

Ambition • 1 Timothy 3:1-7

I. INTRODUCTION

Survey For The Perfect Pastor

Describe the perfect pastor. What does he do? What kind of preparation has he had? How much time does he spend in study, counseling, evangelism, prayer, working with the church staff?

B. Today

1. In Chapter 3, Paul tells young Timothy how to select leaders for the Church.
2. His instructions here demand our careful attention because it seems there's a leadership vacuum in our day.
3. Let's see what he says . . .

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-7

- ¹ **This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.**
- ² **A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;**
- ³ **not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;**
- ⁴ **one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence**
- ⁵ **(for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);**
- ⁶ **not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil.**
- ⁷ **Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.**

1. On Wednesday evening, we'll go into a deeper word study on each of the qualities fir elders Paul identifies here
2. This morning, I want to focus just on the first verse and what he says about *desire*: Look at it again

- ¹ **This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.**

B. A Faithful Saying

1. Several times in the Pastoral Epistles of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, Paul uses this phrase, "This is a faithful saying."
2. Remember that Paul wrote these three letters at the end of his life
3. By that time, a simple set of basic teachings had become common among the churches spread from Israel all the way to Rome and beyond.
4. Because they didn't possess books or scrolls in abundance, most of the teaching was oral and memorized by individual Christians.
 - a. the average believer didn't possess a bible of their own
 - b. a whole congregation might have only one bible among them – and that was the OT!
 - c. so when the church met, the pastor would preach, and part of his lesson would be to reduce his message down to short, memorable sentences the congregation would repeat again and again till they were memorized.
 - d. this is where we get the idea of catechism from – the committing to memory of the basics of the faith
5. When Paul writes to Timothy, "This is a faithful saying," he is putting his apostolic stamp of approval on these basic lessons
6. Then he goes on to elaborate on these simple statements in his instructions.

C. *If A Man Desires*

1. One of the things those early believers were taught was this: It's a good thing to aspire to be a bishop in the Church!
2. The word "bishop" translates the Greek word meaning "overseer."
3. The word we're more familiar with is "elder" – that's what the word bishop means – elder.
4. So, if a man aspires to be an elder, it's a good thing!
5. Now, after a little reflection, what Paul writes here is a bit surprising!
6. Tell me – how does a man become an elder?
 - a. does he go to "elder school" and once he graduates from all the classes, he's automatically an elder?
 - b. can he buy the position?
 - c. is there *anything* he can do that will *merit* him eldership?
7. No - Elders are *called* and *ordained* by God
8. In Acts 20:28, we see that it's the Holy Spirit who makes men elders
9. So how can Paul say that it's a good or noble thing to *aspire* to eldership?
10. Wouldn't such desire be a grasping after something that might not be his?
11. Many of us have seen the result of leaders in the church who weren't called or ordained by God
 - a. the Church has been cursed with such pretenders to ministry for centuries
 - b. many men who bore the title pastor or elder where not in fact elders or pastors before God
 - c. they may have gone to seminary and gotten the Masters of Divinity degree, but a *degree* does not a *pastor* make
 - d. they may have been of forceful personality and pushed their way on to the elder board, but the *label* does not an *elder* make.
 - e. God and God alone makes pastors and elders.
12. So how do we square v. 1 with the rest of scripture?
13. How can it be a good thing to aspire; to be ambitious to be an elder?

D. *Work*

1. Note carefully the words Paul uses here . . .
- 1 **This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.**
2. That phrase, "position of bishop" translates one word that is better understood as "eldership"
 - a. in other words – it isn't the *office* he desires
 - b. as the end of the verse shows, it's the *work* he longs for!
3. Paul isn't speaking about some guy who wants position for position's sake
 - a. this isn't the man who sees the pastorate as a place to have influence over others
 - b. this isn't about power or authority, income or prestige
4. Paul speaks of the man who desires to be an elder so he can do the elder's *work*!
5. It's the work he longs for, not the office.
6. I like what John MacArthur says, "It's not the office the *truly called* seek, but the work itself. . . . Ambition for office *corrupts*, desire for service *purifies*."
7. The man Paul refers to in v. 1 doesn't want power to dominate, but to serve
 - a. he doesn't angle for a *position of prestige* but looks for *opportunities to minister*
 - b. he isn't ambitious for *personal fame* but for the glory of Christ

E. *Ambition*

1. What Paul is saying in this verse is that the *desire* to be an elder *so that one can do the work* of an elder is a noble thing!
2. It's good to desire to be a leader in the Body of Christ!
3. We have to remember the historical setting in which Paul wrote this
 - a. it was far different from modern day America

- b. today - here, elders and pastors are seen as having positions of prestige and influence
- c. in some churches, the pay and perks are pretty good
- d. but that wasn't at all the case in the early church
- e. Christians were often despised and none more so than their troublesome leaders
- f. pastors were often arrested and beaten
- g. to labor full-time in a congregation of people who because of persecution had lost their jobs meant to live and support one's family off daily charity!
- h. to be a pastor or an elder in that day meant to paint a big red bull's-eye on your chest
- i. that's true in many places in the world today for Christians leaders
 - 1) Vietnam, China, Cambodia, Iran
 - 2) talked with Bill Niklas, Pastor of CC in TO on Thursday
 - 3) he recently returned from a trip to India where he helped train hundreds of national pastors at a several training centers
 - 4) he said that in one village they stopped for dinner, it was so spiritual dark and oppressive they could feel it physically
 - 5) when they arrived at the next training center, they told the leaders there about it and those leaders told them that that village was indeed a demonic stronghold –
 - 6) the pastor of the small Christian church there had been beheaded just a short time before!
 - 7) but you know what? Another man will rise to take leadership of the believers there because God does not leave His people without elders to guide them.
- 4. Paul uses two different words for desire in v. 1
- 5. The first word means, “to stretch forth” and speaks of *outward activity*
- 6. The second is the more general word for desire and refers to *inner longing*
- 7. Some translations render the first word as “aspire”
 - a. I like the translation, “ambition”
 - b. ambition speaks of the focused direction and longing of our lives
 - c. it's the basic bent of our hearts and so governs our actions
 - d. it's what we're stretching out toward – it defines where we want to go
- 8. Paul says it's a good thing to aspire to, to be ambitious for being an elder
- 9. But then notice what the next 6 verses are about
 - a. they're not about what an elder *does*; they're not a job-description
 - b. he gives a list of *qualities* that define what an elder's *character* looks like
- 10. Does character matter in a leader? **YES!!!!!!!!!!!!**
- 11. In terms of leadership – **CHARACTER IS EVERYTHING!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

E. Character Is Everything!

- 1. As I've already mentioned, we'll do a closer word study of these verses on Wednesday
- 2. But it behooves us to read the list of qualities Paul gives, again
- 3. As we do, count how many he lists.

² A bishop then must be . . .

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| 1) blameless, | 2) the husband of one wife, | 3) temperate, | 4) sober-minded, |
| 5) of good behavior, | 6) hospitable, | 7) able to teach; | 8) not given to wine, |
| 9) not violent, | 10) not greedy for money, | 11) but gentle, | 12) not quarrelsome, |
| 13) not covetous; | | | |

14) one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);

15) not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil.

16) Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

4. Here is where all this comes together.
5. The ambition Paul describes as noble is one that moves a man to fit his *inner life* with the qualities of character that will enable him to serve the Lord by serving His people
6. It isn't an ambition that connives and strives and conspires to gain office
7. It's a careful and considered reflection on *the kind of person he needs to be* in order to be used to maximum effect by the Holy Spirit.
8. Let me use an example if I may
 - a. both Tom and Fred want to be President of the United States; that's their ambition
 - b. Tom wants to be President because it's the loftiest earthly position a man can attain to
 - 1) the pay's good – the perks are grand
 - 2) but the power of office is beyond belief!
 - 3) Tom's ambition for office is manifest in his political maneuvering
 - 4) he makes sure he makes all the right friends, is seen at all the right places
 - 5) he runs for city council, then mayor, governor, senate, and finally President
 - 6) all along the way, he says exactly what he knows the people want to hear
 - 7) night and day, for 45 years, Tom's ambition drives him toward the *White House*
 - c. Fred is also ambitious to be President
 - 1) he looks at the nation and sees the need for someone to serve as a moral guide
 - 2) declining test scores and the rise of violence appalls him and he determines to try and turn things around
 - 3) he reads political, philosophical and religious thinkers and gains a vision for what the United States can become
 - 4) he studies the founding documents of the nation and the writings of the Founding Fathers and sees the genius of the system they designed
 - 5) but the system has gone astray and he discovers a way to get it back on track
 - 6) so Fred starts meeting with people to share his ideas and get their feedback
 - 7) he isn't much of a public speaker, so he takes classes so he can become more effective
 - 8) he realizes that he tends to be a bit moody at times and that this hinders his leadership – so he spends a week in quiet isolation, reflecting on *why* he slips into such moods – he doesn't return home until he finds the cause and figures out a way to overcome it
 - 9) night and day for 45 years Fred's ambition to be President drives him to develop his character to be a *servant*
 - d. can you see the difference between Tom's and Fred's ambition
 - e. one wants the *office*, the other wants the *work*
 - f. one surrounds himself with a political machine that will carry him to power; the other cultivates a heart that will enable him to serve
9. In v. 1, Paul is saying that ambition is good if it moves us to holiness, to Christ-likeness
10. It isn't wrong, on the contrary, it's good, to be ambitious to be a leader in the Body of Christ if that ambition stretches us to ensure our *inner life*, our *character* is the kind that will bring glory and not shame to the Lord!

III. CONCLUSION

A. What Are You Ambitious For?

1. Every one of us is ambitious for something - The only question is what?
2. Every one of us is stretching out for something.
3. What are you aiming for? What's your life headed toward?
4. It's been enlightening working with the youth and listening to them share their dreams and desires for the future
 - a. some of them are highly motivated and know exactly what they want to do
 - 1) that ambition moves them to apply like mad to college or trade school

- 2) they study night and day and sacrifice their social lives for their courses
- 3) they have a goal – and they *literally* stretch themselves out to attain it
- b. others don't know what they want to do, and when they get out of high school, they kind of wander around between jobs and on the campus of the local city college, hoping that somehow they'll just wake up one day knowing what they're supposed to do with their lives
 - 1) but they aren't *without* ambition
 - 2) it's just that their ambition is for excitement and fun
- 5. Everyone has ambition – the only question is, “For what are you ambitious?”
- 6. What are the choices you make today and tomorrow aimed at?

B. The Only Ambition

- 1. The only proper ambition for the Child of God, indeed the noble ambition Paul endorses here, is ambition for the glory of God!
- 2. And quite frankly, it doesn't matter if you're called to be an elder, a pastor, a plasterer or a nurse;
- 3. Your ambition ought to *stretch you out* in such a way that you realize it's the *inner life* that's most important - and so you cultivate your heart as diligently as you learn your trade
- 4. When this life is over and we cross the boundary between this world and heaven, all the titles and offices we've known here will disappear – the only thing that will last is the character the Lord has formed in us and we've been diligent to pursue
- 5. There aren't any Presidents or nurses or pastors in heaven – just redeemed men and women.
- 6. Just people conformed in their own unique way to the image of Christ.

C. Finally

- 1. I want to urge you to join us on Wednesday evening as we take a look at the kind of character elders need if they're to be effective in their task of overseeing the flock of God
- 2. What we find here is a picture of spiritual maturity.
- 3. We'll be able to take inventory of ourselves and as we do, see how the Lord *has* changed us and needs to change us even more
- 4. Christian – Be ambitious for the Glory of God!
 1:15; 2:3; 3:1 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8
 MacArthur, John, *I Timothy* pg. 96

“Feed My Sheep”

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