have been placed in the church as undershepherds of Christ called pastors, elders, overseers have a high and holy calling to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Leaders are responsible for teaching, for preaching, for direction, for protection, and so there is always a premium on godly leadership.

So it makes sense then that God would have a plan for the leadership structure of his church. And that's what we've been looking at for the past several weeks. God's blueprint for his church – how to line up with what God lines out in his Word.

And after talking for weeks now about how the local church, membership, elders, authority all matter in that process, one of the attitudes that has been jokingly coming up but must seriously be overcome is the idea of "Who would want to be an elder?" – right? How many of you have though that in this series – don't raise your hands!

Well how that question has to be turned around in our hearts is – "who wouldn't want God to use him like that?"

That is a much more prevalent reaction in scripture. Just take a few of Paul's statements. In **1 Corinthians 9:16** Paul talks about how that is all he wants to do when he says *"Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"*

Then in **Philippians 1:23-26** when he thinks about the choice between dying and going home to be with Jesus or staying and working more with the churches he is starting, he says *"I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me."*

He says of course I want to see Jesus but given the choice of going to see Jesus and being used by God to continue to help you grow, I choose to stay with you for now for the glory of Jesus.

If you are already in 1 Timothy 5, turn a chapter back and look at **1 Timothy 3:1** where Paul says that someone who desires to be an overseer – desires to be an elder – he desires a noble task. It is something to want – to pursue – to be honored.

I can tell you that the greatest privilege in my life is to speak God's Word – to be used as a tool to change lives – to equip God's people – to bring hope – to bring truth – to point the way to life – to

exalt Jesus Christ in his church. And you know what that feels like, too – every one of you who has ever been used by God to lead someone to Christ – who has had those moments when you know God took over and used you to give counsel or truth to someone else – who has seen people you love click with the truth of God's Word – who has seen someone get it or get back to it – you know how that is the greatest sense of joy and pleasure and honor and satisfaction there is. Who wouldn't want to be an elder if God so designed it?

In fact that was really the problem in the early church. When people understood elders in the church, too many people wanted to do it! And there is a difference between having elders and a biblical eldership in God's church. And that is what 1 Timothy is all about.

We don't have time to go through the entire letter to see that today, but I want you to know the context of the passage we'll be looking at. In Ephesus – where Timothy was - there were obviously very serious problems among the leaders. Back in chapter 1 in verse 3, Paul reminds Timothy that there are some who were teaching other doctrine, were giving heed to fables, endless genealogies, they were concerned with questions rather than answers and questions that have no redeeming virtue. There are some, verse 7 says, who want to teach the law but they don't understand the law. And what they say and affirm is in ignorance. At the end of chapter 1 in verses 18 to 20, Paul tells about having to put out two men by the name of Hymenaeus and Alexander who, no doubt, were pastor/elders in that church, and who because of their blasphemy had to be turned over to Satan not to do that.

The assumption of chapter 2 is that women had stepped into the role of an elder and usurped that teaching position and were in need of being reminded that they were to learn in silence and not to be permitted to teach.

Chapter 3 is not just a list of qualifications for elders given in a vacuum, but it is a list of qualifications for elders given against a background of unqualified men who needed to be tested by whether they fit this or not. Chapter 4 further indicates that there were some flat out liars in that congregation mentioned in verse 2 who were teaching doctrines of demons, basically energized by seducing spirits. And then from verse 6 to 16 comes a definition of proper godly ministry given by Paul to Timothy as to how he is to conduct himself, again in contrast, no doubt, to the ministry of some in that congregation. And so all through this epistle you get the feeling that the leadership of the church in Ephesus has gone bad.

And with all that in mind we come to chapter 5 today and we see Paul discuss 4 things. John Macarthur breaks them out as honoring elders, protecting elders, rebuking elders, and selecting elders. We've already talked about the honoring part in our series, we'll save the protecting and rebuking part for later, because today where we are in our Church Matters study is – so how do we do this? How do we select elders?

So let's read **1 Timothy 5:17-21** TEXT – Now here is where he gets to the truth that selection matters – **verses 22-25** TEXT.

**In the pastoral letters, the 'laying on of hands' refers to that very unique time and place when hands were laid upon a man to set him apart for the MINISTRY.** It was done, for example, in **Acts 6**. You read **verses 3 to 6** and when they chose out deacons, they laid hands on them to identify with them in their ministry. You go to **Acts 13:3** and when they separated Paul and Barnabas to the work of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, after praying and fasting they laid hands on them to set them apart to the ministry.

And so, what Paul is talking about in the context here is the original ordination of a man to ministry. And what he says is this, "Don't do this hastily." We actually talked about this back in our study of Titus as well – that's why Paul tells Titus in chapter 1 verse 5 to appoint elders "as I directed you." You can imagine if Titus showed up in these churches without a letter from Paul and says "Alright, we need to appoint some elders in this congregation" how it might have gone.

Somebody would say "I want to nominate Bill because he has a lot of money and is very successful and he's over a lot of people and can just organize like crazy." And someone else would

say “I want to nominate my husband because he is a really wonderful guy and ought to be on this group of elders because we like to know what is going on.” And someone else would say “Well I want to nominate this guy over here because he is well-read and educated and just really smart and he’d be good.” Or you’d have people saying “I want this senior adult or this military guy or this young married guy or this middle aged single guy – so that this group or that group has a voice” – as if it is a house of representatives or something.

So to keep away from that kind of free-for-all, Titus has this letter in hand that says here’s the God-inspired criteria and it has nothing to do with all that. In fact back in 1 Timothy Paul warns that if you do the selection hastily like that – in **verse 22** he says – *“don’t share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.”* In other words, **if you HURRY a man into ordination and he is unsuited and unfitted, and he has sinned, you SHARE in that guilt of that sin.** That’s how deep the solidarity is when you lay hands on someone.

Now if you’ve done all you can in examination and as far you know the man is clean and his life is right and later on he turns to sin, there’s no culpability there. The culpability comes in the failure to do the proper examination.

We must be careful in this, church. Selection matters. Leadership in the church is not a mantle of status to be conferred on the church’s aristocracy. It doesn’t come by seniority. It isn’t purchased with money. It isn’t inherited through family ties. It doesn’t necessarily fall to people who are successful in business or finance. It isn’t doled out on the basis of intelligence or education or human talent. Its requirements are faultless character, spiritual maturity, a willingness to serve humbly, and a skill in teaching. It can go to the rich or the poor – the well known or unknown in the world – to those who have failed or not as the world measures success because that has nothing to do with it. What it does have to do with is 1 skill requirement and a whole lot of character. We’ve looked at the qualifications already in detail in our study of Titus, but I want us to hear them again – first in 1 Timothy 3 and then again in Titus 1. So look with me at **1 Timothy 3:1-7 TEXT** and then the echo in **Titus 1:6-9 TEXT**.

D.A. Carson – the professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School noted once that this list of characteristics is most notable for being not very notable at all. What he meant is that **all of these characteristics are, in other places in the Bible, EXPECTED of all Christians – all of them – except the ability to teach,** and we’ll come back to that in one second.

And as you look at the lists, **the first and overarching qualification both in 1 Timothy and Titus are standards to which all the other ones refer and DEFINE.** In 1 Timothy 3 that umbrella word is **“above reproach.”** In Titus 1 it is **“blameless.”**

**The meaning of both comes down to being UNCHARGEABLE – without accusation –** it is the idea of not being called into court or into question – not being called to give an account for what you’ve done. So **the elder is one who has no defect in his life that calls his GODLINESS into question.**

Again, **this is not someone who is SINLESS, but someone to whom no one can point to any public or gross sins in his life. He must have a good REPUTATION.**

Why? That’s the key to the meaning and to the list that will follow. **The elder is a man whose life is a MODEL for spiritual conduct. He has to be a model because that’s what shepherding is – what pastoring – what overseeing is. The congregation doesn’t just listen, they FOLLOW.** Blamelessness is a necessity – not an option, which is why Paul says an elder must be blameless - his life must exemplify what he teaches. That much is clear throughout the New Testament.

**Philippians 3:17** says: *“Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.”*

**2 Thessalonians 3:9** says: *“We did this, ... in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.”*

**Hebrews 13:7** says: *“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”*

Finally, **1 Peter 5:1-3** says: *“To the elders among you, ...Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, ...not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”*

God has ordained that this role of elder, overseer, pastor – the spiritual leaders in the church – be a role of humble and loving service. The leaders are not called to be governing monarchs but humble slaves. They're not called to be slick celebrities but laboring servants. Not called to be charismatic personalities, but faithful shepherds. The men who lead God's people must above all things exemplify sacrifice, devotion, humility, and a love for and ability to communicate God's truth. **And as the only real skill in the list it is important for us to understand 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9 in order for selection to matter.**

Where 1 Timothy simply says “able to teach,” Titus says “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.” John Piper explains it simply for us that:

**First is stressed his firm HOLD on the truth. This refers to his subjective relationship to the truth. Is the person solid and unshakable in his grasp of the truth?** The opposite would be a person who is never quite sure of where he stands or a person who thinks that doctrinal definition is generally unimportant.

**Second is stressed the nature of the Word he holds** - it is sure and accords with the (apostolic) teaching. **This would mean a good grasp of BIBLICAL truth. The Bible, not other books, must be the foundation of doctrinal knowledge,** though other books are very helpful and inspirational.

**Third is stressed the positive role of teaching this healthy doctrine to others.** A person who says, "I know what it means but I can't explain it so others can understand it" would probably not make a suitable elder. **Does he not only know, but can he EXPLAIN, Biblical doctrine?**

**Finally is stressed the negative role of REFUTING doctrinal error.** Is he able to spot the encroachments of secular principles and assumptions and to correct opponents and straying saints?

This office then belongs to those who by God's grace can meet these qualifications. Not everyone can be an elder – a pastor – an overseer. That's why Paul says in 1 Timothy 5 – do not be hasty in putting someone in that position. Look for the biblical qualifications. Keep yourself pure.

And then you come to verse 23 – which says: TEXT

And you're thinking – what is that doing in there?

I think this is an aside to Timothy. But I don't want to just skip it because I want you to know how 24 and 25 really are connected through 23 to verse 22. So it's as if Paul is saying, “Speaking of purity, Timothy, stop drinking only water and use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent illnesses.”

Timothy, obviously, had taken a vow of abstinence from all wine. He was a teetotaler, he didn't drink at all and he probably had his reasons, obviously. He didn't want to be a stumbling block to a weaker brother, he wanted to take the highest vow of spiritual commitment such as the Nazarite took in the Old Testament who was most of all devoted to God and abstained totally from wine and strong drink. He wanted to be a model of virtue. He didn't want to do something, have somebody else do it and fall into sin. And so he had taken this vow of abstinence, and it was an honorable one and Paul isn't telling him to change.

He simply says this, “Timothy, don't let your vow of purity cause you bodily harm, there's a time and a place when a little wine could assist your stomach.”

I don't want to belabor you with a whole lot of stuff but as John MacArthur explains, the Talmud, Hippocrates, Pliny, Plutarch, all kinds of ancient writers talk about wine which was used as a medicine. There is a time and a place for that. Now I just want you to know, personally I don't take drugs, okay? I'm not into cocaine, heroin, I don't smoke grass, I don't do any of that. I have a total abstinence view of that. But when I get sick and need some medication, I'm not adverse to that. If I ever have surgery I don't really want to be sitting there experiencing the whole thing and so I'll let

them give me a heavy dose of drugs, enough not only to make me feel funny but to knock me out. Not only that, as I get older I seem to get more sinus pressure headaches because of storms and when I do I'll tell Nicole "I think I need something for my headache," and she'll give a couple of pills, I don't know what they are, I'm assuming they are sudafed or something like that. But the net effect was to drug me so I wouldn't feel my headache. So I want you to know, I take the total abstinence view with drugs unless there's a purpose in which I would take them for some medicinal value. The same thing would be true with alcohol, I have a total abstinence view of alcohol, but I have been known in my life time to take a little cough syrup, but just a little and always for my throat's sake.

And you understand the point. I mean, there's a time and a place when things like that are appropriate with medicinal purposes in mind, and that's what Paul is saying. He says "I'm talking about a purity of life here in verse 22 but let me address you real fast, Timothy about this issue of abstinence. Please, Timothy, your health is essential, the task at hand is difficult, back away from only water, please, take a little wine for the sake of your frequent illnesses. This is not a call to social drinking, this is simply a little wine for medicinal purposes.

And having sort of said that little aside, he comes back in **verse 24** and wraps up and this is a very very helpful portion, two verses. He returns to the main emphasis of selecting elders with great caution and keeping yourself pure. And he really gives four principles.

Principle number one is **some men will be OBVIOUSLY unfit to be elders. Verse 24, "Some men's sins are clear before hand, going ahead of them to judgment."**

In other words, he says, "Look, it isn't as tough as you think, Timothy, because there are some people whose sins are plain, open, obvious. In fact, they march ahead of them into the discussion." The word judgment, not referring to final judgment, not referring to eternal judgment. It's simply referring to the church's assessing the suitability of a man to serve. And some men's sins march ahead of them into that kind of assessment. Everybody knows their sins. The examination process is easy because their sins are obvious, they're open, they're viewed by everybody and there's not even a need for much discussion. So number one, there are people who are obviously unfit to be pastors or elders.

Number two, there are **some who will be under the assessment process FOUND to be unfit, verse 24, "And some, they follow after."** In other words, some men go into the discussion, into the process of evaluation and their sins are not known but they come in afterwards, they follow in.

A third principle, verse 25, **some men are obviously FIT to be elders.** Some obviously unfit, some determined to be unfit, now, thirdly, some obviously fit. **Verse 25, "In the same way, good deeds are obvious."** In other words, the noble deeds of some people are known by everybody. And there doesn't have to be much discussion. Their life, their character has been visible, everybody knows it, there doesn't need to be a long discussion.

And then finally, the fourth one, **there are some under the assessment process who are FOUND to be fit.** It says, *"and even those that are not cannot be hidden."* That is they whose good works are not known openly, "cannot be hidden." In other words, under examination they will be revealed.

So, Paul says, "Look, Timothy, you have to be serious in the selecting process, don't be hasty in the process. If you're hasty and a man sins, you're going to have some culpability for participating in his sin. Do it with great caution. But don't be threatened by it because one, some men are clearly unfit. Two, in a proper process those who are unfit will be found to be unfit. Three, some are clearly fit. And four, those who are not obviously fit can be found fit under proper examination."

So, **it's vital to be involved in the selecting process with great caution, with clear qualifications, and finally with great PRAYER.**

See as we look at the truth that selection of our elders matters, the starting point is asking “who would you follow?” But also, WHY? Are you thinking of them because of their worldly status – their personality – their powerful influence? Or knowing what God has laid down as qualifications, are you thinking of them because you see these QUALIFICATIONS in their lives or think that they may be there?

And if the qualifications are there, the last question is how do we know they – the individuals – are RIGHT? Let me close by asking you to turn to Acts 20:28 with me. TEXT

*“of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.”* It is the HOLY SPIRIT who appoints pastors – who chooses and provides elders. What we must do is get in line with the mind of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who calls and ordains and gifts and who sets apart those to lead his Church. Folks that simple point is going to be absolutely crucial in our understanding and moving forward together.

Because what that means is that the only way for you or me to know who God is providing as elders here at Fairway is to be IN LINE with the Spirit. That’s why we had to start with a look at what meaningful membership in the local church is all about. I want you to read this with me – it was too long for your message map but it is so important today:

- Without a biblical understanding of what it means to be a part of God’s church –
- Without a personal commitment to Fairway Baptist Church in unity with God’s call, our vision, our beliefs and doctrines –
- Without an expression of that commitment being evidenced in faithful participation, meaningful relationships, and biblical pursuit of obedience for God’s glory –
- Why would any of us think that God would reveal to us who he is setting aside as elders in this church? Why would we think we would have any right to have any say in the matter?
- And if we are not covenanting to regular prayer for the leadership we have and seeking the leadership we need, how do we expect to know whom God is selecting?

Church, SELECTION matters. But not by itself. It is impossible until church matters – until membership matters – until leadership matters – until authority matters – not just because they do, but because they do in and to YOU.

With that in mind, are you in a place with Jesus in those areas and in your life that you can move forward in this together?

What is the Holy Spirit putting his focus and finger on in your life so that we can do life in Christ one step at a time together?