

SERIES Operating the Church (part 1)
 SERMON **Leaders of Christ-like Character (1 Timothy 3.1–7)**¹
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—PRAY—

1. CALL FOR MODELING GOD’S NEWNESS

To speak broadly: Paul will give his reason for writing either fairly early in his letter or right near the end. However, there are occasions when he mixes things up—but for good reasons. For example: about half way through his first letter to Timothy, Paul seems to break his stride when he says: “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you in case I am delayed to let you know how people ought to conduct themselves in the household of God, because it is the church of the living God, the support and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tim 3.14–15). But a closer inspection of the text, and the larger context, reveals that this is not a random break. This declaration is quite intentional and meaningful—not only for Timothy but also for anyone else who reads this letter.

The phrase, “how people ought to conduct themselves” is a focal point of this passage, and it’s so much more than a recommendation or highly favored option. The language gives the sense: “how it is necessary for people to conduct themselves” or “how it is necessary for people to live [or even behave] in the household of God.” And to make sure things aren’t missed or misunderstood, Paul gives two reasons for this necessity. First of all, instructions on conduct, living, or behavior are tied to the reality that “the household of God” is “the church [ἐκκλησία] of the living God.” This recalls the truth that “the church” refers to the people who belong to God in Christ through faithful allegiance, obedience, and lifestyle. And that people, comprised of believing Jews and Gentiles (*thus fulfilling God’s covenant promise to Abraham*), are made one in Christ and fellow-heirs in God’s household.

And since it’s God’s household, it belongs to Him and is therefore under His authority and rule. So, what He expects of His people as new creations in Christ is who they are to be and how they are to live. And also notice: Paul says the church belongs to “the living God.” It’s not devoted to some other god or goddess that doesn’t truly exist. The church is devoted and belongs to the only One (*and no other*) who can declare: “I am He. Before Me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after Me” (Isa 43.10, ESV) and “I am the first and I am the last; besides Me there is no god” (Isa 44.6, ESV). And because He is eternal and unchanging: His authority, rule, and expectations do not end and will not change for His people.

Secondly, the necessary instructions are tied to the reality that “the church”—God’s people—is “the support and bulwark of the truth.” And just to be clear: the “truth” in mind is not some personal truth or ever-changing-in-definition truth. Instead, it’s God’s truth. The only truth there is and matters, and it’s the only truth that leads to the One who gives life and provides eternal value and meaning to that life. Thus, it’s the truth of who God is (*in His identity and nature*), all that He’s done (*from creation onward*), and what He will accomplish (*from new*

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations will follow the New English Translation (NET).

creation to everlasting life). More specifically, it's the truth of who Christ is, the world-flipping and life-changing gospel He proclaims and fulfills, the salvation and new life He provides, and the assured, hope-filled guarantee of everlasting life with Him for those who belong to Him in faithful allegiance, obedience, and Holy Spirit-defined lifestyle.

And from that, we see that it's the truth of what it means to live as new creations in Christ—a newness whose way of life is completely other-than the fallen, broken, and sinful world. This is an other-than-ness that is not only characterized by a life defined by God's holiness, righteousness, wisdom, and truth but also faithful in its resolve to resist the world's unholy, unrighteous, foolish, and false definitions. To say this bluntly: this distinctiveness of the new identity and lifestyle is an expectation for all of God's people—as revealed by Christ and His heralds of the true gospel. But it's also one that will be constantly challenged, opposed, and shamed by the world because it's other-than what the fallen, broken, and sinful world wants and how it defines life according to its own standard of measure. More to the point, this distinctiveness of the new identity and lifestyle for God's people will constantly be attacked—both overtly and subversively, as well as originating from outside and inside the church.

Jesus gave an example of the overt way when He told His disciples: “[If the world hates you, be aware that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you](#)” (Jn 15.18–19). And that hatred will express itself through (*at the very least*) slander, lies, false testimony, attempts to silence the message, persecution, imprisonment, or even death. A well-known example of the subversive way is found in Jude's letter, where he declares: “[certain men have secretly slipped in among you—men who long ago were marked out for the condemnation I am about to describe—ungodly men who have turned the grace of our God into a license for evil and who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ](#)” (Jude 4).

To be clear: Jude is talking about those who do not truly belong to God, proven by their life, beliefs, and identity. Notice the intent of these ungodly people who sneak into the church: they not only desire to establish an identity, lifestyle, and (*especially a*) morality that reflects and affirms their ungodliness, which they bring with them as they sneak into the church. But they also redefine beliefs about God's identity, His graciousness, and what He blesses. And those redefinitions are necessary to give support to and uphold the ungodliness they prefer and believe He should affirm, celebrate, and bless. But notice what that requires: they must deny who Christ truly is. And those who deny Christ do not belong to Him, they will not submit to His lordship, they do not live in accordance with His truth, nor will they support or defend it. They won't, because they know if they did, they would lose their lordship.

And that leads to another way the distinctiveness will be attacked subversively, especially from inside the church. As Paul reveals—specifically in the “pastoral letters”—there will be those who claim to believe to Christ but live from a heart that denies the true faith. Thus, Paul warns Timothy: “[For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, savage, opposed to what is good, treacherous, reckless, conceited,](#)

loving pleasure rather than loving God. They will maintain the outward appearance of religion² but will have repudiated its power” (2 Tim 3.2–5).

More to the point: they will remain in the church and after rejecting “sound doctrine” (*i.e.*, *God’s truth; and they reject it because they cannot tolerate it and what it requires*), they will—in accordance with their own desires—begin teaching false doctrines, man-made and human-centered traditions, and myths as truth. And if that wasn’t enough: such people will turn away from the heralds of the true gospel and will gravitate toward and only recognize teachers who affirm, celebrate, support, bless, and defend their preferred truth and way of life. It’s no wonder Paul says: “avoid people like these” (2 Tim 3.5). They do not belong to God in Christ, and they have no desire to live life according to God’s holiness, righteousness, and truth.

Now, within all of this, we see the God-inspired heads-up about what God’s people can expect from those who are not. A heads-up not reserved for some distant time in the life of the church, but one that’s ever-needed in the ongoing existence of the church. The problems believers encountered in the earliest days are similar to the ones facing (*or confronting*) the church throughout its history—even today. (*Some might say especially today*). But also notice that in giving this heads-up, Paul offers God-inspired instructions for how the church can faithfully sustain its distinctiveness of the new identity and lifestyle as well as defend against the constant overt and subversive attacks that originate from outside and inside in the church.

Hence the passage that began this part of our study, where Paul says: “I am writing these instructions to you...to let you know how people ought to conduct themselves in the household of God, because it is the church of the living God, the support and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tim 3.14–15). And while I hope we now have a better handle on what the central part of that passage means, we cannot miss the importance of the opening phrase: “I am writing these instructions to you.” This is important because while we already know the instructions are vital for believers to know how they “ought to conduct themselves in the household of God,” we might be wondering what those vital instructions are.

2. LEADERS OF CHRIST-LIKE CHARACTER

Part of the answer is tied to the larger argument of 1 Tim 2.1–3.13, which follows Paul’s encouragement to Timothy: to “fight the good fight. To do this you must hold firmly to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck in regard to the faith” (1 Tim 1.18–19). From there, Paul instructs Timothy on how to instruct fellow believers in how to be a healthy, strong, God-honoring, and Christ-defined church. (*Thus, this whole series on “operating the church” is not me trying to be clever, but trying to follow Scripture*). But the answer (*or focus*) of the necessary instructions is specifically tied to the details found in 1 Tim 3.1–13. This is where Paul speaks about elders and deacons—those who faithfully and obediently oversee and serve the church, as God’s household, and do so in Christ-defined ways. More directly: they are to be models of such living for other believers.

a. Big Picture

That being so, we’re not surprised to see how Paul begins this part of the instruction: “This saying is trustworthy: ‘If someone aspires to be overseer, he desires a noble work’” (1 Tim 3.1,

² The term used here is, εὐσεβεία, which more commonly means “reverence” or “piety.”

CSB). This “trustworthy saying” has been understood as Paul encouraging believers to strive for this “office” of oversight or eldership (*the Greek terms are interchangeable*)³—as though Paul is referring to some official place or position of high status and authority in the church. This understanding is not helped by the fact that, since the time the (*uninspired*) KJV, the term “office” is often inserted into English translations of the text. But the Greek says no such thing. More to the point, Paul doesn’t define things in terms of offices to establish and hold, but rather needs of ministry that exist and how they are faithfully fulfilled. He would no more call oversight or eldership an “office” than he would call “parenthood” an “office.”

Thus, when it comes to oversight, Paul’s focused on what matters more: the identity, life, and service of the person. And a needed attribute of the person is an earnest desire to serve in God’s church as an overseer or elder. A desire that’s not fueled by pride, self-interest, self-promotion, or some inner-drive to make statements or waves in the church. That desire is focused entirely on the individual and their wanted exalted status. Rather, the “trustworthy saying” shows the desire must be focused outside of the person and grounded in a faithful awareness of what the ministry truly is and what it requires. A ministry that’s defined as a “good [or noble] work.” With the term used for “good” being, καλός. This doesn’t refer to something below “great” and just above “mediocre.” Instead, it speaks of that which is ideal and morally virtuous.

Thus, the person aspiring to serve is desiring something greater than the self and it must be treated accordingly. More to the point, it must be treated not as something thought up by any one of us, thus making it something we can own or control. Instead, it must be recognized as that which God established for the church and entrusted it to those who are faithfully and humbly qualified to oversee and fulfill the “good work” to be done. The work of faithful oversight of God’s people—a work that Peter describes as shepherding over the lives (*and souls*) of believers (see 2 Pet 2.25). A shepherding that is not an authoritarian, controlling use of power—Paul has already blasted that way of thinking and behaving in 2 Tim 2 as unhealthy and unChrist-like. Instead, shepherding involves caring for, nurturing, guiding, and protecting the flock. Commitments most perfectly embodied and fulfilled in the one who is truly the Good Shepherd—the One whom leaders in the church are to reflect.

b. Primary Quality

So, in the light of the nature and requirements of the good work to be done and for whom it is ultimately to be done (*i.e., God*), Paul identifies the kind of person needed to undertake, uphold, and fulfill the work. He begins with the definitive claim: “The overseer then must be above reproach” (1 Tim 3.1a). (*He says something similar for deacons—i.e., they must be*

³ the term used here for “overseer” is, ἐπισκοπή, which is also often translated in the older versions as “bishop” or, less frequently, “elder.” (*Technically speaking: ἐπισκοπή is an abstract noun, which would give it the meanings of: oversight or eldership. It’s in v.2 that Paul switches to the common noun, ἐπίσκοπος; thus, he’s referring to a person*). When we look at the near-parallel instruction given to Titus, Paul says: “The reason I left you in Crete was to set in order the remaining matters and to appoint elders in every town, as I directed you” (Titus 1.5). There, Paul uses the term, πρεσβύτερος, which is usually translated as “elder.” In fact, πρεσβύτερος is typically used for elders in the church as identifiable leaders (cf. Acts 11.30; 14.23; 15.2, 4, 6, 22; 16.4; 20.17; 21.18; James 5.14; 1 Pet 5.5). Now, scholars, church authorities, and church-goers have long-debated over these two terms and what they mean or to whom they apply, and often being determined by tradition or traditional understanding of the roles of “bishop” and “elder.” But given that Paul’s instructions about this leader are near-mirror images in 1 Tim 3 and Titus 1, it’s safer to say he’s speaking about the same thing with interchangeable terms. Thus, an “overseer” is an “elder” and an “elder” is an “overseer.” And for what it’s worth: while πρεσβύτερος is sometimes used for “elder” in the sense of “older in age,” thus giving the impression that elders have to be over 50; that’s not the only meaning or point of reference for the term. When used as a reference for a leader in the church, one’s biological age is not really relevant. When it comes to age, Paul has a different focus in mind (see v.6).

found “*blameless*” [1 Tim 3.10]). In general, “above reproach” and “blameless” mean one who’s known for living a life that pursues holiness and freedom from patterns of sin. This doesn’t mean one who lives a perfect, sinless lifestyle. (As John tells us: *to claim to be without sin is itself a sin, thus scuttling the entire claim and making the one who makes it a liar; not to mention making God a liar, which is never a good idea—see 1Jn 1.8, 10*). Instead, it means one who’s committed to living in accordance with the Holy Spirit and not the sinful flesh. They are ones who are humbly defined by God and not the self. And as we see in v.7, that way of living is to be recognizable by not only those in the church but also those in the world, thus removing any possibility of duplicitous living.⁴

Now, before going any farther, we need to be aware of two key details about this opening charge for overseers or elders (*and even deacons*). First, the language shows this character trait to be a necessity. Thus, Paul’s not offering some “guideline” or just some ideal that’s on paper but doesn’t really have to be fulfilled. Instead, it’s a non-negotiable requirement. And second, and this is particularly the case with overseers or elders: given that Paul concludes his instructions for eldership with a warning about “*falling into disgrace*” (1 Tim 3.7), which is the result of failing to live in accordance with one’s new-creation-identity in Christ; the call to be “*above reproach*” functions as a primary, overarching category for the whole thing, which is then explained or illustrated by what comes after it. Thus, after saying “*elders must be above reproach*,” Paul answers the anticipated question: “*What do you mean by that?*,” or “*What does that look like in real time?*”

And it should be pointed out that, in answering such questions and explaining his meaning, Paul doesn’t rattle off some vague generalities or abstractions about one’s inner-life—i.e., “*They’re a good person*,” “*they have a heart for ministry*,” “*they’re just so positive*,” “*they’re a born leader*,” “*they’re passionate*,” or even “*they’re really spiritual*.” Instead, Paul lists off real, concrete, and observable behaviors—the outward lifestyle that naturally emerges from the new-created heart. And that clues us in to one more detail worth recognizing. Given the focus and substance of what Paul says, we can see that he’s not offering some iron-clad corporate job description. Instead, Paul employs a fairly common and useful literary device known as a vice-virtue list. These lists were often found in philosophical discussion on morality, where they function as a character profile of one who reflects what it means to be a moral person.⁵

And while Paul borrows this literary practice (*and not just here in Timothy and Titus, but other letters as well*), the obvious difference would be the standard of measure. In ancient Graeco-Roman philosophy, the standard was often created and determined by human beings—i.e., “*this is how we define morality and a moral person*.” However, for God’s people—especially His new covenant people—the standard is always what God has created and determined—

⁴ Thus, elders in particular (*but really, this applies to all believers*) are to embody the truth that Christ alone is our salvation and that He alone has given us new life—a life that is unlike anything the world could ever offer or give. Thus, who we are must match what we claim. And this especially necessary for church leaders—the ones on the frontlines, standing guard against the ways of the world. Or as NT Wright says: “*Paul would rather have no leader at all than one whose character didn’t match the message. If you can’t rely on church leaders to model Christian character, how can you expect anyone else in the church to bring their lives into the pattern of Christ?*” (*Paul for Everyone: Pastoral Letters* (SPCK, 2003), 144). And this reinforces the truth that while the expectations placed on elders are the ideals for those who serve as elders, they are the ideals that elders are to model for all believers, thus encouraging them to live up to the same.

⁵ One commentary, over 120 years ago noted: “*Paul seems to have been specially anxious that the possession of high public gifts should not be esteemed above the abiding graces of Christian character*” (J.P. Lilley, *Pastoral Epistles* [T&T Clark, 1901], 96). For it’s entirely possible to be exceptionally gifted, but be devoid of godly morality.

i.e., “this is how He defines morality and a moral person.” And that difference certainly governs what Paul is doing when he gives the character profiles for elders and deacons. Leaders whose identity, behaviors, and lifestyle reflect not only who they are in Christ but also their commitment to the ways of God’s holiness, righteousness, and truth.... So with all of that in place and understood, let’s take the rest of our time together and consider the details of this “above reproach” profile—especially as it relates to the need for a living testimony.

b. Supporting Features

Paul begins with six positive traits that deal with relationships, and he starts that list with the most sacred or relationships. Paul says of both the elder and deacon: “he must be...the husband of one wife” (3.2, 12). To be clear: the language used can also be legitimately translated as, the elder and deacon “must be...a one-woman man” (*something applicable to dating relationship*). Which one does Paul have in mind? Honestly, it’s difficult to tell. But here’s what we can know, and that is the overall concern. Whether it’s marriage (*in which case, Paul would say it must be a marriage according to God’s definition and design—as revealed in Gen 2.24 and affirmed by Jesus in Mt 19.4–7*), or a committed dating relationship; the primary focus of the instruction is the same: it’s calling for monogamous fidelity.

So, to update and expand the language a bit, we could read this as: “If you’re in a relationship (dating, committed, engaged, or married), be in that relationship alone. Be solely devoted, loyal, active, and protective of that relationship. Don’t mess around. Don’t play the field with someone else while you’re committed to another. And don’t accept the cultural mindset that says it’s okay to do so.” Or to build on what Paul says in 1 Tim 4: “Don’t listen to those who tell others to forget marriage or even to downplay its sacredness, so as to enjoy the pleasures without the commitment. That’s the better way to live.” As believers called to live other-than lives, we cannot be defined by or bound to what culture says is okay, permissible, worth celebrating, or some better way. As people made new in Christ, we must be defined by and bound to what God says is honorable and right. And God desires true monogamous fidelity (*especially in marriage*). Similar to our fidelity to Him alone, which is often portrayed with marriage language. Chief of which being: the church is the bride of Christ, who is to be pure.

Then comes a group of behaviors to be lived out both in the home and in daily life. Paul says elders must “temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable” (3.2). The first two refer to a state of mind or way of being—especially in challenging situations. So, the “above reproach” elder is one who’s known for not flying off the handle at the smallest inconvenience, or because of a trivial set-back in life or problem in the home. Rather he’s one who faithfully strives to maintain stability and control of emotions and thoughts, and who seeks to establish peace and goodness in his relationships with others. And that leads to the next two traits, which specifically deal with how to treat others. “Respectable” is a two-way street, meaning: the elder is one who shows respect toward others and is also one worthy of respect. And “hospitable” refers to the treatment of outsiders—especially those who become welcomed guests in one’s home. A worthy treatment that’s not only good in general but also healthy for the life of the church—seeing that churches met in people’s homes.

For the sixth positive trait, Paul says the elder must be “an able teacher” (3.2). This is one of only two items in the character profile that could be classified as abilities—i.e., it speaks to something specific the elder must be able to do, whereas the others items speak to who the

elder is. And similar to being “respectable,” the focus here is twofold. The concern is not simply on the ability to lead a class or give instruction. Instead, it’s primarily on the fact that the person is known to be an able teacher. That deals with character. Now, to get a handle on what Paul means by that, and specifically the nature and substance of the teaching, we need to consider what he says in Titus 1.9, which explains things a bit more. There Paul says an elder must “**hold firmly to the faithful message as it has been taught, so that he will be able to give exhortation in such healthy teaching and correct those who speak against it.**”

That passage deserves its own attention, and maybe we can do that at another time. For our purposes the morning, we’ll just hit the basics. First of all, elders are those who “**hold firmly to**” (the term ἀντέχομαι also means, *stand guard—ready to defend*) the true gospel and no other. This does not allow for vague awareness of a few basic details of what the Bible says, or that doing anything more is merely optional. Instead, it stresses the deep commitment not only to God’s revelation but also to being defined by it, which reveals itself in both word and deed. Second, elders are to be those “**able to give exhortation in such healthy teaching**” — other translations will say, “**in sound doctrine.**” Such teaching or doctrine is that which comes directly from “**the faithful message as it had been taught.**” The teaching or doctrine is faithful to and reflects what God has revealed. Thus, elders cannot promote fringe ideas, personal feelings, or anything else that detracts from or conflicts with God’s revelation. They must be able to speak His truth alone, and that ability is secured when they firmly hold that truth alone.

And finally, elders are to “**correct those who speak against it.**” The language for “correct” is a bit stronger. The term ἐλέγχω, means refute—i.e., not simply call something false but prove why it is false. This is necessary because of the presence and influence of false teaching in the church. A teaching Paul elsewhere defines as “**diseased**” (1 Tim 6.4) and something that “**spreads like gangrene**” (2 Tim 2.17). And when it’s allowed into the life of the church, it infects the lives of believers with its corrupting (*if not corrosive*) ungodliness. And when that’s happened, it’s nearly always tied to a failure in the leadership to hold firmly to and stand for the true gospel and resist any false one. And the only cure or way to stop the spread is to cut it out and remove it from the body. But here in Titus 1.9, Paul is calling for a preventative measure: elders who stand guard and prevent diseased teaching from entering the body. And they’re able to do this not just because they know the truth, but can also spot the falsehood.

Now, to return to the list in 1 Tim 3: Paul moves into some negative traits—things elders must not be in their character and life. Specifically, he says: “**not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not contentious, free from the love of money**” (1 Tim 3.3). The last bit is sometimes translated as “**not a lover of money.**” And the obvious reason for that one comes from what Paul says a bit later: “**For the love of money is the root of all evils. Some people in reaching for it have strayed from the faith and stabbed themselves with many pains**” (1 Tim 6.10).⁶ Notice the connection between an unhealthy way of living and that unhealthy life leading to the decay of faith. A reality and warning that Jesus Himself gave when He said: “**No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money**” (Mt 6.24). Paul is building on the

⁶ Peter says something similar: “**By forsaking the right path they have gone astray, because they followed the way of Balaam son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, yet was rebuked for his own transgression**” (2 Pet 2.15).

same truth, especially the call for fidelity to God alone. Thus, he not saying an elder (*or any believer*) has to be poor;⁷ rather, he saying an elder must decide whom he faithfully serves.

What about the other negative traits? We could update the language a bit and say: an elder “**must...not be a raging drunk, or a brawler—one who loves getting into fights, but instead is peaceable**” (see 3.3). If we’re paying attention to the flow of his argument, we can see that the ability not to fall victim to these things is a direct result of one whose heart defines a way of life that is “**temperate**” and “**self-controlled**” (3.2). But there is another layer to this that can be easily missed, and it relates to how our culture prefers to channel such things. To be less cryptic: we live in an age that celebrates swimming in booze (*no matter the time of day*) and getting into random fights (*and that doesn’t have to be up-close-and-physical; it can also be verbal attacks from-the-comfort-of-one’s-home-over-the-internet*). We also live in an age that encourages the pursuit of money or wealth in order to feed an insatiable appetite of materialism. But within the celebration and encouragement lies a foundational problem, and that is: such things are promoted as coping devices.

Culture says: “**When life gets you down or doesn’t go your way, get tanked; go verbally abuse someone; go pick a fight; go buy stuff. It will make you feel better, and you’ll soon forget your problems.**” But Scripture says: while that’s the world’s way of dealing with things—with empty, superficial, and never fulfilling remedies—that’s not the way for those who belong to Christ and whose hearts, minds, and lives have been radically transformed. Rather, all who belong to Christ—especially leaders—are to be controlled in their minds and passions; who are peaceable and gentle in the face of adversity; and who love God and pursue the eternal, deep, and meaningful heavenly blessings that only He can provide. And, for Paul, one of the best ways for believer to learn this mindset and approach to life is to see it modeled in the lives of the leaders in the church. And that implicit call for modeling Christ-defined behaviors in the church, which helps Paul transition to the idea of elders and deacons being models in their own homes. Which, by the way, is the second item that functions as a required ability.

Paul says: the elder and deacon “**must manage his own household well, and keep his children in control without losing his dignity**” (3.4; cf. 3.12). The goal here is to establish a home where God’s truth, instruction, and love reign always.⁸ And truth be told: this characteristic is

⁷ See Paul’s instructions in 1 Tim 6.17–19.

⁸ Just in passing, but relevant for much of what has been said—and not only in this message. Generally speaking: in ancient Judaism while the synagogue served as a place of instruction in God’s Word (*especially during the period of post-Babylonian exile*), the bulk of one’s “education”—learning God’s truth, wisdom, and ways—took place in the home (see e.g., Gen 18.1; Exod 12.24–27; 13.8–10; Deut 4.9–14; 6.6–9, 20–24; 32.7, 46–48; Prov 6.20; 10.1; 15.20; 17.21, 25; 28.7; 29.3, 13; 31.26, 28). In fact, home-based instruction was fairly common throughout the ancient world. And even though the broader culture at the time was patriarchal, the responsibility of education (*among God’s people*) fell on both the mother and the father. (*For OT texts pointing to the value of a mother’s instruction, see e.g., Prov 1.8; 6.20; 31.1, 26*). They were both to be the teachers of God’s truth and wisdom, and models of how to live out the taught wisdom faithfully. Thus, Solomon can say: “**Listen, my child, to the instruction from your father, and do not forsake the teaching from your mother**” (Prov 1.8). For what it’s worth: the term used for the father’s “instruction” is מוֹסָר (mūsār), which refers to instruction in wisdom via moral training or discipline. And the word used for the mother’s “teaching” is תּוֹרָה (tôrâ), which refers to instruction in wisdom via moral guidance—especially guidance in the ways of right living before God as God’s people. This general practice and expectation do not change with the arrival of God’s promised new covenant kingdom in Christ. Those who belong to Christ and have been adopted into the eternal family of God and sealed with the Holy Spirit—the result of faithful acceptance of the true gospel—they are to become the teachers and models of that new life in their own homes. And this is especially the case we look at Paul’s statements in his list of character qualities for elders and deacons. What they say and how they live is to reflect who they are—both in the home and the church. In fact, as mentioned in the message, in 1 Tim 3.5 and 12 Paul makes the explicit claim that how one manages his own household has an effect on how one serves in the church. That claim reveals the importance Paul gives for why the home is the place where our Christian formation and development occurs. I think Paul relies on the home because of the nature of home life. It’s the crucible of human relationships. It’s the place where life happens in

something of a proving-ground for leaders in the church. It's the one that's given an exacting explanatory qualifier: "But if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for the church of God?" (3.5)—how will he care for God's people? And to be clear, the term used for "care for" (ἐπιμελέομαι) doesn't simply mean operational or functional ability to make things work or manage a system. Instead, it carries the sense of giving careful attention to the health and well-being for that which one is responsible. Like a shepherd and his flock. In fact, the other two times when this word is used in the NT, they're both found in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who not only "took care" of the injured man but also called for the innkeeper to "take care" of the man while the Samaritan is away.... How one cares for his home serves as a bench-mark for how he will care for God church.

Paul then moves into a final negative trait that serves as a both a requirement and a warning. In v.6, he says: the elder "must not be a recent convert, or he may become arrogant and fall into the punishment that the devil will exact." The term for "recent convert" is νεόφυτος, from which we get the old term, neophyte (*meaning: novice*). While only used here in the NT, the term elsewhere refers to "young plants" or something "newly planted." This might give us the impression that Paul is stressing newness in time, in relation to one's faith. While that might be partially true, we know from elsewhere in the NT that the more pressing concern is the depth of one's maturity of faith. Thus, it's entirely possible for believers to be old in years and long-standing members of the church, but have remained infants in their faith development. They never moved beyond the stage of "newly planted." Their roots never dug down deep.

And as we know from the rest of Scripture: an immature, shallow, and weak faith can easily be snatched away by the devil or will quickly crumble at first sign of struggle, hardship, temptation, or persecution (*as Jesus teaches in the parable of the sower*). Such a faith can also be easily led astray into the world of self-importance, self-interest, and self-glory (*which is what we find with the Corinthians*). And such a faith is simply not able or equipped to stand firm against the constant onslaught of false teaching—with its redefinitions of God, morality, and a blessed life. That is not one who "continues to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3.18), or one who is mature in the wisdom of God because they are constantly submitting to the transforming and maturing work of the Holy Spirit within them. Instead, that is a life that—as Paul describes—leads to arrogance; a life blinded by pride and a pursuit of self-obtained power. And that is certainly not the life of faith of one who is "above reproach" and committed to the "good work" that is greater than self. The "good work" of the elder requires one of mature, deep-rooted, and strong faith—a life made possible through faithful allegiance and submission to the One who provides it.

And finally, in v.7, Paul concludes the character profile by saying: the elder "must be well thought of by those outside the faith, so that he may not fall into disgrace and be caught by

close quarters. Where things are real, unvarnished, and unhidden. And that close-quarters living can make life in the home a buffet of emotions and experiences. There will be love, excitement, passion, support, fun, and joy, while at the same time there will be tension, disappointment, challenge, frustration, and even annoyance. But I think Paul would say: what defines the family in that home is how they deal with the less-than-desirable experiences or emotions when such things occur. Because they will. And they will because we're dealing with people, and things can get weird, difficult, and messy when people are involved. And how such things are dealt with in the home becomes a set of invaluable lessons for how one deals with similar situations in the world, and especially in the church. Moreover, if the family is growing in an atmosphere under the care and guidance of God's truth and wisdom, where the ways of God are taught and modeled by the parents; then there is a greater chance not only for the existence of an environment of love, grace, and peace but also for the children to learn and walk in God's truth and wisdom. And to do so within the Christ-defined and Christ-reflecting environment of love, grace, and peace.

the devil's trap.” This takes us back where Paul began, where he not only calls for a life that pursues holiness and freedom from patterns of sin, but also for that life to be recognizable by those inside the church as well as those outside of it. A way of living that does not allow for duplicity, where it's possible to live openly faithful in the church—because it's safe to do so in that setting—but to live secretly faithful in the world—because it's not safe to admit one's belief in Christ and living according to God's truth. Nowhere is that encouraged, praised, or blessed in Scripture. What is encouraged, praised, and blessed is the life that lives faithfully at all times and faithfully upholds both the true gospel and the life it declares we have in Christ.

More to the point: it's that faithfulness to that way of life in Christ that serves as a testimony for the world—a testimony that declares a new life, a new purpose, and a new hope for life. A newness that both illustrates and verifies the other-than-ness that comes from being new creations in Christ. Thus, as Peter says: “For who is going to harm you if you are devoted to what is good? But in fact, if you happen to suffer for doing what is right,⁹ you are blessed. ‘But do not be terrified of them or be shaken.’ But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess. Yet do it with courtesy and respect, keeping a good conscience, so that those who slander your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame when they accuse you. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if God wills it, than for doing evil” (1 Pet 3.13–17, quoting Isa 8.12).

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⁹ The phrase “for doing what is right” comes from, διὰ δικαιοσύνην, which means: “because of righteousness”—i.e., the believer is, in this case, suffering because they are living in accordance with God's definition for holy and righteous living, and the world stands in opposition to such a way of life. Such an experience, plus the assured blessing (as Peter mentions), is all a part of the promise given by Jesus: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil things about you falsely on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad because your reward is great in heaven, for they persecuted the prophets before you in the same way” (Mt 5.10–12). Thus, faithful disciples who live the other-than life can expect to be opposed, hated, and persecuted by the world.