

# The Minister's Personal Life

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Preacher: Edward Lobb

[ 0 : 00 ] Our reading is from the first letter of Paul to Timothy and you'll find the page number, page 992, if you'd like to follow it in the large, hard-backed Bibles that we have.

So Paul the Apostle writing to Timothy, 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verses 1 to 7. The saying is trustworthy.

Not a lover of money. 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?

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.

Well, let me begin by placing this little passage in its context, both in the first letter of Paul to Timothy, but also in the setting of Paul's relationship and friendship with Timothy.

[ 1 : 36 ] Now, Paul the Apostle at this stage was a seasoned campaigner in gospel mission. And Timothy, his friend, was his junior by, we don't know exactly how much, but perhaps 20 or even 30 years.

But despite that age gap, Paul and Timothy were very close friends, best friends perhaps. And probably Timothy was Paul's most valued colleague in gospel work. Do you remember how the Apostle says of Timothy in Philippians chapter 2 verse 20, I have no one else like him.

Now, that's high praise, isn't it? No one else like him. Now, let me ask, can anybody tell me now, just to answer this question, where Timothy was living and working when Paul wrote this first letter to him?

Anyone like to sing out? Don't be embarrassed. Don't be embarrassed. I'm waiting. No ideas? It begins with E, but it's not Edinburgh.

Ephesus. Thank you very much. Ephesus is the place. Turn back, if you will, to chapter 1 for a moment in verses 3 and 4. And you'll see the word Ephesus is there, but I'd like to read verses 3 and 4.

[ 2 : 44 ] After we have the customary greeting of Paul to Timothy in the first two verses, he says, As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

Now, what an explosive beginning to a letter. No gentle inquiries here about the state of the weather or the state of the health of the dog. Paul cuts straight to the chase here and he launches into the big subject with which he's concerned, and that is false teaching at Ephesus.

Leaders in the churches, whether they were self-styled or self-appointed, we don't know, but leaders in the churches who were damaging and destroying the Christian faith rather than nurturing it and teaching it.

Now, Timothy clearly had a role in Ephesus of overseeing the churches. If he'd been an Anglican, I guess they might have called him an area bishop.

But Timothy might, of course, have been a Presbyterian, in which case I guess he was a big cheese elder. But whatever his title was, he had Paul's delegated authority to oversee the churches in the Ephesus area.

[ 4 : 0 0 ] There would have been not just one church, but perhaps a number of small or smallish house churches. And Timothy had the authority to take decisive action where it was necessary. So he was the senior pastor of the whole area.

And there was this particular unpleasant, nasty nettle that he had to grasp. And if Timothy wasn't prepared to grasp this nettle, nobody else would do it. These certain persons, see that phrase there in verse 3, these certain persons who were teaching false doctrine had to be silenced.

In fact, Paul describes them further in verse 7 of the same chapter, desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

In other words, plausible and apparently persuasive speakers who actually don't know what they're talking about. That's Paul's verdict upon them. Now, have you ever suspected that there might be leaders around in certain churches who could fit that description?

It gets pretty near the bone if you're an Anglican, as I am, and perhaps also if you belong to the Kirk. It gets fairly close to the bone as well. Now, do you begin to see how all this connects with our little passage in chapter 3?

[ 5 : 1 3 ] Why should Paul be telling Timothy in some detail about the necessary qualities and qualifications required in a church leader or overseer?

Because once Timothy has silenced and removed these false teachers, he's got to know what kind of men to choose in order to replace them.

In other words, you could put it this way, the most effective way of countering false teaching is to replace it with true teaching, given by the right kind of teachers. Dislodge the false teacher and appoint the true teacher, and then the church will flourish and be nurtured.

Now, you can be sure that in this church, St. George's Tron, a couple of years ago, when there was no minister in post, the chief concern of the elders would have been to find a new minister who would teach the truth.

And now that the new minister has arrived, one of his chief concerns is again to promote true teaching throughout the church's groups and activities. So as he from time to time appoints new leaders, youth leaders, Sunday school teachers, leaders of small Bible study groups and so on and so forth, he's going to be concerned to appoint teachers who know the truth and will teach the truth from the scriptures.

[ 6 : 2 6 ] Now, let me change tack just for a moment. There may be some folk here today, in fact, I rather hope there are, who are not Christian believers, or who are not sure whether they're Christian believers or not, but have nevertheless come here today with a kind of question mark in their minds about life.

And if you're in that position, you may be wondering whether the Christian faith may provide the answer to the big question which is in your heart. And you may be sitting there thinking, this fellow is speaking about true teachers and false teachers, and quite honestly, that's not scratching where I itch.

It's a bit like going to a fish and chip shop to get a good supper. And when you get there, you hear the shop people arguing about who fries fish well and who fries fish badly when all you want is to buy a decent meal and eat it because you're hungry.

Well, friend, if you're hungry, stay here in the fish shop, please, because it is important to know who fries fish well and who fries it badly. Let me put it like this.

Would you really want a false religion which doesn't answer the big questions of life and doesn't bring you satisfaction and joy in life when you could have a true faith which brings great joy and deep satisfaction and even more importantly, that brings you to a place where you're at peace with God, where you know that your sins are really forgiven and where you know that you are bound of a certainty for heaven.

[ 7 : 56 ] Now, if that's what you want, you need true teachers like those described in chapter 3, not false teachers like those people back in chapter 1 who don't know what they're talking about. Now, any modern city like Glasgow is bound to have both types of teachers around.

The right teaching will lead you to the saviour, but the wrong teaching eventually will drive you away from him. That is what's at stake in the end, to have a saviour or not to have a saviour, to be saved or not to be saved.

That's why it's so important, as much in the 21st century as it was back in the days of Paul and Timothy. So, let's look at this profile of the right kind of person to be a church leader as Paul paints it to Timothy in chapter 3, verses 1 to 7.

Now, in this little passage, it seems that the apostle has two main goals in mind as he describes the good church leader. First, Paul covets the good opinion of the world.

And secondly, Paul values the healthy growth of the church. So, let's take those in that order. First, Paul covets the good opinion of the world.

[ 9 : 10 ] Now, you might say, but surely the world's opinion should carry no weight at all. Are we going to allow the world's standards to govern the way in which we select our church leaders and to provide the criteria for them?

I think Paul's answer would be, we don't select our leaders according to worldly standards, but we do bear in mind the way in which the world outside will regard them, because we have a good news responsibility, an evangelistic responsibility towards the world outside.

So, if the world sees the church appointing unsuitable pastors, it's quickly going to dismiss the church as corrupt, and it will also dismiss the church's message.

And God will be dishonoured, because the message about Christ will be dishonoured. This is borne out in verse 2. Have a look at verse 2 with me. Do you see how the first quality of the overseer, the pastor, is that he must be above reproach?

Above reproach. Now, isn't that unexpected? You might expect Paul to say that the first quality should be that he's a great prayer warrior, or he's a brilliant orator, or a gifted evangelist.

[ 10 : 20 ] It's almost an anticlimax to see what Paul actually does say. He's got to be above reproach, he says. But so important is this quality to Paul that he not only begins his list with it in verse 2, you'll see that he also ends his list with it in almost the same words in verse 7, where he says that this man must be well thought of by outsiders.

It's the same idea there. One of the problems at Ephesus seems to have been that the false teachers were bringing the church into disrepute. And I imagine we've all known churches, I've certainly known churches, where the church has been dismissed by the local community because its pastor has not been above reproach.

And if you look through this list of qualities from verse 2 through to verse 7, you'll see that they all concern observable behaviour. In other words, it's the kind of behaviour which the local community knows about because it can see it.

Now let me focus in this first section on just two aspects of this. First of all, family life. Look at verse 4. The overseer 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 be able to care for God's church? So Paul knows that the local community is aware of what goes on behind the pastor's front door.

[ 11 : 46 ] If there is significant bad behaviour in the pastor's home, that will become known about in the community. So if the pastor beats his wife, or if his children are in trouble with the police, or are being excluded from their schools, the reputation of the gospel is bound to become tarnished.

Now we're living in an age where the institution of the family is in crisis. Many people are treating the family as if it was a dead duck, a thing of the past.

And a number of alternative lifestyles and domestic arrangements are now on offer. So we have, for example, the advocates of serial monogamy. It sounds a bit like a contradiction in terms, doesn't it, serial monogamy?

But really it means having two or three marriages over a period of a few decades, one after the other. We also have the advocates of gay and lesbian marriages, in inverted commas, where children are brought up within that home and that milieu.

And there are other departures from the biblical ideal of children being raised within the secure framework of heterosexual committed lifelong marriage. Now of course the truth is that God who is very gracious often wonderfully rescues people from these situations where the Bible's standards have been departed from.

[ 13 : 01 ] God is very kind. It is gloriously possible to become a Christian after going through these traumatic and sometimes very sinful experiences. But the point about verse 4 is that the pastor mustn't simply preach about family life being lived God's way.

He's got to exhibit it and demonstrate it in his own family. And here in the early 21st century, with family life disintegrating in Western culture, the pastor's family, if it's organized on the pattern of verse 4, is going to be a powerful witness to the truth of the gospel.

But if the pastor's family departs from the pattern of verse 4, we're in trouble. Let me just add one little footnote to this as well from verse 2. The overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife.

I think there's been a bit of debate by theologians and Bible commentators over the years as to exactly what that means. Does it mean that he must only marry once during the course of his life or is he allowed to marry again if he's widowed and so on?

But I once heard it put like this, that the pastor needs to be a one-woman man. Is that a good phrase? A one-woman man. He's devoted to his own wife and that's where his love and his delight and joy is fixed.

[ 14 : 21 ] Now still on this subject of the family, just think for the moment about the way in which job appointments tend to be made these days in industry or in schools or so on. It's politically very incorrect to ask job applicants about their family situation, isn't it?

If you're interviewing somebody for a job and you start asking questions about their marital situation or their family, you're likely to get a pretty frosty response in some circles. The idea being that one's sexual behaviour or inclinations or one's children and their behaviour have absolutely no bearing upon their ability, the person's ability to do the job properly.

But not so with the pastor. 1 Timothy chapter 3 forces us to ask these questions about our pastors. Some of you may be elders in your own churches and in years to come you might find yourself having to appoint to discover a new pastor for your church.

you cannot afford not to probe him about his wife and his family if he's a married man. In my days of being a vicar down in England on a number of occasions I had to interview prospective new curates, new assistant ministers and if the candidate for the job was a married man I would always ask him point blank if he loved his wife and if he was faithful to her.

The family life of the pastor has got to be sound because if it's not the gospel will be discredited in the non-Christian community. Now secondly under this title of The Good Opinion of the World secondly Paul focuses on several other aspects of the pastor's make-up.

[16:00] Just look at verse 3 for a moment. Not a drunkard not violent but gentle not quarrelsome not a lover of money.

Again when I used to interview prospective assistant ministers I always would ask them point blank if they had a problem with drink with money or with bad temper. You see there's something about the stresses and strains of the pastor's life which are bound to expose weaknesses at these points.

A bridge with cracks in its structure can stand up to the pressure of light traffic passing over it but when the traffic begins to get heavy that bridge will break up and fall apart.

Now I'm not suggesting that the pastor's way of life is the only stressful way of life. I'm sure that some of you here lead lives under a great deal of pressure. You'll have to get back and face it in a few minutes. But where a ministry comes unstuck it's almost always because of drink bad temper financial impropriety or something to do with sex and marriage.

The pastors of our churches need to be the kind of people who hold the reputation of the gospel untarnished in the opinion of the surrounding community. The opinion of the world is very important at that level.

[17:19] Now secondly Paul has in view the healthy growth of the church. The overseers must be people who are going to help the church to grow. Let me again pick out two aspects of this.

First at the end of verse 2 the overseer must be a person who has ability as a teacher. Do you see that little phrase able to teach? It's interesting that all these qualities mentioned here are moral qualities with the exception of this one which is if you like a kind of intellectual gift quality.

It's the only one on those lines. All the other things are moral qualities. But ability as a teacher is absolutely indispensable. If you just flick over a couple of pages to Titus chapter 1 verse 9 Titus 1 9 it's about three pages on I think we can see there what Paul has in mind when he speaks of this ability as a teacher.

Titus 1 9 I guess is the classic verse on the three main aspects of being a Bible teacher. First the pastor must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught.

So he needs to know the message and he needs to have strong convictions about it. This is why he mustn't be a recent convert. The recent convert may have great joy great love for the Lord and zeal for evangelism but he won't have real depth of conviction.

[18:36] That only comes with time. Then secondly in Titus 1 9 he needs to be able to give instruction in sound doctrine. So he's got to hold the church to the teaching of scripture.

So if the church or perhaps a group within the church is wanting to do something unscriptural he has to be strong enough to say no brothers and sisters we mustn't do that because the Bible says we mustn't.

His understanding of the Bible has got to be strong enough to enable him to say no when no needs to be said. And then thirdly from Titus 1 9 he's got to be able to rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine.

In other words he must firmly oppose those who argue against biblical doctrine and he needs to do it with some competence. So wrong teaching is always going to threaten the churches. No church is clad in armour that's impenetrable to the arrows of false doctrine.

Now going back to 1 Timothy 3 verse 2 this leads me to my second focal point and that is that the pastor must be verse 2 sober minded and self controlled.

[ 19 : 43 ] Now you might think that's a rather unexciting pair of qualities especially in a world which greatly values the adjective exciting. We see the adjective exciting everywhere. You know the sort of thing exciting new opportunity exciting new ministry an exciting new hymn book an exciting new program of evangelism so on.

Everything's got to be exciting today. Well Paul says that the pastor has got to be sensible. Sober minded that is to say free from excess or rashness.

He's got to be a steady person who can hold a church firm in the face of the big upheavals and exaggerated teachings which emphasise one part of the Bible at the expense of other parts which are going to come at all the churches these days.

Well we must wind down or wind up. Paul's description of the overseer has in mind first the good opinion of the world he needs to be well thought of by the outsider and secondly the healthy growth of the church.

So friends how can we respond to all this? Let's pray for those who are our pastors today that they will more and more conform to the pattern set here by the apostle Paul.

[ 20 : 55 ] They, I should say we because I'm one, we're all sinful people so there will never be total conformity to this pattern but let's pray for a continual increase in growth towards it in our pastors.

But let's also pray for our future pastors, people who might be in short pants today but who will be leading our churches in 20 or 30 years time. Let's pray that God will raise up fine ministers and plenty of them, scores of them, hundreds of them, thousands of them so that our British churches will be blessed, revived and reinvigorated.

Is God able to do that? Let's ask him. And lastly, if you're not yet a Christian or if you're in doubt about what the gospel is and how to enjoy its benefits, keep coming to churches where the truth of the Bible is taught with integrity because you'll find that in the end the Bible will answer all your big questions and will lead you to the Saviour who loves and rescues those who are lost.

Thank you. Let's bow our heads for a moment of prayer. Dear God, our Father, we thank you so much for inspiring the Apostle Paul to write these things about church leaders and we so much therefore want to ask you to raise up armies of people who will do this task and do it really well along the lines that Paul teaches Timothy here.

We'd love to see churches up and down Scotland and England and throughout the UK and elsewhere too reinvigorated because they're really well led by people who are submitted to you and to the Bible and who want to preach the gospel faithfully and with enthusiasm and love.

[ 22 : 40 ] So please look down upon your churches, dear Father. Encourage and help and strengthen those who are pastors now and provide us with many fine new ones for the generations to come.

And all these prayers we ask confidently in Jesus' name. Amen. Friends, do stay for as long as you like and let me just say a little bit of a prayer.

Thank you.