

Sober-Mindedness, Self-Control, & Discipline

This study considers the qualities of sober-mindedness, self-control and discipline. We read of these qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop (**elder**), he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, **TEMPERATE**, **SOBER-MINDED**, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 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?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (1 Timothy 3:1-7, NASB1995) (Notes & Emphasis added)

For this reason I left you in Crete (**this is Paul writing to Titus**), that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you – if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, **SOBER-MINDED**, just, holy, **SELF-CONTROLLED**, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. (Titus 1:5-9, NASB1995) (Notes & Emphasis added)

There are three different Greek words to be considered here. *Nephalios* (nay-fall-ee-ose), *Sophron* (so-frone) and *Enkrates* (en-kraht-ay).

Nephalios (1 Timothy 3:2)

Strong's Concordance defines as "sober". Some different translations are sober-minded (NKJV), sober (KJV), temperate (NASB & NIV), self-controlled (NCV), circumspect and temperate and self-controlled (AMP). Two instances of this word are in found in 1 Timothy 3:2, 11. There we see that this is not only a characteristic of elders but also of wives of deacons. A third instance is in Titus 2:2 where Paul notes that it should be a characteristic of older (aged) men.

Sophron (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8)

Strong's Concordance defines *sophron* as "of sound mind, self-controlled". Sometimes it is also translated as "prudent" or "sensible". This word is also used a couple more times in Titus 2. There Paul tells Titus that this quality is one that old and young alike should possess. Not only that but both genders.

Enkrates (Titus 1:8)

Strong's Concordance defines *enkrates* as "strong, master of, self-controlled". It is also translated as "disciplined".

This quality of sober-mindedness/self-control/disciplined can be seen as a bit of a foundational one in order to possess the others for any length of time. Having a reputation as one who is blameless does not come without a great deal of sober-mindedness, self-control, and discipline. To be blameless, as Nate spoke to us about earlier in this series, is a quality and reputation that is built over years of submitting oneself to God and righteousness. Self-control and discipline are also required to raise children who are faithful (whether in respect and obedience to their parents and/or in respect and obedience to God). To maintain a healthy marriage, it can, at times, take a good deal of self-control and sacrifice. It's also necessary in reigning in one's temper and not being greedy, covetous, etc.

Self-control and discipline are qualities we all understand take effort. The fruit of that effort, we all want. Take a non-spiritual example: Many of us would like to be very skillful in a certain activity (carpentry, crafts, playing a musical instrument, etc.). Also, most of us would like to be in tip-top physical shape. That's the outcome that we want. However, one of the key ingredients to getting there (unless you're just especially blessed) is self-control and discipline. The same is true for one who wants to succeed spiritually. It requires focus, careful consideration, not just picking up Christianity on a whim or haphazardly living one's life and hoping the end result that we want so badly just happens to materialize.

As we consider examples of these qualities in those we read of in the Bible, specifically around the quality of an elder that we're considering in this study, let's ask ourselves whether or not we possess and display this quality in our own lives each day.

Abraham

There are few people we can read of in the Bible with the focus that Abraham had. I've heard of some horrifying stories in the past about people who had been out hiking or camping or something and ended up being caught somehow by an arm or foot between rocks and they made the choice to sever the appendage that was caught in order to survive. While those are terrifying stories, they are also amazing in that a person had enough sober mindedness to understand the situation, understand the choices to be made, and to make the decision, albeit very difficult, to achieve the most desirable outcome (life). Abraham was faced with an even more difficult circumstance than the one we just considered. In Genesis 22 we read that Abraham was faced with a very sobering situation. God had spoken to Abraham on multiple occasions, assuring him that he and his wife, Sarah, would have a son of their own. At 100 years old, this son of promise, Isaac, was born. Some years later, when Isaac was young, God tested Abraham to assess his faith. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son on a mountain in the land of Moriah. If one was commanded to jump off of a cliff, that would take a good deal of sober-mindedness and self-control to submit oneself in obedience. However, to slay one's own child that had been promised and that you had been waiting for decades to obtain is on another level. What do we read of Abraham doing in this situation? In Genesis 22:10 we see Abraham, with Isaac laid upon the wood of the altar, with a knife in his hand just moments from slaying his own son. How is this possible? Who in their right mind (one who is sober-minded) would ever do such a thing!?! Abraham (regarding Isaac) and God the

Father (in Jesus Christ). Then we come to the question of “How”? Because Abraham had faith! In Hebrews 11:17-19 we read,

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your descendants shall be called.’ He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.”

How incredible! We see Abraham’s sober-mindedness. Despite the tumultuous situation and the emotions that I am sure were tearing at Abraham as he was carrying out God’s command, he was able to retain his sober-mindedness, self-control and discipline in order to not forget the fact that God is God. God is not man whose word may or may not be worth trusting. God is not a liar. Sometimes being successful as a child of God requires setting aside our knowledge for that knowledge that is perfect. We may not understand a situation or why God expects us to behave a certain way, but we should always retain the self-control and soberness of mind to deny ourselves and remain faithful to God, just as Abraham did in this situation. Our elders should possess this same quality.

Joseph

Joseph is another great example of these qualities. This is a story in which, if anyone ever has a reason to lose heart and abandon their previous belief system, Joseph would have been a candidate. Joseph was the firstborn son of the favorite wife of Jacob. That wasn’t Joseph’s fault. Joseph also received a special colorful coat from Jacob that none of his other brothers received. That wasn’t Joseph’s fault. Joseph had dreams that revealed to him that, one day, Joseph’s brothers, and even his parents, would come and bow before him. That wasn’t his fault. But all these situations outside of his control led to the hatred of his brothers towards him. This hatred resulted in his brothers selling him to some Ishmaelite traders and Joseph ended up in the house of the Egyptian captain of the guard, Potiphar. So here is Joseph, who, as far as we know, has behaved himself righteously and has retained his faith in God. But through no fault of his own he is now a purchased piece of property for an Egyptian. His colorful coat, that I’m sure he cherished, is no more. His brothers took it away from him and dipped it in blood in order to deceive his father. He was in a different land and he began to become quite successful and was entrusted with all that Potiphar owned. Then Potiphar’s wife began to try and talk Joseph into lying with her. Joseph is a young man. Potiphar, holding a high position, likely had a beautiful wife. Who would know if Joseph committed this act? If God was looking out for Joseph, how could He have allowed him to be sold to merchants and isolated from his people in the land of Egypt? Life hadn’t been fair to him. Why should he be expected to act with fairness toward others? Was this Joseph’s attitude? No. Despite the circumstances, Joseph didn’t look for ways to deny or question God. In all things, he had faith that God did have a purpose in what was happening to him and it wasn’t just a string of random circumstances. After denying Potiphar’s wife multiple times, one day she was more adamant and grabbed Joseph’s garment in an effort to persuade him. However, Joseph just slipped out of it as quickly as he could and he ran. Joseph didn’t allow his circumstances to control him. He retained his self-control and sober-mind and controlled his circumstances in as much as he was able. Later in the life of Joseph, we read that he had the perfect opportunity to get back at his brothers - those brothers who despised him and who said he would never stand in a place of authority over them.

Those who took his special coat and sold him into a land away from his father and mother. Do we see Joseph seeking revenge? Joseph surely had the power to, being the number two man in all of Egypt. Who would have known? But Joseph didn't lose sight of righteousness. He didn't lose sight of love and compassion for others. So, he looked after the needs of his brothers, who had been his enemies, even after the death of Jacob. How does our sober-mindedness and self-control compare to Joseph's when we find ourselves in situations that test our faithfulness to God? Elders of the church should hold these same qualities.

Hannah

Sober-mindedness, self-control and discipline are not only found in male examples. Let's consider Hannah. We read about Hannah in the first two chapters of First Samuel. We don't read a whole lot about her but what we do read speaks of her strength in these qualities we're considering in this study. Hannah was one of two wives of a man named Elkanah. Elkanah's other wife's name was Peninnah (puh-nee-nuh). Similar to the story of Rachel and Leah, Hannah found herself in a similar situation to that of Rachel's. Hannah had no children while her husband's other wife did have children. Obviously, this was a point of sorrow for Hannah. And, similar to Rachel, her husband favored her more than his other wife. This is evidenced by how Elkanah behaved when his family went once per year to sacrifice to God in Shiloh. Elkanah would always give a greater portion to Hannah than to his other wife and her sons and daughters. As if this wouldn't be difficult enough—wanting children and being unable to conceive while her husband's other wife had both sons and daughters—Peninnah provoked Hannah bitterly, rubbing it in her face that she wasn't able to bear any children for Elkanah. Despite her husband's love for her, she was grieved and desperately wanted to be able to bear children for Elkanah. So, we remember that she broke down in tears and prayed to God at the temple, begging Him to open her womb. She vowed to God that, if He would allow her a male child, she would never cut his hair and would give him to the LORD all the days of his life. Well, not long after the family made it back home from the temple, God remembered Hannah's request and He granted it. What a great ending, right? WAIT!!! It's not over yet. Hannah made a vow. Not just any vow, a vow to the LORD. This was her only child. This is what would bring her the unending favor of her husband and what would keep his other wife from deriding her all of the time. If Hannah lets her son, Samuel, go to be devoted to God at the temple, would this not cause her more ridicule from Peninnah? She finally received a child but she failed to keep him! Unfortunately, there can be times when the waters of our reasoning seem to get muddied and it comes to be that we want something so bad that we find a way to justify it in our own minds. Surely God wouldn't really hold Hannah to her vow, right? Maybe she would dedicate her next child. Or maybe she would dedicate Samuel after she had another son or daughter. NO! That was not Hannah's decision. Hannah, in a great show of her sober-mindedness and self-control, followed through on her vow to the LORD and she gave Samuel up as soon as he was weaned to be dedicated to the LORD. What did that accomplish? MUCH!!! As we remember, Samuel was a great priest. In Jeremiah 15:1, Jeremiah is pleading for God's mercy on Judah. God, in His frustration with Judah replies to Jeremiah saying, "Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth." What a compliment to Samuel! God considers him alongside Moses in terms of how much He respects his requests. Indeed, Hannah's display of these qualities is one we should consider against our own. When we become Christians, we are committing that we are going to remain

faithful to Christ all of our days. How seriously do we take that commitment? When we are confronted with difficult circumstances, do we remain sober-minded, self-controlled and disciplined and make the choice that we know pleases God?

David

Just because a man or a woman fails to show sober-mindedness and self-control in a certain instance, even a very serious one, does not mean that they can't recover from that mistake. One of the greatest examples of this is David. In some instances, we read of great sober-mindedness and self-control in David. One of the greatest challenges in David's life was trying to deal with the hatred of King Saul. We read in 1 Samuel 18 that Saul became very jealous of David because the people began to start regarding David more highly than Saul. In 1 Samuel 18:7 the women were dancing and singing, "Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands." From that point on, Saul started looking for opportunities to kill David. David and Jonathan tried to convince Saul that David was not trying to overthrow him and take his place as king, but Saul would not listen. Instead, Saul pursued David and David's men all over the place. During that time, we read of multiple times when David had what seemed like a golden opportunity. In one case, in 1 Samuel chapter 24 Saul went to attend to his needs in a cave while he was pursuing David and his men, not knowing that David and his men were in that very cave. David had told his men that God had told him that He would deliver Saul into his hand. To his men, this was obviously the fulfillment of what God had told David. They encouraged David to take Saul's life saying, "This is the day of which the Lord said to you!" In another case, in 1 Samuel chapter 26, Saul and his men were sleeping in their camp during a pursuit of David. David and Abishai went down into the camp and stood right by Saul, whose spear was stuck in the ground right by his head. What a great opportunity! God had finally delivered his enemy into his hand! All of the difficult days of running for their lives could be over in just a moment. Abishai looked at David and said, "God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at once with the spear..." Who could blame them, right? Wasn't it obvious what God was doing? This was David's chance to be rid of his enemy. What was David's action? As he told his men in 1 Samuel 24:6, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD." Why? In Exodus 22:28, God commanded the children of Israel saying, "You must not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people." While the situation seemed obvious to David's men, that David should take Saul's life, David knew what God expected of His people. Also as is recorded in Deuteronomy 32:35, God says, "Vengeance is Mine, and recompense..." Even though David's life was at stake, he remembered the word of the LORD and did not stray from it. Now, as I mentioned a minute ago, does this mean that David never stumbled in this area? NO! We remember from 2 Samuel chapter 11 that David was faced with a string of events regarding Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite. In this circumstance, David stumbled in his sober-mindedness and self-control. He suffered from that string of poor decisions for the rest of his days. Reading through the collection of Psalms that David wrote makes it evident that David was not perfect in all of his decisions. Did this render him an incapable leader? No. There was still much good that he was able to accomplish in his life—even in years after the mistakes he had made.

Peter

The same goes for the apostle Peter. Even after having spent years with Jesus and confessing Him to be the Messiah, he denied being with Jesus when he was questioned by the fire while Jesus was in the house of Caiaphas being interrogated. However, Peter later went on to become instrumental in the establishment of the early church and we understand that he died a martyr proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. What separated these men was not that they were perfect. What separated them was that their lives, for the great majority, displayed dedication to God in sober-mindedness and self-control.

Jesus

There are SO MANY MORE examples of those who demonstrate these qualities throughout the Old and New Testaments. Of course, the perfect example of all good things, Jesus, displays this same quality as we read of Him in the Bible. It would take too much time to list each instance in which we see this quality present in His actions but let's take a brief look at a couple of instances in which we see it. When Jesus was a twelve-year-old boy, as we read in Luke chapter 2, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, unknown to His parents, after the Passover feast. At this point, Jesus already knew who He is. In Luke 2:49, after Joseph and Mary questioned why He had stayed behind, Jesus answered, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" However, what do we read next? In verse 51, the scripture says Jesus left with Joseph and Mary and was subject to them.

Then if we fast-forward from these early days of the Lord to his last days, we see a great example of His self-control and sober-mindedness. In Matthew chapter 26, after Jesus and His disciples had eaten the Passover meal and were in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas, one of the twelve, came and betrayed Him with a kiss. The soldiers came to arrest Jesus and His disciples began to try to defend Him. Just a short time before this arrest was made, Jesus had been sweating great drops of blood due to the anxiety of knowing what lay ahead in His crucifixion. His own disciples were going to abandon Him and deny Him. He was going to be mocked and beaten by sinners. He was going to be blasphemed by the Pharisees. But when His disciples began to try to defend Him, He said to them in Matthew 26:53, "...do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" I can't imagine how difficult it would have been to have remained focused and self-controlled enough in that situation to deny Himself and allow the coming events to take place. Sometimes I worry about what MIGHT happen to me in the future. Jesus KNEW what was going to happen to Him. But He remained on course and did not falter. Jesus taught His disciples in Luke 6:40, "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher." Jesus is our teacher. In all things and in all ways we should be examining Jesus' character and molding our own thoughts and actions to conform to those of His. We should truly strive to be sober-minded and self-controlled in all of our thoughts and actions. We should dedicate ourselves to the pursuit of these qualities. It's going to take effort. As Paul encouraged the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 9:27,

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the

air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Conclusion

We must not live our lives in such a way that we are just “beating the air”, as Paul says. We must not live our lives without aim. We must be sober-minded. We need to display self-control and discipline in all of our actions. This is especially true for those who are considered to serve in the role of an elder.

As we have seen, these aren't just qualities for elders. These aren't just qualities for men or those who are advanced in years. These are qualities for us all to strive possess from the time that we are young until our time on earth is ended. As in all godliness, we should be ever-increasing in these qualities. However, we should all be pursuing them at all ages. And since this is something for us all to be working on, that is why it is so important that elders demonstrate these qualities themselves. Because we all need them and we all need strong examples in our leaders.

One thing that is essential if we want to always act in a way that displays sober-mindedness and self-control is faith. How were these men and women able to make the right decisions even in very difficult and uncertain times? Because 1) they knew God's word/will on the matter, and 2) they had faith that obedience to God would always result in the greatest good, no matter what their own reasoning may have been leading them to do. Abraham was able to follow through with God's command because he trusted God, even to the point of believing God would raise Isaac from the dead. Joseph was able to continue to live righteously and not take revenge because he had no doubt that God existed and works all things for good to those who love God (Romans 8:28). The same goes for Hannah, David, Jesus and many others that we can read of.

Through our faith, our sober-mindedness and self-control can help us in keeping our priorities straight, staying focused on spiritual things, abstaining from sin, doing what is right, making necessary sacrifices and persevering in trials. These are qualities we all should be working to grow in every day and they are qualities we should expect in those who desire to be elders in the LORD's church.

As Christians, we are so thankful for Jesus' sober-mindedness, self-control and discipline. Without them, we would still be lost in our sin with no hope of redemption. It took the perfect Lamb of God and His complete devotion to the Father to bring about our salvation. Let us all live faithfully in sober-mindedness, self-control, and discipline in order not to be disqualified (as Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 9).

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