

He Must Manage His Own Household Well

As previous lessons in this series have highlighted, the church needs strong, godly leadership. The Good-Shepherd wants His flock to be led by under-shepherds, also known as elders or overseers.

The church has not been left to its whims to appoint these under-shepherds. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has given us a picture of what an elder should look like. We find that picture painted in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

We have already noticed that such a man must be “above reproach” and must be “the husband of one wife.” The latter is a moral qualification, as well as a family one. Now, we come to a more in-depth evaluation of an elder’s family life. We also come to one of the most debated, controversial, and challenging of the qualifications.

The challenging and controversial nature of this quality should cause us to approach the subject prayerfully and humbly. It should cause us to come to this subject with open minds, ready to learn, prepared to study, and willing to discuss.

A matter like this is unlikely to be settled in everyone’s minds from just one sermon. My goal is not to answer or even address all the particular questions. Instead, I hope to review the text and thus lay the groundwork for further thought and study by all of us as we continue down the road of seeking qualified men to lead our congregation as elders.

Important Reminders

Before we consider any of these qualities, we should remember a few essential points concerning the Qualities and Qualifications:

- The qualities are given for a reason—to demonstrate a man’s ability to lead the church.
- It is dangerous to appoint an unqualified man.
- It is dangerous to reject a qualified man.

The Text

Both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 include a quality about a prospective elder’s household and children. But unlike the marital qualification, the lists are not identical. Let’s read the passages:

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? (1 Timothy 3:4-5, ESV)

If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, (Titus 1:6–7, ESV)

Just some simple observations about the text: First, while both lists address a man’s children, there is some nuance between them.

Second, this qualification comes right after the marital qualification in Titus, rounding out an entire group about the home. In Timothy, however, the household qualification is not grouped with the marital qualification. Several other qualities (10, to be precise) come between the two.

Third, in both lists, this quality is the first to be explained by Paul. So now, let’s take a closer look at both passages.

First Timothy

Here are some various translations of 1 Timothy 3:4-5

ESV	CSB	NIV
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 manage his own household competently and have his children under control with all dignity. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God’s church?)	He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.

Manage

First, the elder is a man who is a faithful manager of his own home. The word “manage” means:

- (1) to exercise a position of leadership, rule, direct, be at the head of (2) to have an interest in, show concern for, care for, give aid (BDAG)

The Greek English Lexicon by Louw & Nida defines this word as:

“to so influence others as to cause them to follow a recommended course of action.”

Louw and Nida also contains this interesting thought about the Greek word:

In some languages it is difficult to distinguish readily between expressions for ‘leading’ and those which refer to ‘ruling’ or ‘governing,’ but it is important to try to distinguish clearly between these two different sets of interpersonal relations. In some languages, the concept of ‘leading’ can be expressed by ‘showing how to’ or ‘demonstrating how one ought to.’ In other languages it is possible to speak of ‘leading’ as simply ‘going ahead of,’ ...or it may refer only to a person who insists on his prerogative as the most distinguished person in a group.

The word certainly pertains to leading, ruling, and governing but shows that one does so by helping, guiding, and caring for others. In fact, sometimes, the word is translated in the New Testament as “devoted.” For example:

The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to *devote* themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people... And let our people learn to *devote* themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. (Titus 3:8, 14, ESV, *emphasis added*)

We should note that an elder is expected to manage “*his own household.*” If a man neglects his own household but helps other families, that is not acceptable. While an elder may help other households, his ability to be appointed as an elder comes down to how he manages *his* household. He is not responsible for households that are not his.

Also, we should notice the present tense. This quality is not just about how a man *has* managed his household (although that may be important), but how he currently manages it.

With All Dignity

How a man manages his household is important. Paul says a man must do so “with all dignity.” This word means:

“Majesty; gravity, dignity, **dignified seriousness**” (Mounce)

Leading a home is a serious matter which should be approached and handled with the appropriate gravity and sincerity. A man who pays little attention to his fatherly role does a disservice to his family and disgraces a position that is to be majestic and dignified.

Another dictionary says of this word:

“Behavior which is befitting, implying a measure of dignity leading to respect” (Louw and Nida)

When someone lives or leads in dignity, they earn the respect of others. Here is one of the critical clues we should look for in a man—does his family respect him? Not is he feared by his family, but is he respected? If, over the years, a man leads his home in such a way that he loses the respect of his own family, should we expect him to lead the church? Should we expect him to be able to earn and keep the respect of the church?

Again, another description of this word says:

“A manner or mode of behavior that indicates one is above what is ordinary and therefore worthy of special respect.” (BDAG)

An elder isn't a man who meets society's norms when it comes to being a father. He is a man who has stepped up to God's call to bring up his children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord without provoking them to anger (cf. Ephesians 6:4)

An elder is a man who has proven to be an effective manager of his own household. He is not a tyrant or a dictator, but an effective guide for those under his care. He is a teacher in word and by example. He is a man who seeks to help his family be and become what they ought to be. He understands the high-stakes of spiritual warfare and the high calling to raise, lead, and prepare children for that spiritual warfare.

He is also a man who has proven an ability to lead and earn others' respect by doing so in his own home.

Keeping His Children Submissive

First, let's consider the word "children." The Greek word is a generic term that refers to a person's children without reference to gender or age. It can refer to a grown adult or a small child. This word alone does not limit our scope to a man's young children, but neither does it necessitate a man's children be grown, adults.

Also, the term "children" here is plural. Because of that, many believe an elder must have more than one child. But this is likely a case where the plural can also refer to the singular.

For example, if I were to ask you, "do you have children," you would not say "no" because you only had one child. You would understand I'm asking if you have *any* children. When Paul wrote these qualifications, he does the same thing. He uses the generic term that means if someone has any children.

Sometimes it is argued that a plurality of children better demonstrates a man's ability. In other words, if a man can successfully raise two children, that proves he is a capable leader more-so than a man who only raised one. This might seem to make sense, but we should be very cautious. After all, if a man is more qualified because he has two children, then a man with three children is even more qualified, and even more so is the man with four, and on and on it goes. But this becomes an arbitrary means of evaluating a man that is not found in the Bible.

The focus of the quality is not on the age or number of the children, but on their behavior. A qualified elder is a man who can keep his children submissive. Again, this is not accomplished through tyranny or abuse but in a loving, caring, and dignified way.

As for what submissive means, it is a unique word used only four times in the New Testament, all of which have their unique context. For time's sake, we will not review them all, but I will list them so you can read and contemplate these passages later: 2 Cor. 9:13; Gal. 2:5; 1 Tim. 2:11.

One clear definition of the word is:

"The state of submissiveness as opposed to setting oneself up as controller." (BDAG)

That paints a simple picture. As the head of the household, the father is supposed to be in control. Sometimes, we see the exact opposite. We often see homes where the parents have no control, and it is the whims of the children that virtually run and dictate the household. If a man is not a leader in the home, and thus his children control the home, he cannot lead in the church. On the other hand, if a father oppressively rules the house and "provokes his children to wrath," so they respond in rebellion, that also indicates the man is not fit to lead the church.

Simply put, the elder is a man who has led his home with dignity, thus maintaining control of his household while earning the respect and submission of those he leads.

The Reason

The reason for this requirement is straightforward. Paul says, “for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” If a man can’t lead in the microcosm of his own household, should he be entrusted with the household of God?

We must also note the focus on leadership in *the home*. The church is most like a family or a household. A man may be an excellent and successful leader in business, the classroom, or any other number of arenas. But if he isn’t successful in the home, he is unqualified to lead the church. If he is unsuccessful through neglect or incompetence, he should not be entrusted to lead the local church family.

Titus

Here are some various translations of Titus 1:6-7:

ESV	NKJV	CSB	NIV
and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach.	having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God,	with faithful children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion. As an overseer of God’s household, he must be blameless,	a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be blameless—

His Children are Believers

This phrase introduces one of the most challenging aspects of the qualities of eldership. What does the text mean? Even a review of various translations shows a lack of consensus. There can be a big difference between “his children are believers” and “having faithful children.”

The keyword is the Greek word *pistos*. This is a common New Testament word, but it does have a nuanced meaning. It can refer to belief or faith, to faithfulness, loyalty, dependability, or trustworthiness. So, when the elder’s children are described by *pistos* we must ask, “what does that mean?”

The translation “his children are believers” indicates the children are Christians, for Christians are often called “believers” in the New Testament.

In the translation “having faithful children,” we may ask, faithful to whom or what? Are they faithful to God, and thus they are Christians? Or are they faithful to their father, and therefore “submissive” and “obedient” as the qualification in Timothy suggests?

On the one hand, the term “faithful” or “believer” is frequently used in the New Testament to describe a Christian. Since such is the case, we should not quickly or flippantly write off such a meaning in Titus 1:6. On the other hand, we must remember that the purpose of these qualities is to show us a man’s ability to lead. He proves that ability first in the home. First Timothy and Titus’s general scope seems to deal with how the man’s household functions concerning his leadership.

Obviously, if a man leads his children to become faithful Christians, that would seem to indicate he can lead others in the church. But if a man's adult child (who is on their own and no longer under the direct leadership of their father) turns away from the Lord and the church, is that evidence the man is unqualified to lead the church? Is the man responsible for those who are not truly in his household any longer?

We should also keep in mind that all Christian parents are expected to teach their children about the Lord and the Lord's will. Generally speaking, when parents are devoted to this, their children will become Christians when they are older.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4, ESV)

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6, ESV)

Not Open to the Charge of Debauchery or Insubordination

Paul describes the opposite of what it means to be "faithful" or "believing" children. He says they can not be accused of "debauchery" and "Insubordination." Debauchery is a general term that means.

"Behavior which shows lack of concern or thought for the consequences of an action"
(Louw & Nida)

Such behavior may be displayed in drunkenness, immorality, excessive-ness, or recklessness. This is an openly worldly lifestyle. For a picture of this type of child, think of the prodigal son when he left his father's home.

The word "insubordination" means "disobedient," "rebellious," or "undisciplined." These words paint the picture of a rebellious and wild child. That seems to indicate something more than an infant, toddler, or even young child. While they may be unruly, it's unlikely we would accuse a 10-year-old of "debauchery." But older children and adult children certainly can be. If a man's children are out of control, we should question his ability to lead. When a man raises children who are known for and easily accused of a rebellious and wild lifestyle, we should be gravely concerned about the man's ability to lead others to a life of faithfulness.

The Reason

As in First Timothy, Paul gives a reason for this quality. He says that "an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach." This reason is similar to Paul's rhetorical question to Timothy. An elder is a steward—that is, he is responsible for managing something that doesn't actually belong to him. He is an under-shepherd who is tending a portion of the flock that belongs to Jesus.

The proving grounds for a man's ability to manage such stewardship is his home. If he is not willing or capable of handling his family's stewardship, he should not be entrusted with the congregation's stewardship. If a man's own family is rebellious and out of control, people will understandably question his ability to lead themselves and others. His unruly children open him up to criticism and reproach so that he is no longer "above reproach" or trustworthy as a spiritual leader of God's people.

This doesn't mean the man himself is a poor Christian. He may be a wonderful Christian, but his past mistakes or inability render his current trustworthiness as a steward of souls unreliable.

Conclusion

When we look at an elder, we should see a man who did everything he could to teach his children to love the Lord. He will not have done so perfectly, but he will have done so diligently. When a man spends his life diligently teaching his children to love the Lord through his word and example, we can expect his children to grow up to be respectable, trustworthy individuals. Further, we can expect to see those children become faithful members of the Lord's church.

On the other hand, if a man, devout as he may be personally, raises children who have no interest in the church, or even worse are rebellious and the exact opposite of a faithful Christian, we may understandably ask, "why did that happen?" Without being judgmental, we may rightfully question the father's leadership in the home. If we question his leadership in the home, we should undoubtedly question his ability to lead the church.

But we should also be careful. When children reject the Lord and His church, the parents may very likely bear some fault. Maybe they didn't make the Lord the focus of the home. Perhaps they were hypocritical. Or they may have "provoked their children" to rebellion. But we cannot assign total blame on the parents every time a person leaves the church. Children grow into adults and must make their own choices. Sadly, some cave to the world's pressures and temptations, despite a very faithful upbringing. Not all departures from the truth are a sign of poor leadership.

For example, Judas benefited from the best leadership imaginable—he spent three years with Jesus! And yet, he ultimately chose to reject the Lord. Does Judas' betrayal reflect some failure on Jesus' part? Absolutely not. On the contrary, Jesus' leadership guided the other disciples to become men of intense faith that literally changed the world. But if Jesus Himself could not lead every person under His closest influence to be faithful, should we expect others to do better?

The qualifications in First Timothy are given by God. As such they are required, but they are also obtainable and purposeful. We should be careful we don't stretch them or interpret them in such a way so as to require virtually impossible or highly improbable standards for men to become elders.

What the church is supposed to look for is a proven and loyal family man. A man who has demonstrated both the commitment and ability to lead his home the way a Christian man is called to lead his home. As we evaluate how a man has led his family (or how a man has not led his family), we get a picture of the man's ability to lead the church. We want men who are committed and able to earn and maintain the respect of the congregation and men who can lead others towards faithfulness and spiritual growth. The household of God needs stewards who can be like spiritual fathers. To see who these men are, we must evaluate their leadership in their own homes before appointing them to lead the church.

Sermon by: Nate Bibens