

Effective Elders

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. 1 Timothy chapter 3.

1 Timothy chapter 3. And we'll just read again from the beginning. Where Paul writes, The saying is trustworthy.

If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. The saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

Now, as you know, each month, the office bearers are meeting together to read and discuss Rico Tice's new book called Faithful Leaders. And as I said before, I'd encourage you to read it because it's very readable and it's also applicable not only to leaders, but also to everyone.

Because as Rico Tice said, we all want to be faithful leaders, whether preaching from a pulpit or around the family table at home. But it was actually the well-known and much-loved Scottish preacher, Alistair Begg.

[1 : 20] He writes, or he wrote, the foreword to Rico Tice's book. And with nearly 50 years' experience in the pastoral ministry, what Alistair Begg has to say, it carries some weight with it.

Because he said, some of our, or so many of our problems in church life can be traced to defective leadership. Churches have too often been damaged by leaders who are exceptionally nice, but afraid of their own shadow.

And by those who are exceptionally driven, but make others afraid of them. Those who have led God's people effectively are found in neither category. It is essential that we get this right, because effective leadership is not all about giftedness and ability.

Fundamentally, he says, it's about holiness. As Robert Murray McShane, who died at the age of 29, said about the life of the church leader, he said, my people's greatest need is my personal holiness. In other words, says Alistair Begg, the key to a church leader's public usefulness is his inner unseen life. Character, he says, is what we are when no one is looking.

[2 : 37] The leader is leading all the time, and for the most part, unconsciously. Therefore, as a leader, he says, your holiness matters greatly to those you have been entrusted to lead.

As a leader, your holiness matters greatly to those you have been entrusted to lead. And as you can expect, it's a real challenge.

But that's the call, the commission, the command, and even the commitment required for faithful leadership. And you know, I want to say from the outset this evening that when I preach on a topic like this, or any topic for that matter, I preach it to myself first.

The buck stops at me first, because I know that I have many flaws, many failings, many failures. But my desire, as it was Paul's desire for Timothy and the elders in Ephesus, my desire is that as elders, we will be effective elders in our congregation and in our community.

I want us to be effective elders in our congregation and in our community. And so I'd like us to consider this section of effective elders just under three simple headings, the elders' character, conduct, and conversation.

[3 : 59] The elders' character, conduct, and conversation. So first of all, the elders' character says in verse one, the saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

Now, as you know, Paul wrote this personal and pastoral letter to Timothy. Timothy was a young minister. He was preaching and pastoring in a congregation in the city of Ephesus.

And Paul had sent Timothy to Ephesus because there were erroneous elders who were soft on sin. They were loose on the law. And they were just glossing over the gospel.

And their false teaching was infecting and infiltrating and influencing the Christians in Ephesus. In fact, there were so many problems.

We've said it before. There were so many problems in Ephesus that Timothy just wanted to throw in the towel and walk away altogether. But as we learn from this letter, Paul exhorted and he encouraged Timothy to stay there, stand firm, stay focused.

[5 : 04] And when you face problems, he says, pray. Because prayer is priority. Prayer is particular. And prayer is for all people. But as we said before, throughout this letter, Paul draws attention to five areas.

There are five areas that he highlights in this letter. There's the problems of the church, the importance of prayer, positions of leadership, passion for truth, and pastoring patiently.

So in his letter, this, in the letter as a whole, Paul gives us five Ps. Problems, prayer, positions, passion, and pastoring. And this evening, we've come to the third P, which is positions.

Positions of leadership. Positions of leadership. And Paul teaches us that effective elders consider their character.

Effective elders consider their character. Because it's safe to say that these erroneous elders, they didn't consider their character, their conduct, or their conversation. Because all they were interested in as elders was the applause and the approval of their congregation.

[6 : 15] They were focused and fixated with status, not service. With positions, not pastoring. They were like, they were like James and John when they were immature and ignorant of what it means to be part of the kingdom of God.

You remember when James and John, they came to Jesus in Mark chapter 10. And they say to Jesus, they want a position. They want a position in the kingdom of God.

And Jesus says to them, you don't know what you're asking. Because the kingdom of God, it's not about status. It's about service. And Jesus says in Mark 10, for even the Son of Man, even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And you know, that's the example that Paul sets before Timothy. That if Jesus, who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, if he is the one who had every right to a position of status, and yet he took a position of service, then Paul says, how much more should we take a position of service as elders?

And this is why Paul says in verse 1, the saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

[7 : 41] And you'll notice that we've seen that phrase before, the saying, the saying is trustworthy. We saw that phrase in chapter 1, when Paul said, the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

In fact, Paul uses that phrase, the saying is trustworthy, or this is a faithful saying. He uses it five times throughout his pastorally epistles. And he uses it in order to stress the seriousness and the solemnity of the statement he's about to make.

He uses this phrase, the saying is trustworthy, or this is a faithful saying, in order to stress the seriousness and the solemnity of the statement he is about to make. And so you read verse 1, and it's serious and it's solemn.

He says, the saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. In other words, Paul stresses that the office of an elder, it's a serious role in the church of Jesus Christ, and it carries with it a solemn responsibility.

It's a serious role, and it carries with it a solemn responsibility. Now the word overseer that Paul uses here, it literally means elder.

[9 : 05] If you're using the authorized version, you'll have the word bishop, which was what the Episcopalian church used to justify their position of church government, because the word bishop in Greek is episkopos, which is where we get the word episkopalian from.

But in the Episcopalian church, or the Episcopal church, their form of church government is like a hierarchy. You have the monarch is the head of the church, and from there, the queen, she's the head of the church, and then there's the archbishop, who's over a diocese of bishops, and then there's priests and presbyters and deacons.

So the Episcopalian church government, it's a hierarchy. But in Presbyterian church government, which is the government we are part of as a denomination, there's no hierarchy.

And there's no hierarchy because that's what the Bible teaches. The Bible actually uses the words bishop, presbyter, elder, and overseer.

It uses all these words interchangeably. It uses them, and they mean the same thing, which emphasizes to us that there's actually no hierarchy in the church of Jesus Christ.

[10:21] There are just two offices. There are just two offices, the office of an elder and the office of a deacon. That's what Paul sets before us in this chapter. And these two offices, Paul teaches us, they are not stages of advancement or progression or qualification or knowledge.

No, they're two separate offices with two distinct functions. Because the role of an elder focuses upon, as you know, the spiritual welfare of the congregation and the community.

Whereas the role of a deacon focuses upon the temporal welfare of the congregation and the community. What's interesting is that in our free church tradition, every elder is also a deacon.

Every elder is also, I don't understand why, but that's just the way we've always done it, probably due to a few numbers. But as Paul highlights, he highlights the offices of elder and deacon in this chapter and he says that both are equally important.

But the office of an elder, he says, is a serious and solemn role. It's a serious role that carries with it a solemn responsibility. Because as he teaches throughout many of his letters, Jesus is the king and head of his church.

[11:41] Not the queen, not the pope. Jesus is the king and head and he calls and he commissions and commands his elders and his deacons to serve in his church.

Now, although there's no hierarchy within eldership, the Bible does distinguish between a teaching elder and a ruling elder. And so, I'm an elder.

I'm a teaching elder because I've been trained and taught to teach. That doesn't mean I know everything and don't ever think I do or that I'm above.

Don't ever think I'm above any of the other elders because I'm not or that I'm more important than any of the other elders because I certainly am not. The only reason I stand in a pulpit or in the presenters box is because the Bible is to be above the people, not me.

It's the word that's always above us. We always have to sit under the word. And that's why I'm referred to as a minister. A minister is a servant.

[12:46] He's not above the people. He's actually serving the people. And that's what every elder is. They're ministers. They're servants. And together, we're to serve as a team because this is a team ministry.

What we're doing in Barbers Free Church is a team ministry where we serve as elders alongside one another. So we're to serve as a team.

But as Paul teaches here, effective elders consider their character. They consider their character. And as Alistair Begg mentioned earlier, he said, character is what we are when no one is looking. Character is what we are when no one is looking. Therefore, unlike these ineffective elders in Ephesus who wanted to be seen and show off their proud position in the church, effective elders must be willing to serve secretly and just out of sight.

Do you know, in our study of faithful leaders last night, we were looking at chapter 1. I don't think we even finished chapter 1. But chapter 1 concludes with a quote from Tim Challies. And Tim Challies, he's a Reformed Christian serving as an elder in a church in Canada.

[14:04] And as an elder, he preaches now and again, but for the most part, he writes this Christian blog. And I'd encourage you to read it. It's very interesting. But when writing about the character of an effective elder, this is what he wrote.

The highest privilege and the greatest honor in pastoring is not standing in the church pulpit, but praying by the hospital bed.

It is not being accorded the highest place, but carrying out the least seen service. It is not broadcasting the truth to thousands, but whispering it to one.

The holiest moments of pastoring are the ones that are seen by the fewest of people. Because as Alstabe said, character is what we are when no one is looking.

Character is what we are when no one is looking. And effective elders, says Paul, effective elders consider their character. But effective elders also consider, he says, their conduct, which is what we see secondly.

[15:11] Effective elders consider their conduct. Look at verse 2. He says, therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable,

hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

So as I said, leadership is not all about aptitude and ability. It's all about holiness. But when we read these verses, you know, when we read these 12 statements that are actually made about what an overseer or an elder is to be, they set out for us the conduct that's expected and should be exemplified in the life of a minister or an elder.

But you know, what we have to see is that this is also the conduct that's expected and should also be exemplified in the life of every Christian.

It should be expected and exemplified in the life of every Christian, not just the minister, not just the elders. And I say that because there isn't a different level or a different standard of holiness that's expected or should be exemplified in the life of a minister or an elder in comparison to every other Christian in a congregation because every minister and every elder is first and foremost a Christian. The only difference is, and it's the difference I think Paul is highlighting here, that in comparison to the majority of Christians, a minister or an elder is more visible.

[17:01] They have a public office within the church and within the community. Therefore, a minister is not to hide away in a study and then appear in the pulpit only on a Sunday morning.

And an elder is not to confine his pastoral role and responsibilities just to the elders' box at the front. No, we're to make ourselves known in our congregation and in our community.

And we're to be known by and get to know our congregation and community. And you know, as Paul teaches us here, there's a conduct that's expected and should be exemplified in the life of a minister and an elder and also of every Christian.

Paul says here that an elder must be above reproach. He must be above reproach, which doesn't mean that he's to be perfect because that's impossible. If it was, I would have to resign immediately.

But what Paul draws attention to is the reputation of the elder within his congregation and within his community that he's to have this irreproachable reputation.

[18:10] That there's to be no public or private sin in his life that would cause concern or even criticism. Where people in the congregation or even in the community would question his character or his conduct or his conversation.

So he's to be above reproach. He's to have an irreproachable reputation. He's also, says Paul, to be the husband of one wife, which doesn't mean that he has to be married in order to take up his office because Paul himself was never married.

But Paul says if he is married, he's to stay married. He's to live a morally upright life. He's to be faithful to his wife.

He's not to adopt as it was the pagan fashion of polygamy that was prevalent in Ephesus at the time. He's not to partake in immoral conduct and immoral conversations with other women.

He's to be the husband of one wife. Literally, Paul says, he's to be a one-woman man. He's to be a one-woman man. He's to have eyes for his wife and his wife alone.

[19:22] And his marriage in private is to be consistent with his marriage in public. His marriage in private is to be consistent with his marriage in public because, you know, like the elder, the elder's wife is to be an example to the congregation in her character, her conduct, and her conversation.

Their marriage together is to be an example in private and in public. So he's to be the husband of one wife. Then Paul says that the elders must be sober-minded, self-controlled, and respectable. He's to act wisely and sensibly. He must control his temper. He must be cautious with temptation. His conduct must not be frivolous or foolish so as to degrade or damage or even destroy his Christian witness and the office that he holds.

He must be sober-minded, he says, self-controlled and respectable. He should also, he says, be hospitable. And, you know, I love this word, hospitable.

It means that we're to love strangers. As elders, we're to love strangers. And, you know, Scripture teaches us and the example of Jesus teaches us that we're to be hospitable.

[20:46] Jesus loved strangers. And, you know, throughout the Gospels, we find Jesus, he's sharing fellowship and he's enjoying food with strangers, with different people.

And, you know, even when a stranger comes in to church, whether for the first time or they're just visiting, we should make a point as elders, but also as a congregation, we should make a point of speaking to them and welcoming them, not just looking at them or talking about them and

wondering who they are.

We should welcome them with open arms. You know, I'd hate for anyone to come into our congregation on the Lord's Day and not feel warmly welcome.

We should be hospitable. We should be hospitable. But then we see that after listing all the things that an effective elder should be, Paul lists all of the things that an effective elder shouldn't be.

He says in verse 3, not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. Now, Paul is clear.

[21 : 57] Drunkenness, violence, and quarrels, that is not the conduct of an effective elder. It's not the conduct of an effective Christian either. Now, as you know, there's nothing wrong with alcohol, but there is something wrong with the abuse of alcohol.

And no one should ever be so intoxicated that they've lost control of their senses. As Christians, when it comes to alcohol, we should always be self-controlled.

More than that, says Paul, we should be gentle. We should be peaceable. We should not be a lover of money. And Paul will remind us in chapter 6 when we come to it that the love of money, it's the root of all evil.

Because the love of money is the seed which fell among the thorns. It's the seed that was choked by the word and made it unfruitful. And that's a warning for us as Christians and as elders.

We will never be effective if we are consumed by the things of the world. We will never be effective if we are consumed by the things of the world.

[23 : 08] And you know, when you consider the conduct of an effective elder and what Paul sets out for us here, it's a high standard of holiness. It's a high standard of holiness.

But as I said, there isn't a different level. There isn't a different standard of holiness when it comes to the conduct of an elder. Because what's expected and what should be exemplified in the life of a minister and an elder should also be expected and exemplified in the life of every Christian.

And so Paul teaches that effective elders consider their character. Effective elders consider their conduct. And effective elders, he says lastly, in a word, as time is going, they consider their conversation.

So effective elders consider their character, conduct, and conversation. Character, conduct, and conversation. Look at verse 4.

Paul says, He must manage his own household well, with all dignity, keeping his children submissive. For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

[24 : 19] He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit. And fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

You know, one of the best books I've ever read about ministry, it was a book written by Derek Prime, and also Alistair Begg. And it was a book called On Being a Pastor.

And I've read the book numerous times. And as you'd expect, in the book On Being a Pastor, they cover every area of the pastor's life. They cover his calling, his family life, his prayer life, his study, his sermons, and how he conducts himself.

And that's the chapter I want us to think about. He talks about the pastor's life and conduct. And they both say, Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, they state that whatever else a shepherd and teacher provides for God's people, he is to give them an example to follow.

Because God's people require examples if they are to be effectively shepherded and taught. God's people require examples if they are to be effectively shepherded and taught.

[25 : 41] And of course, this applies to the whole kirksession. It applies to the minister and to the elders. Because an effective elder must be an example.

That's what Paul says here. He must be an example in his own house as well as in God's house. So he must be an example at home and here.

Therefore, what a person is in public must also be what a person is in private. there's not to be a conflict or a contradiction or confusion without character, conduct, and conversation.

I'll say that again. There's not to be a conflict or a contradiction or confusion without character, conduct, or conversation.

And that's what Paul makes clear here. What we are in public must also be what we are in private. And that's the challenge, a real challenge.

[26 : 45] What we are in public we must also be in private. There needs to be consistency in our character, conduct, and conversation.

That's what he says. For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? And that's the point.

An effective elder will be a Christian example in his house and in God's house. An effective elder will consider his character, his conduct, and his conversation.

It's a high standard. That's why Paul says, this saying is trustworthy. If anyone desires the office of an elder, he desires a noble task.

So an effective elder will consider his character, his conduct, and his conversation. And my prayer is that as elders we will do that.

[27 : 47] We will consider our character, our conduct, and our conversation so that we are effective elders in our congregation. and in our community.

Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray together. O Lord, our gracious God, we realize that the standard is so high and that we fall so far short from it.

But we pray that thou wouldest give to us grace, that thou wouldest enable us to be faithful, and that even as thy word reminds us that when we are unfaithful, that even the Lord remains faithful to us because he cannot deny himself.

O Lord, help us, we pray, to effectively serve as elders in our congregation and in our community. Help us to love our people. Help us to love Jesus by loving them.

O Lord, bless us, we pray. Bind us together and build us up, we pray, that we might be built up, as Peter says, as a spiritual house, holy and acceptable unto thee, that we would be that chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and even a peculiar people.

[29 : 07] For thou hast called us from darkness unto thine own marvelous light. Lord, do us good, then we pray. Bless our time together, bless thy word to us, teach us from it, that we would always be students of thy word, disciples, learning day by day, more and more about Jesus, and more and more about ourselves, and our need to serve him.

Lord, do us good, then we pray. Go before us, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for his sake. Amen. We're going to sing again, this time, again actually, in Psalm 107, but this time in the Sing Psalms version.

Psalm 107, Sing Psalms version, it's on page 145. And, before we sing, I'll just highlight a couple of prayer points.

I think I sent them out on Monday. They're still sending them out on Monday. And for those at home, just to take time to pray after the live stream comes to an end.

We're encouraged this week to pray for Glenelg and Inverinet, I think I'm pronouncing that right, I always get that wrong, a congregation in Sky that's vacant, so pray for them during their vacancy.

[30 : 41] There's also Portree, we're encouraged to pray for Portree, and particularly Donny G, their minister, who has leukemia at present. I was messaging him a couple of weeks ago and he was saying he was going for his bone marrow transplant or a stem cell transplant where basically he was saying that it's like a computer hard drive where they just wipe it and then they implant good cells into his body and hope it grows again and makes him better.

So pray for Donny G and his congregation in Portree and also another congregation in Sky, Dunvegan and Waternish, they're also vacant.

I mentioned them to you I think recently. David Miller was there. He's had to resign from his charge due to ill health. So Sky is struggling as a presbytery.

They have lots of vacancies and they also have ministers who are unwell or just returning from illness. So please pray for the presbytery of Sky.

We're also encouraged as a presbytery. The presbytery sent an email out this week and I put in intimations what was the last week about Ukraine and I'm sure you're all praying for Ukraine anyway.

[31 : 56] We're all very conscious of what's going on there. Pray for peace. I think when it comes to Ukraine and you see it I honestly think you're left speechless.

You just don't know what to pray for. And I often find myself I think it's Psalm 12 where it begins with those two words help Lord. You feel that that's all you've got.

Help Lord. So please pray for Sky and pray for Ukraine. And remember also Christianity Explored. As I said it's coming to an end. Remember those who have been attending it.

Especially those of you who have done it before and you know what it's like and you've been in their shoes. So please please pray for them. So we're going to sing Psalm 107 and the Sing Psalms version page 145 and verse 23.

Yet others traded on the sea they sailed the ocean's length they saw the wonders of the Lord and on the deep his strength. For when he spoke a tempest rose the sea grew wild and rough they mounted up to heaven and then went down into the trough.

[33 : 06] And as it says there in verse 32 about elders so in the elders council may they ever praise the Lord and in the people's gathering let them exalt their God.

So we'll sing these verses of Psalm 107 to God's praise. Amen. Psalm 107 And on the deepest strength For when he spoke a tempest rose the sea grew wild and raw they mounted up to heaven and then went down into the cold

At this their courage bled away for danger was in view They railed and staggered the squithering They knew not what to do Then in despair they sought the Lord Who saved them from distress He stilled the storm Stowed up the waves Where hushed in quietness

Their joy was great When it drew down They anchored safe again And let them thank Him for His love His awesome deeds for men So in the elders The elders counsel May They ever praise the Lord Hunting the people's gathering Let them exalt their Lord ■■■■

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