

A Trustworthy Saying

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[0 : 00] 1 Timothy chapter 3 and if we read again at verse 1. The saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer or elder, he desires a noble task.

Now, as you all know, at the close of this service we'll be ordaining four men, the four men that you see at the front. And they'll be ordained to the office of elder.

But I want to say from the outset, and just to make it 100% clear to us all, this service is not about promotion. This service is not about promotion because these men, they are not being elevated, they are not being exalted, they are not being given a preeminence above the congregation.

And it's not that they have reached this spiritual plane in their life where they've made it as a Christian and they've now received the promotion of elder. No, in fact, the opposite is true.

This church service is all about service. And these four men, they are taking up the office of an elder, not to be served, but to serve you as the people of this congregation and as part of this community.

[1 : 24] Because eldership, it's all about pastoring. It's not about promotion. And that's why we're considering some of the words from Paul's letter to Timothy this morning. Because the letters of the Apostle Paul to both Timothy and to Titus, they have often been described as the pastoral epistles.

And they're called the pastoral epistles because Paul, who was himself a pastor, he wrote these letters to two young pastors, two young ministers who were called Timothy and Titus.

And Timothy and Titus, they were young men in the ministry and they were serving the Lord in different places and in different contexts. Timothy was a minister in an urban church.

He was in a city, in the city of Ephesus. But Titus, he was called to be a minister in a more rural context, like ourselves. And he was on the Greek island of Crete.

And Paul wrote these three pastoral epistles in order to instruct and guide and exhort and encourage these two young men in the ministry. But when Paul wrote his first pastoral epistle, which was 1 Timothy, when he wrote that letter to Timothy, he encouraged young Timothy to stand firm and to continue in the faith and to keep preaching sound doctrine.

[2 : 45] Because at that time, there were many false teachers and there was a lot of false doctrine that was going on and being taught. But despite all the opposition and all the discouragement, Paul encourages Timothy to keep fighting the good fight of faith.

And with that, Paul gives Timothy instructions and advice. He instructs them to teach the Christians in the church in Ephesus so that they will implement all this teaching in their lives.

And Paul highlights various issues throughout his letter, such as false teaching, prayer, the role of women in church, the qualifications required for elders, which we read, and deacons, and also the responsibility of church members.

Paul squeezes a lot into this pastoral epistle. But above all, Paul's pastoral heart is that both minister and congregation will progress in their faith and continue to serve the Lord faithfully where they are.

But you know, what we see in this passage of Paul's pastoral epistle is what we mentioned earlier, that eldership is about pastoring, not promotion.

[3 : 59] And that's what Paul talks about here in these opening verses of chapter 3. And what I'd like us just to take from this passage, verses 1 to 7, is that Paul highlights three areas of importance in an elder's life.

He highlights the elder's heart, the elder's home, and the elder's house. The elder's heart, the elder's home, and the elder's house. That's the three headings this morning.

So first of all, we'll look at the elder's heart. The elder's heart. Look again at verse 1. This, the saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

Now in this chapter, Paul wants to emphasize to us the solemn responsibility that it is for those who have been entrusted with the office of elder in the church of Jesus Christ.

And in this passage, Paul draws attention to two offices that are in the church. Because there are only two offices in the church.

[5 : 03] The office of an elder, as Paul says, and then the office of a deacon. But Paul seeks to emphasize the solemn responsibility of these offices because he uses the phrase at the very beginning of chapter 3, the saying is trustworthy.

The saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of elder, he desires a noble task. What's interesting is that Paul uses this phrase, the saying is trustworthy.

He uses it five times throughout these three pastoral epistles. And he uses this phrase not only to emphasize the accuracy and the genuineness of what he's about to say, but he also says it to stress the truth and the solemnity of the statement.

Because, you know, the first time that Paul uses this statement or this phrase in the pastoral epistles is back in chapter 1 at verse 15. Now, what Paul says really is a trustworthy saying because he says chapter 1 at verse 15, the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

And, you know, there's no better trustworthy saying than that. That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners like you and me. Jesus Christ came into the world to save us from our sin, to redeem us by his blood and to bring us to himself, to change our hearts and to transform our lives.

[6 : 33] And, my friend, if you take anything away with you this morning, I pray that you take away this trustworthy saying in 1 Timothy 1 chapter 15 where he says, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

To save sinners like me and like you. And, you know, you can be saved by trusting in this Jesus by faith alone. But, you know, when Paul said this statement in chapter 1, he was addressing a problem that was rife in the church at the time.

The problem of false teaching. There were many false teachers in the church and they were leading the people astray with all this false doctrine. They were the elders in the church.

And they were telling those who came to church that they needed something more than Jesus. They were telling, the elders were telling the people that Jesus wasn't enough for them.

And that they needed something more in order to be saved. That they needed more knowledge of the Bible. They needed to be a better person. They needed to be more worthy. They needed to have a certain criteria before they became a Christian and a follower of Jesus.

[7 : 47] But Paul says here very clearly, this is a trustworthy saying, he says, all you need to be saved. All you need in order to be saved is Jesus Christ. All you need in order to be saved is to see that you're a sinner in need of a saviour.

That's why Paul says this saying is trustworthy and full of acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. sinners. And then Paul says, of whom I am chief.

Paul refers to himself as the chief of sinners. Because when we consider Paul's life, well, before he became a Christian, before Paul became a Christian, he used to hate the church of Jesus Christ.

And he used to persecute Christians. He would burn their homes. He would put them in prison. He would put Christians to death. Paul was so self-righteous and so legalistic that he thought that all his Bible knowledge and his upright life and all his upbringing as someone who is so religious, he thought that that was enough to get him into heaven.

But what Paul came to discover was that the qualification for being saved, the qualification for being an elder, it's not knowledge or having all these things or being worthy in any way.

[9 : 06] the qualification for being saved, he says, is coming to the realization that you're a lost sinner in desperate need of a saviour, the saviour Jesus Christ.

And when Paul said that he's the chief of sinners, he said that in order to emphasize that no one, no one in all the world, no one in here today, no one, he says, no one is beyond the pale, no one is unsavable because he's saying that if I, if he, a man who hated Jesus, persecuted Christians, put them in prison, put them to death, if I, if he can be forgiven, he's saying, and if he can be saved, then there's no reason why you can't be saved either.

There's no reason why you can't be saved if you seek Jesus and seek his forgiveness. The saying is trustworthy, he says, and full of deserving of full of acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

I got lost there. But just to note that these five sayings of being trustworthy, they're mentioned in the epistle of Timothy and Titus.

But we're looking at this one in chapter three. And you know, it's a good exercise if these, these are five sayings. The saying is trustworthy. It's a good exercise for us this afternoon to look up where these trustworthy sayings are to be found.

[10 : 36] But Paul uses this phrase here in chapter three. The saying is trustworthy. And Paul uses it in order to emphasize the importance and the solemn responsibility of those who take the office of eldership.

The saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of elder, he desires a noble task. Now, as I said, the word overseer here in the Bible, it literally means elder.

If you're using the authorized version, you'll have the word bishop. And the Episcopal Church, they use this text to justify their church government because the word bishop in Greek is the word episkopos, which is where we get the word episkopalian from.

And in the Episcopal Church, which is a type of government that's mainly used in the Church of England, their form of church government, it has this hierarchy with the monarch as the head of the church where you could say the queen.

The queen is the head of the church. Then there is the archbishop. Then there are all the bishops and there's this priests and there's deacons. There's this great hierarchy in the church.

- [11 : 52] Episcopal church government has a hierarchy where everyone is below one another. But in the Presbyterian church government, which we're part of, there is no hierarchy.
- And there's no hierarchy because the Bible uses the terms bishop, presbyter, overseer, and elder. The Bible uses all these terms interchangeably, meaning that they all mean the same thing.
- There's no hierarchy in the church of Jesus Christ. There are just two offices that we see here in chapter 3. The office of elder and the office of deacon. And these offices, they're not stages of advancement.
- They're not stages of qualification. They're not stages of knowledge. They are two separate offices with two distinct functions. Because the deacon's concern is with the temporal welfare of a congregation.
- The building. The finance. All these different things. The elder's concern is the spiritual welfare of a congregation. Your soul. That's the elder's responsibility.
- [13 : 02] The souls of the congregation. And as Paul stresses in this passage, both are equally important. And so there's no hierarchy in the church of Jesus Christ.
- Because Jesus, as Paul says himself again and again in his letters, Jesus is the king and head of his church. Not the queen, not the pope. Jesus is the king and head of his church.
- And he appoints elders and deacons to serve the people in his church. Now, although there's no hierarchy in the eldership, the Bible does distinguish between a teaching elder and a ruling elder.
- And as a minister, I am a teaching elder. I am a teaching elder because I've been called and trained to teach.
- I'm not above the other elders. Not at all. I'm not more important than any of the other elders. Not at all. I'm not even more important than any of you. Not at all.
- [14 : 05] I'm to serve alongside all the other elders who are ruling elders. And they're ruling elders because their responsibility, as I said, and their concern, like mine, is for the spiritual welfare of the congregation.
- Their concern is the souls of the congregation. And so we have to get over this idea of the minister being above the elders. That office does not exist.
- It does not exist whatsoever. The minister is not above the elders. And the minister is not above the people. It's not true. It's not biblical. Yes, you should respect the office that the Lord has appointed.
- But the office is an office of service. That's why I'm referred to as a minister. Because a minister is a servant. The Lord's servant, yes, but the servant of the people.
- And that's what an elder is too. They are ministers. They're servants. They're not above the people. The only reason I have to stand in the pulpit is because the Bible is above the people. The Bible is up here.
- [15 : 10] That's the focus. Not me. The focus is the word of God. The Bible is to be above us. The Bible is to direct us. The Bible is to enlighten us. And we are to humble ourselves before it and subject ourselves to it because it's God's word.
- It's God's word to us. And so being an elder is not about status. It's about service. And Jesus is the example that we have to follow whether we're an elder or a deacon or a Christian or not.
- Because the example of Jesus is that he came not to be served but to serve. My friend, the elder's heart is to be a heart of service. That's why Paul says that if anyone desires to be an elder, he desires a noble task.

And what Paul means by that is that eldership is not a job for someone who's lazy. Because eldership is hard work. It's a noble task, he says.

Eldership is not about honour, it's about humility. Not about status but about service. It's not about position, it's about pastoring. My friend, the elder's heart is to be a heart that strives to be more and more like Jesus each and every day.

[16 : 24] And it was this man called Jeremy Rine. He's in your intimations. He wrote this great book called How to Shepherd God's People Like Jesus. And the quote that I put in the intimations is that he said, elders shepherd churches like Jesus by teaching, leading, pursuing, serving, and modelling like Jesus.

And so the elder's heart is to be a heart that strives to be more and more like Jesus. And so that's the first area of importance in an elder's life. The elder's heart. But the second area of importance in an elder's life is the elder's home.

The elder's home. If you look at verse 2, it says, Therefore an overseer or an elder 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.

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity, keeping his children submissive. And in these verses, Paul sets out the qualifications of an elder.

And he stresses that what goes on in the home of an elder, he says, he says, because what he's trying to get across is that what a person is in public must also be what a person is in private.

[17 : 50] And as an elder reading this, you know, I always find these words very, very challenging. And you always think, well, you fall so far short. But these are the qualifications.

And just to go through these qualifications briefly, because Paul says, first of all, that an elder must be above reproach. Now, of course, that doesn't mean that an elder has to be perfect. That's impossible.

I would have to resign immediately. But what Paul does mean is that there should be nothing in an elder's character, conduct, or conversation that should cause concern or criticism.

There should be nothing in an elder's character, conduct, or conversation that should cause concern or criticism. Because if there is, it will only bring down the cause of Christ.

But the Christian character, conduct, and conversation of an elder, it must emulate Jesus Christ. And as Paul does in other letters, he says this teaching, it applies not only to elders, but to every Christian.

[19 : 04] There should be nothing in our Christian character, conduct, or conversation that should cause concern or criticism. We are to be above reproach.

But secondly, Paul says that an elder should be the husband of one wife. Now this doesn't mean that an elder has to be married in order to take up the office of an elder in the church because Paul himself, he was never married.

And so what Paul is teaching here is that elders should live morally upright lives. Elders, including ministers, they should be faithful in their marriage bond with their one wife.

And they're not to adopt the pagan fashion that was prevalent at the time of writing this letter, the pagan fashion of immoral conversations or immoral relationships with other women.

They're to be the husband of one wife, meaning that they're not to be polygamous. They're to be faithful to their wife. And they're to be, their marriage in public is to be consistent with their marriage in private.

[20 : 08] And you know, it's a challenging statement, but one that is greatly needed in our day. But you know, following on from this, you know, Paul's teaching here, it not only stresses the importance of marriage, well, marriage as an elder in the church, it also clearly emphasizes that an elder must be a man and not a woman.

Because an elder is to be the husband of one wife. And so eldership is for the role of men. Not because men are better than women. Certainly not. But simply because God's word says so.

And even in chapter 2, if you look back to chapter 2, Paul taught that a woman is not to teach, she's not to exercise authority over a man. And so, women are not to be elders, they're not to be ministers, they're not to be deacons, simply because God's word says so.

That doesn't mean that women are irrelevant in a congregation. Certainly not. Women have a crucial role in the life of the congregation.

And we see that in our own congregation. The tireless work of the Sunday school, the creche, the toddler group, the fellowships, getting together with one another. Ladies, I address you now.

[21 : 26] Ladies, the truth is, without you, the congregation could not function. Okay? And you know, that's the way the Bible has set it out for us.

We're to work together in the work of the congregation. Man hasn't dictated this. This is what God's word says.

And God's word is final because it's the only rule to direct us. And so then, thirdly, we keep going. Paul says that an elder must be sober-minded, self-controlled, and respectable.

And what Paul means by this is that an elder must act wisely and sensibly. He has to be in control of his character, his conduct, and his conversation. That's not easy to do.

I fail all the time. But Paul is highlighting this teaching so that an elder would never act in a foolish way that would degrade the office that he has been given. Because although it's an office of service, it's still an office that's in the church of Jesus Christ.

[22 : 30] And because it's Christ's church, the office requires to be taken seriously and to be carried out with sincerity. But then, fourthly, Paul says that elders should be hospitable.

Hospitable. The elders in the congregation should set an example by showing hospitality to others. And you know, I love this word hospitable because it literally means to love strangers.

And you know, in our culture, if I can say it like this, that's quite hard for us to do because by nature we're very reserved people and we tend, well, we tend to be suspicious of strangers when we meet one.

But the Bible says we need to get out of our comfort zone. We need to get out of our comfort zone. We need to love strangers. We need to be hospitable. That doesn't mean that we have to invite everyone round for Sunday dinner after a service.

But it does mean that when a stranger comes into our church, whether they've come to church for the first time or they're just visiting, you know, we're to make a point of speaking to them and welcoming them and encouraging them.

[23 : 41] And yes, it might take us out of our comfort zone, but that's a good thing. Because when you're out of your comfort zone, just like I am today, always out of my comfort zone. And yet, you're here because you're not relying upon yourself.

You're only relying upon the Lord. And that's why we have to step out of our comfort zone. We have to be hospitable. We're to love strangers. And you know, I would hate for anyone to come into our congregation and say that we're cold people and that we're not warm and friendly and welcoming.

I would hate that because that's not Christ-like. That's not emulating Jesus. That's not what we're taught in the Bible because we're taught here to be hospitable.

We're taught to love strangers. But you know, then after listing all these things that an elder should be, Paul lists some of the things that an elder shouldn't be.

He says in verse 3 that he shouldn't be a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. And you know, Paul is clear, he goes on this list, he's clear, drunkenness, violence and quarrels, they should not be characteristics that describe an elder or a Christian in the church of Jesus Christ.

[25 : 01] Because no Christian should ever take too much alcohol that they lose control over their own senses. We should always have self-control and we should always be gentle with one another, always peaceable with one another.

We're to be peacemakers, not troublemakers. We're not to seek to get our own way. Paul says we're not to be a lover of money. And you know, by the end of this letter, Paul will remind Timothy, he'll say, well, don't be a lover of money because the love of money is the root of all evil.

It's the root of all evil. And you know, even though Paul draws attention to all these qualifications for an elder in the church, we can easily see that they apply to everyone in the church.

But as we said earlier, Paul is highlighting the importance of what goes on in the home of an elder because what a person is in public must also be what a person is in private. And Paul says that this not only applies to an elder's character, but also an elder's conduct.

Because he says in verse 4, 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?

[26 : 17] In these verses, Paul uses the simple analogy of the elder's family and Christ's church. And he says that an elder has two houses to govern.

He has his house and God's house. He has two families to watch over. His family and God's family. And Paul indicates here that the family in the home is to be the training ground for the family in God's house.

And Paul puts it very bluntly and I always find it challenging because he says that if an elder can't look after his own family, how can he be expected to look after God's family?

But what's interesting is that the word manage, it means to be a leader. If he can't manage his house, he's talking about leading. And what Paul is indicating is that as an elder and as the head of your home, there is to be order in your home instead of chaos.

There's to be discipline instead of free reign. There's to be an example and a model to follow instead of being left to their own devices. And that's Paul's point here because he's saying that as an elder in your home, you're to lead by example.

[27 : 32] And as an elder in the church of Christ, you're to lead by example. But if you can't lead your home by example, how can you lead those in God's house by your example?

And it's a, you know, it's a very challenging statement. And you know, this is the point that I'd like us to consider thirdly. We've considered the elder's heart, the elder's home. But lastly, we come to the elder's house.

The elder's house. Look again at verse four. He 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?

And as we mentioned earlier, Paul has taught us about the character and conduct of an elder. But his purpose in doing so is to ensure that what an elder is in public is also what an elder is in private.

What an elder is in his own home must also be what an elder is in God's house. Because it's in God's house that an elder is to lead and serve God's family.

[28 : 40] And as we know, God's house, it's precious to God. It's precious to God and God's family is precious to God. Because God's family, they have been bought, they have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ on the cross.

God's family and God's house is precious to God. Therefore, God's family and God's house ought to be precious to those who serve God's family in God's house.

God's family ought to be precious to the elder. And you know, Paul's words here, they're very fitting because when you read in the book of Acts chapter 20 and verse 28, it's also in the intimations, we're told that when Paul came to Ephesus, which is where Timothy was a minister, Paul spoke to the elders of the congregation there.

He addressed them all. And Paul said to the elders there, pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock. Pay careful attention to your heart, your home and God's house.

Why, he says, because the Holy Spirit has made you elders and you're to care, you're to pastor, you're to shepherd, you're to lead the flock, you're to love the church of God, he says, which Christ Jesus obtained with his own blood.

[30 : 03] Jesus loved his church and he gave himself on it. And so as elders, we are to pastor the church that Christ loved and died for.

Because as we said before, eldership, it's not about promotion. It's all about pastoring. And so, let me just make this personal to us and to our congregation.

As elders, we are to shepherd the sheep of our congregation. We are to care for the flock of our congregation. We're to love the flock in our congregation.

And that's the role of all the elders, not just the teaching elder. Because as we said, I'm just one elder in the congregation. I'm the teaching elder, I'm not above the other elders, I'm not important in any other way.

And so as elders, we're to know the flock. We have to know the flock and if there's someone in the congregation that we don't know, then we need to get to know them. We're to look out for the flock.

[31 : 03] If someone is missing in church or ill or in hospital, we're to let the elders know. And the elders are to discuss it. The elders have to tell one another so that they'll first of all pray for them and also visit them.

We're to love the flock. We're to care for the flock. We're to feed the flock. We're to teach the flock. We're to lead the flock. We're to encourage the flock. We're to challenge the flock. Why? Because this flock, that is you, this flock is precious to God.

and you are precious to God's people. But you know, then Paul says about elders in closing, he says in verse 6, he must not be a recent convert, but he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into 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. And you know, it's interesting because in this pastorally epistles, Paul reminds, in both pastorally epistles, Timothy and Titus, Paul reminds both Timothy and Titus, he says, let no one despise you for your youth.

Timothy and Titus, they may have been young in years, but they weren't young in the faith. They were certainly exercised in the things of Christ. Timothy and Titus, they may have been young ministers, but they were to be respected because of the office they held.

[32 : 35] And yet, Paul's concern here wasn't for Timothy as a young minister. His concern was for the ruling elders as being young converts. Because there was a danger of being puffed up and becoming proud and ultimately falling.

And Paul says twice in verses 6 and 7, he says that the greatest danger for the elder of the church of Jesus Christ, the greatest danger, is the devil.

Because the devil constantly attacks the elders. That's what he says. Condemnation of the devil. Snare of the devil. The devil constantly attacks the elders because he wants to bring them down.

He wants them to cause arguments. He wants quarrels amongst them. He wants disagreements. But you know, the elders, they have to stand firm. They have to put on the whole armor of God.

They have to serve the Lord with gladness. They have to serve the people with gladness. Because as we have said, eldership is about service. Not status.

[33 : 37] It's about pastoring. Not promotion. It's about leading and loving the flock which Jesus Christ purchased with his own blood.

And so there are three areas of importance in an elder's life. the elders' heart, the elders' home, and the elders' house.

So may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray together. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for the reminder in Thy Word of what the under-shepherds of God have to be.

And Lord, we realize when we look at these words that we fall so far short. help us, Lord, by Thy grace to be more faithful to Thee, to serve Thee wholeheartedly, to keep looking to Jesus, knowing Him and loving Him as the author and the finisher of our faith.

Continue with us, Lord, we pray, as we meet around Thy Word and as we consider the things of Thy Word. Bless us and go before us for we ask it in Jesus' name and for His sake.

[34 : 49] Amen. We're going to sing again this time in Psalm 65. Psalm 65 in the Scottish Psalter, page 297.

Psalm 65, we're singing from the beginning down to the end of the double verse marked 4. Praise waits for Thee in Zion, Lord, to Thee vows paid shall be.

O Thou that hear art of prayer, all flesh shall come to Thee. Iniquities, I must confess, prevail against me, do. But as for our transgressions, then purge away shalt Thou.

Down to the end of the double verse marked 4 of Psalm 65. We'll stand to sing to God's praise. praise!

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