

In Search of Shepherds - The Character pt1

REVIEW: We are in week three in our Search for Shepherds. Up to this point we have been doing a chronological survey of the bible to see where elders appear in Scripture, what and if there is a pattern, and what is said about these spiritual leaders.

We have noted how the elders simply seemed to appear in several churches, and have had to speculate on how they were appointed in the early days of the church. Even as we watch Paul on his journeys appoint elders in each church he established, we are not given the specifics of how that happened.

INTRO: It is not until Paul codifies the qualities to look for in an elder that we begin to get a sense of how elders were selected in the church. We have seen that the pattern has been to establish elders in a church, and this has happened in both Jewish communities and Gentile communities. This gives us good reason to believe that this is a biblical pattern that transcends culture - it is one of those “supracultural” principles we talked about.

Today, we are going to look at the character qualities that Paul began to codify to Timothy and Titus about the elders. To do this, we are skipping over one significant story about elders in Acts 19-20. I do so with a purpose. The story in Acts 19-20 gives us a good look at what some of the responsibilities of an elder are - in other words, what elders do. I want to save what elders do for later. Largely because what they do is a smaller concept to who they are as far as the Bible is concerned.

- I. Before we go into the character, let me give you the quick overview of the historical timeline from where we left off to the time Paul wrote the character qualities out for us - and this will be an overview, not a detailed account
 - A. We left Paul in the middle of his second missionary journey in Greece
 1. When he was ready to head back to Syria (home) he sailed from Greece to Ephesus
 - a) This is where he met people in Ephesus
 - b) He promised to return - and he did
 2. In fact, Paul went back and spent about three years with the Ephesians
 - a) The story we are skipping is about the Ephesian elders
 - b) No doubt this is the time Paul established the elders
 - c) In the story we skip, Paul warned the Ephesian elders that men would try to teach false doctrines
 3. This was part of Paul’s third missionary journey
 4. After returning to Jerusalem, Paul was accused of bringing a Gentile into the Temple

In Search of Shepherds - The Character pt1

- a) This precipitated Paul being arrested and his eventual journey to Rome
- B. It was during this time, around 63 A.D. - 15 years after Paul and Barnabas first established churches on their first missionary journey, Paul wrote a letter to Timothy
 - 1. Timothy had been going with Paul on his fourth missionary journey, but stayed in Ephesus because of crisis in the church
 - a) What Paul said would happen evidently did happen
 - b) 1 Timothy 1:3
 - 2. In this letter, Paul gave us the character qualities that elders should be known for
 - 3. This is where we pick things up
 - a) That was a very fast overview of about eight years of biblical history
 - b) Eight years that were replete with stories that you can read in Acts 20-28
- II. So now we are ready to see what Paul tells us about the character of an elder
 - A. Before we dig in, it is important to note that Paul is not talking about skills, talents, gifts, or abilities
 - 1. Paul is very specific that character matters more than skill
 - 2. You can have the most skillful person around, but if their character is off even a little bit, where will they lead you?
 - a) They may use that skill to lead you straight in sin and death
 - b) Turn to 1 Timothy 3
 - (1) We will be taking these character qualities one at a time, and really focus on them
 - (2) We may only get through a handful in a sermon, but that is by design because I want us to fully understand the measuring stick we use for choosing elders
 - B. 1 Timothy 3:1 “Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.”
 - 1. This is not really a character requirement, but a description of the office
 - 2. It is a noble task
 - 3. Note what Paul says here, “whoever”
 - a) The implication is that being an elder is open to all who meets the requirements
 - b) Anyone that desired to labor for the Lord, to pursue this kind of ministry could do so
 - c) There is no divine calling in the sense that the heavens open, the light shines down and you are called to be an elder - you don’t have to have a burning bush talk to you to have the desire to minister

In Search of Shepherds - The Character pt1

4. But, do not overlook the fact that the rest of this list is all about character
 - a) It was maturity in Christ that was being sought after
 - b) That is the measuring stick
- C. Verse 2 - the overseer is to be “above reproach”
 1. We often think of the phrase “above reproach” as meaning, perfect, or sinless
 - a) Yet we know this is not what Paul was going for
 - b) The Bible’s own word “perfect” does not mean perfect like we think of it
 - (1) It means mature
 - (2) It means complete
 - (3) It does not mean sinless
 2. Paul’s point was that an elder should have a good reputation
 - a) Paul listed this first both here and Titus 1:6 (there it says “blameless” meaning free from accusation)
 - b) Paul listed this first with good reason - it’s kind of an umbrella quality
 - (1) It overarches all the other qualities
 3. There are several examples for us in the NT of this already being done - looking for people with good reputations
 - a) In Acts 6 when the first helpers to the apostles were chosen, (the deacons) the apostles said, “choose seven men of good reputation”
 - (1) The NIV translation translates it differently than the Greek
 - (2) In the NIV the word for “known” is deeper than that, meaning one having a good reputation
 - (3) So having a good reputation was one of the requirements that the apostles set up to settle the dispute in Acts 6 about who would minister for the church members
 - b) A week ago we noted that when Paul chose Timothy for ministry
 - (1) Timothy was well spoken of by the believers
 - (a) At both Lystra
 - (b) And Iconium
 - (c) So Timothy was spoken well of by his hometown, as well as other surrounding communities
 - c) So one principle that we can pull from Timothy’s story is that people that are above reproach and have good reputations tend to create positive conversations among a variety of people
 - (1) Doesn’t mean they are famous or some local celebrity
 - (2) But their reputation precedes them

In Search of Shepherds - The Character pt1

- (a) At the risk of sounding arrogant, I'll give you an example regarding myself
 - i) When Joe Candela first got started in our school system, he was putting together a committee for dealing with the sexual education for the school
 - ii) He needed a minister from the community on the committee so he asked around
 - iii) He told me that everyone he asked said "You want Keith" because of how involved I had been with the school and the community
- (b) Doesn't make me a celebrity - just means that I have a good reputation with the school
- 4. Building a good reputation takes time
 - a) And regardless whether we are wanting to be an elder or not, having a good reputation should be our goal
 - b) "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold." - Proverbs 22:1
- 5. So how do you know if you have a good reputation?
 - a) Start with those closest to you
 - (1) Let's face it, spirituality can be faked
 - (a) That doesn't mean that people are not allowed grace for moments of weakness
 - (b) But some people merely play at the game, and don't really want to allow the grace of God to change them
 - (c) So it stands to reason that the closer someone is to you, the less you can fake them out
 - (2) So, if you really want to know if you are above reproach, and have a good reputation, ask your wife
 - (a) Don't just ask her, give her the grace to be open and honest without reacting
 - i) Go into the conversation with a commitment to simply listen to what is said, and ask clarifying questions
 - ii) No commentary from the peanut gallery
 - (b) Also as your kids
 - i) Give them that same grace to be honest
 - ii) You might find some eye opening things when you talk with the kids
 - (1) Even if it is as small as "Daddy, you don't really listen when I tell you things that are important to me."

In Search of Shepherds - The Character pt1

6. If you are willing to go through this process, it is showing that you value your reputation already
- D. The second quality that Paul lists we will slow down for here, it says “faithful to his wife”
 1. Other versions put it as “the husband of one wife”
 - a) That has led to some misinterpretations of what this means
 - b) I want to go over some of those so you know the wrong from the right
 - (1) Some have said that it means that an elder must be married
 - (a) This seems like an odd interpretation if you have read all of Paul’s letters
 - i) Paul encourages singleness so the single person would have more time for ministry
 - ii) Seems strange that Paul would encourage singleness and yet require that an elder be married
 - (b) Plus, as far as we know, Paul, Timothy, and Titus were all single
 - (2) Some have said that an elder must never remarry
 - (a) So an elder is married, his wife dies, and he is not allowed to remarry if he finds another woman that he wants to marry, or he must stop being an elder
 - (b) This again seems to contradict the rest of the NT that speaks of, including Paul
 - i) 1 Cor. 7:39
 - (3) Some have said that the elder must not be divorced - and this has been one of the most popular understandings of this phrase
 - (a) So in other words, if a man has ever been divorced in the past, he is disqualified from being an elder
 - (b) One of the first problems with this view is that it makes divorce an unpardonable sin
 - i) So we could have a man that was a serial killer, changed his life around, and he could be an elder
 - ii) But a man that had a divorce could not
 - (1) Which by the way, you could have said that of Paul
 - (2) The Bible only says he made “murderous threats”, that he considered himself the “worst of sinners”, and he was a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man”
 - (3) And yet Paul became an apostle

In Search of Shepherds - The Character pt1

- (c) The second problem with this view, if divorce and remarriage are in view, is it means that a man that had been to the temple prostitutes thousands of times could become an elder
 - i) Even upon becoming married he could be an elder
 - ii) Even though he had been “one flesh” with countless women
 - (d) The third problem with this view is that all of the other qualifications allow for the elder candidate to have done them previously in their life
 - i) So perhaps they used to be addicted to wine but are no longer
 - ii) Perhaps they didn’t used to manage their household well, but now they do
 - iii) Perhaps they used to be quarrelsome, but now they have learned patience and restraint
 - iv) And yet this one requirement - husband of one wife - means that if they were ever divorced they are disqualified - seems illogical
 - (e) Please don’t take this as Pastor Keith lowering the standards of leadership
 - i) The elder candidate still needs to exhibit and embody these qualities in their present life
 - ii) What we are really doing is finally extending the grace to the divorced community that they deserve
 - (4) A fourth way this has been understood is that an elder is not a polygamist
 - (a) Obviously if the literal meaning is “a one woman man” this would militate against polygamy
 - (b) However, to say that this is what Paul had in mind is probably untrue
 - i) The Roman Empire outlawed polygamy
 - ii) So it does not seem like Paul would have had to deal with this, and if he did, doubtless he would have been more specific
 - (5) The last idea that we have been driving you toward is a one woman man
 - (a) Paul was merely requiring men to be faithful to their wives
 - (b) And as you will see in a minute, that was a radical idea, given the culture they were in
2. To understand this quality better, I need you to understand what the climate was in the Gentile world about sex

In Search of Shepherds - The Character pt1

- a) Even today, there are cultures in which fathers will take their young sons entering puberty to prostitutes to teach them about sex
 - (1) Some even put the prostitutes on retainer so their sons can go any time they like
- b) Many of these boys grow up to be men with sex addictions
 - (1) When they marry, they still visit prostitutes
 - (2) Their wives may not like the idea, but they accept that this is the way men are
3. If you understand that, you understand what Paul is going after here
 - a) Back then, most men in the Roman world had three women
 - (1) A slave girl to satisfy them any time they wanted
 - (2) A prostitute
 - (3) And their wife
 - b) Why would women put up with this?
 - (1) They had little choice back then
 - (2) Their very lives depended on their husbands and their families
4. This is the culture in which Paul preached the gospel
 - a) So when men came to Christ, they had some very different lifestyle changes to make
 - (1) And for many of them, overcoming this lifestyle was difficult because that was the value system they grew up under
5. So when Paul says “the husband of one wife” you can see what he is concerned over
 - a) A man that could not have victory over sexual immorality should never be appointed to lead Christ’s church
 - b) So the NIV got this one right when they wrote as “faithful to his wife”
 - (1) The Greek literally means “a man of one woman.”
6. Let me give you some biblical examples/background to fill in the picture
 - a) The Corinthians tolerated even bragged about a man having a sexual relationship with his stepmother
 - (1) Turn to 1 Cor. 5:1-2
 - (2) They were proud over this and it was something even pagan didn’t tolerate
 - b) This gives us a glimpse into the mindset that had to be present to rationalize this behavior
 - (1) It wasn’t just some man that battled the values he always knew and slipped back into immoral behavior
 - (2) Even the non Christians would not do this

In Search of Shepherds - The Character pt1

- (3) And somehow they were proud - sounds a little to me like those that want to be proud that we Christians have grown so much that we now accept homosexuality
 - (a) Wonder if Paul would say something like this to us today?
- 7. We know that an elder candidate is to be faithful to his wife as in not having a sexual relationship with anyone else
 - a) Jesus raised the stakes when he said “if you even look at a woman with lust in your heart you have committed adultery”
 - b) Please understand that there is a difference between fleeting thoughts of temptation, and lingering on temptation
 - (1) There is no way we could live in this world if the mere thought of temptation was sin
 - (2) It is whether we dwell on temptation, and so it turns to desire, and desire can before you know it turn to action
- 8. So allow me to give some quick steps to help us in moral purity
 - a) Have good communication with your spouse
 - (1) In fact, that is part of what sex is - communication
 - (2) And you need to be able to have open lines of communication about your sexual needs
 - (3) Just so you don't think I am crazy here, turn to 1 Cor. 7:1-5
 - (a) Paul is saying that part of your role as a husband, as a wife is to meet each other's sexual needs
 - (b) When this is not taking place, problems can develop
 - (c) And by the way, who is Paul writing to - the Corinthians - the same sex crazed people from chapter 5
 - (4) So communication should be open and honest about sexual needs between husband and wife
 - b) Second step to moral purity is avoid sexually stimulating situations
 - (1) If you are traveling, avoid the newsstands, or video locations
 - (2) If you are staying in a hotel room, hide the movie channel guides
 - (3) Do what you must to avoid those situations
 - (4) But don't think avoidance alone is the answer - to avoid it just leaves a void
 - (a) Actively pursue righteousness
 - (b) Keep your Bible with you - develop a habit of studying the bible, and prayer
 - c) Third, think rightly
 - (1) One thing to say on this - Philippians 4:8
 - d) Fourth, be accountable

In Search of Shepherds - The Character pt1

- (1) We should all have men in our lives to whom we give the permission to ask the tough questions
- (2) And whom will graciously, lovingly point us to Christ when we fail, and give us a good knocking in the noggin' when needed

III. So these are the first two requirements for an elder

A. They must be above reproach

1. They have a good reputation, and they live their lives in such a manner that they are not accused of things
2. And certainly, if they have sinned, they seek to set things right rather than try to rationalize or sweep it under the rug

B. Elders must be faithful to their wives

1. Their eyes, their sexual desires should be for the woman they married and her alone
2. Moral purity

C. These are the first two of many things we look for in an elder candidate