

The Call to Lead the Church--Elders, Part 2

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:1-2

Code: 54-19

Let's open our Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 3...1 Timothy chapter 3. You remember, don't you, that Paul is writing to Timothy. Timothy is in Ephesus. Ephesus is a city famous for its paganism, a city within Greek culture, a city where Paul was sent by the Spirit of God, founded a marvelous church, fed and taught and nurtured that church for three years. Paul then, of course, left on further journeys, ended up in prison, came out of prison. When he comes out of prison, he goes back to Ephesus. He finds that things have deteriorated there. They have false leaders, they have abandoned the holiness that they were taught. Things are not as they should be in Ephesus, so Paul leaves Timothy there and then after Paul goes on to Greece or Macedonia, he writes this letter back to Timothy and tells him the things that must be done in Ephesus. So Timothy is in Ephesus receiving this letter, though written to him it is really written to him for the purpose of benefiting the church at Ephesus and it has benefited all the churches who have followed its injunctions ever since.

Now he takes up many themes in this epistle but there's sort of a current that runs through the whole epistle around the theme of leadership. It was obvious that the leadership in the church at Ephesus had deteriorated severely. There were some who were teaching false doctrine, who were teaching fables, genealogies, questions that didn't edify anybody and weren't even godly. There were some who wanted to be rabbis and teach the law but they had no idea what the law meant. There were some who perverted the gospel. There were some women trying to usurp the authority of the men. There were some who were teaching seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. There were some speaking lies and hypocrisy. There were some who were saying it was wrong to marry and you were to abstain from certain food. There were all kinds of people who were trying to rise to leadership because of money and prestige and the glamor and the pride of it. There were sinful pastors and elders who needed to be rebuked publicly. The whole problem in this church in the people had really flowed down from the problems with the leadership. And that's always the way it is. The most important single element in the church is its leadership, without question. And we were reminded last time that Jesus said when a person is fully taught he will be like his teacher. And so whatever the leaders are, the people become. Hosea said it, "Like people, like priests." Whatever the priests are like, that's what the people will be like.

And so, leadership in the church is really at a premium. It saddens my own heart just to take an even cursory look at leadership in the church today. Pastors are falling all over the place into sin of all kinds. And there are people who take the position of pastor or elder or overseer in a church who are ill equipped and ill qualified for such responsibility. And consequently they cannot lead the people any

further than they themselves are. There is then a great premium on leadership in the church. Anybody in any church, including this one, should be asking the question...who are my pastors? And what is their spiritual state? And are they qualified for service because my life is in their hands? I am the sheep and they are they shepherds.

If you go into the Old Testament, you will find that the history of Israel is a history of apostasy. It is a history of departing from God and disobeying His Word and abandoning His worship. And as you look at the apostasy of Israel, you note that it is directly related to the decline of its leadership. That's always the way it is.

Go with me for just a moment to Jeremiah before we look at Timothy, and I want to take just a minute to help you to understand this. In Jeremiah chapter 2 and verse 8, now Jeremiah all through his prophecy is indicting the apostate people of Israel and also their leaders. And I just want you to see how he speaks to the leadership issue. In Jeremiah 2:8 it says, "The priest said not, Where is the Lord? And they that handle the law knew me not." The priests, he says, who should have been asking God to speak, who should have been calling the people to seek God never even asked where is the Lord. They were not interested in that.

"The rulers also transgressed against Me and even the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that do not profit." You have a corruption of the priesthood, a corruption of the rulers and a corruption of the prophets. Now you had the prophets, the priests and the kings as those in positions of authority and all of them, says Jeremiah, have been corrupted. And, of course, the consequence was the apostasy of the whole nation. In Jeremiah 5:31 and verse 30 introduces it by saying, "An appalling and horrible thing is committed in the land, the prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule by their means and my people love to have it so." In other words, the prophets don't tell you the truth and the priests operate in their own power and the people love it. And then he says, "What are you going to do in the end of it all? How you going to deal with the judgement that is inevitable on this?"

Now chapter 8, and I'm only giving you some samples, but chapter 8 verse 8, "How do you say we are wise and the law of the Lord is with us? How can you say that? Lo, certainly in vain He made it." In other words, the law is useless. "The pen of the scribes that wrote it is for nothing." What do you mean you're wise and you are committed to the law of the Lord, the law is worthless, the men that wrote it down have done something that has turned out to be empty. "The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken, lo, they have rejected the Word of the Lord and what wisdom is in them?" In other words, what good is the law of God if you reject it.

And then he says I'm going to bring a judgment, their nation will be plundered and their wives will be given unto others and their fields to them that inherit them for every one from the least even to the greatest is given to covetousness...from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. They

have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people only slightly, saying, Peace, Peace, when there's no peace. They have a psychological message about all peace, peace and no spiritual message about obedience to God. And they have committed, verse 12 says, abominations. And again the leadership here is indicted for the sin of the people.

Chapter 10 then of Jeremiah and verse 21, "The pastors or shepherds, the pastors are become stupid and have not sought the Lord, therefore they shall not prosper and all their flocks shall be scattered." Tragic judgment on all the people because of the failure of the pastors.

Chapter 12 verse 10, "My shepherds, many of them, have destroyed My vineyard, they have trampled My portion under foot," He's referring to His people again. "They have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness." And so the people again are victims of the false leaders.

In chapter 23 the first two verses in particular to call your attention to, "Woe be unto the pastors who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture, saith the Lord. Therefore, thus saith the Lord, God of Israel against the pastors who feed My people, you have scattered My flock and driven them away and have not visited them. Behold, I will visit on you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord." Verse 4 He says, "I'll give them pastors who will feed them because you haven't." In verse 9 of chapter 23, He says, "My heart within Me is broken because of the prophets." Verse 11, "Both prophet and priest are profane." And He goes on to speak about the judgment on them. Verse 16, "Hearken not to the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you, they make you vain, they speak a vision of their own heart and not out of the mouth of the Lord."

So all of this points up to us how strategic spiritual leadership is and its tragic impact upon the people. In 1 Samuel 2:12 it says, you don't need to look it up, it says, "Now the sons of Eli were worthless men, they knew not the Lord." And yet they were the ones who were to be the priests succeeding their father who was high priest.

In Malachi 2 there is a most graphic denunciation of false leadership. In fact, the statement that is made is really a fearful statement and very vivid. Malachi 2, the Lord indicts the false leaders of Israel and says this, "I will corrupt your seed and spread dung on your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts." What vivid language. I'll smear your faces with your own excrement because of what you've done to my people.

Now the matter then of leadership within the family of God is of great importance. The moral character, the spiritual commitment, the holy behavior and the faithfulness to the Word of God are essential among those who lead His people. You come into the gospels in the New Testament and our Lord indicts the false leaders of Israel. In Matthew chapter 23, those of you who were with us in that study of Matthew will remember the passage. He blisters the leaders of Israel with His rebuke. He says to them in verse 13, "You shut up the Kingdom of heaven against men, you neither go in

yourselves nor permit them who are entering to go in. Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. You devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers, therefore you shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, you compass sea and land to make one proselyte, or convert, and when he is made you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves."

And He goes on with His indictment. He calls them fools and blind. Reminds that they pay their tithe but they are not concerned about justice and mercy and faith. He calls them blind guides. He says you clean the outside of the cup and inside is extortion and excess, hypocrites, whited sepulchers, outside you're painted beautiful but inside full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. You're guilty of hypocrisy and iniquity. And He goes on and on. You serpents, you generation of snakes, how will you escape the damnation of hell? So this again is a stern rebuke of false leadership.

You come into the epistles then, the epistles of Paul and Peter and John and James and Jude, all of those epistles deal with the matter of false leadership, all of them, in one way or another. We're reminded of Paul's indictment of Galatians 1 where he speaks about those who speak another gospel. We're reminded of his letter to the Colossians in chapter 2 where he says, "Beware of philosophy and vain deceit," those who would twist and pervert the truth, those who would bring in mysticism, those kinds of people who lead you astray, those who bring in legalism. And he delineates several false forms of teaching in Colossians 2.

We're reminded of Peter how in 2 Peter 2 Peter just describes false teachers in the most graphic terminology as scabs and filth spots and just very graphic terms...clouds flowing along in the wind, wells without water. Jude does the same thing. John writes about the antichrists who deceive. And even James speaks about the serious retribution of God upon those who seek to be teachers and don't fulfill it as they should.

It is a grave matter in the Kingdom of God to deal with the issue of spiritual leadership. And no person should aspire to that position without a very serious consideration of what is involved. And I want to see if I can't in this series in 1 Timothy get us to come to grips with this seriousness. I realize that what I teach here will go on far beyond the walls of this church this day because of our tape ministry, and I trust that many others who hear this will have a greater understanding of what the Spirit of God is saying regarding the matter of being a pastor, an elder, an overseer, a leader in the church.

Now need I remind you that whether he uses the word overseer, bishop, pastor, elder, shepherd, he's referring to the same person. All three terms...overseer speaks of his role of supervision and leadership; elder of his maturity and experience; pastor refers to his feed and caring. But they all embody the same position. In fact, in Acts 20 verses 17 and 28, all those terms are used to refer to the same people. In Titus 1:5 and 7 they're used to refer to the same person. And in 1 Peter 5:1 and 2.

Last time we said that this overseer or pastor or elder is responsible to rule the church, teach the church, pray for the church, care for the church, set policy for the church, ordain others into the ministry and be the example of godliness for all the people to follow. And it is a very serious calling. And that is why in verse 1, do you remember what it says? "This is a true saying," that marks the importance of this, that little phrase was used for those things that were of great importance to the church. It is important for us to remember that when a man desires to function as an overseer, he is desiring a noble work. And we saw last time, didn't we, the high character of leadership in the church. It is a high calling. It is a noble work that a man commits his life to.

I was reminded of that this week. In fact I pursued some reading on my own about the nobility of the ministry just to refresh and rehearse in my own mind that lofty calling to which God has called me and many others. And I was especially warmed in my heart by the writings of a seventeenth century American Puritan by the name of Cotton Mather(?). He had a powerful ministry in Boston and he wrote a volume entitled "Student and Preacher," and in that volume, "Student and Preacher," he had a section called "Directions for a candidate of the ministry." And in it he speaks of his view of the worthiness of the ministry. Listen to what he says:

"The office of the Christian ministry rightly understood is the most honorable and important that any man in the whole world can ever sustain. And it will be one of the wonders and employments of eternity to consider the reasons why the wisdom and goodness of God assigned this office to imperfect and guilty man. The great design and intention of the office of a Christian preacher is to restore the throne and dominion of God in the souls of men, to display in the most lively colors and proclaim in the clearest language the wonderful perfections, offices, and grace of the Son of God. And to attract the souls of men into a state of everlasting friendship with Him. It is a work which an angel might wish for as an honor to His character, yea an office which every angel in heaven might covet to be employed in for a thousand years to come. It is such an honorable important and useful office that if a man be put into it by God and made faithful and successful through life, he may look down with disdain upon a crown and shed a tear of pity on the brightest monarch on earth," end quote. Now he had a sense of the loftiness of the calling.

Will Sangster(?) who preached in Westminster Hall in London in World War II days wrote, "Called to preach, commissioned of God to teach the Word, a herald of the great King, a witness of the eternal gospel, could any work be more high and holy? To this supreme task God sent His only begotten Son. In all the frustration and confusion of the times, is it possible to imagine a work comparable an importance with that of proclaiming the will of God to wayward men? Not by accident, nor yet by the thrustful egotism of men was the pulpit given the central place in the church. It is there of divine and devotion. It is there by the logic of things. It is there as the throne of the Word of God," end quote.

And so, a man who takes the eldership or the oversight or the pastorate takes a place, as it were, in the throne of God to speak the Word of God which emanates from that throne. It is a worthy calling, a high and holy calling.

John Wycliffe writing in the fourteenth century said, "The highest service that men may attain to on earth is to preach the Word of God. This service falls peculiarly to priests." And in his day the priests were the ones who did that. "And therefore God more straightly demands it of them and for this cause Jesus Christ left other works and occupied Himself mostly in preaching and thus did His Apostles and for this God loved them. The church, however, is honored most by the preaching of God's Word. And hence this is the best service that priests may render unto God and thus if our bishops preach not in their own persons and hinder true priests from preaching, they are in the sins of the bishops who killed the Lord Jesus Christ," end quote.

What he's doing is commenting on a time period in history when spiritual leaders were not allowing the Word to be preached by lesser priests and he says they are as guilty as those that killed Jesus Christ, for restraining this most noble and needful of all endeavors. So it is a worthy task. And we saw that last time.

And it is right to aspire to that worthy task. If a man desires that, he desires a very noble occupation. But it is not that the church immediately accepts the person just because they aspire to that. And so, beginning in verse 2 he begins to list the qualifications to affirm such an aspiring man. It's one thing to seek this, it's something else to be qualified to receive it. And here we move from the man with the desire to the church with the responsibility. As much as a man is to desire this, so much is a church to qualify that man or to affirm his qualifications. This is the church's responsibility.

Pastors, elders, overseers are uniquely set aside by the church and ordained to ministry. The word "ordain" is familiar to us. The word in the Greek is *kathistemi*, it's used many times in the New Testament. It means to set aside, it means to appoint, it means to ordain. The official sign in the early church was laying on of hands. When they wanted to set somebody aside for the ministry, then the pastors of the church or the Apostles or the ones who worked with the Apostles would put their hands on this individual and by doing so affirmed their union with them, their identification. And in a sense, transmit the ministry blessing to them. So that we read in 1 Timothy 4:14 Paul's word to Timothy, "Not to neglect the gift that he had which was confirmed in him with the laying on of the hands of the elders." So Timothy also was ordained to the ministry by the laying on of the hands of the elders.

Now the idea of the laying on of hands comes from an Old Testament symbol. When a Jew went to give his sacrifice, he put it on the altar then he put his hands on the sacrifice. He did that as an act of solidarity, as an act of union, saying I am one with this sacrifice, this sacrifice will pay the penalty for my sin, in a sense. It's in my place I offer this. And so that symbol of identification that came out of the laying on of hands at a sacrificial moment is carried into the New Testament in the laying of the hands

of one on another ordaining them into ministry.

In chapter 5 verse 22, 1 Timothy, Timothy is warned not to lay hands suddenly on any man or you might be a partaker of that man's sins. In other words, if he is a sinful man and has no right to be in the pastorate and you ordain him for that, you are a partaker of his sin. So it is a very weighty responsibility. When we affirm by putting our hands on some men that they are suited for and ready for and qualified for the ministry, we are identifying with them in such an intimacy that if they are sinful, we literally partake of that sin. And so the warning comes not to lay hands on anyone suddenly without proper evaluation. By the way, in our service tonight, we'll be laying hands on two men who have been qualified. We're very pleased to be able to do that. Chris Mueller and Jack Regan(?) will be set apart officially tonight for the work of the ministry because they have been found not only to aspire to that but to be worthy of that by qualification when measured with the standards given in the Word of God.

And the church does that. In the early years of the church we find that it was done by the Apostles. In Acts 14:23 the Apostles laid hands on and ordained. As the church began to grow and the Apostles began to disappear, a new generation of leaders came like Titus and in Titus 1:5 Titus is told to ordain elders in every city. It passed from the Apostles to those who were representative of the Apostles, such as Titus. But in the case of Ephesus where there already was a group of pastors and elders, it became their responsibility and so they are the presbytery who are given the responsibility of laying their hands on others. So we could say in the early years the Apostles did it. Then those who worked with the Apostles did it. And then once the church was established, it becomes the pastors of the church who add to their ranks by the laying on their hands on others being commended to ministry. And today that's the way we do it. It is the task of the pastors and elders of the church to confirm others into that very sacred trust.

Let me also mention that in Acts 13:2 and in Acts 14:23, on both occasions when men were set apart for ministry, the church engaged in prayer and fasting and seeking the mind of the Spirit of God. And that again emphasizes to us the great seriousness of setting men apart. Acts 20:28, by the way, says the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. It is really a work of God. God does the work, puts the desire in the heart, the church affirms that. The leaders put hands on and the person is then set apart to ministry.

But that process of ordaining can only be done in God's will when the man has been measured against the standard. And the standard is given in 1 Timothy 3:2 through 7 and also in Titus 1, and we'll look at the Titus 1 parallel later on. But let's begin a look at the qualifications in verses 2 through 7. And to be honest with you this morning, we're only going to look at the first one. We'll get a little more speed going next time, but we have to start with this very very important one given first.

The first qualification for one suited for the ministry, an overseer, verse 2 says, then...the then is there to indicate that because of what verse 1 says, because it is such a sacred trust, a high duty, a lofty office, a noble work, a bishop or overseer then must be blameless. And stop at that point.

Must is *dei* in the Greek, it's a particle put in there to emphasize something that is an absolute necessity. It is an absolute necessity that this man be blameless...blameless. That is the basic overall requirement. And by the way, it is a *nig*(??) in the Greek, that is it is a present participle of the verb to be. He must be in a present state of blamelessness. It doesn't mean that he never committed a sin in his whole life. It doesn't mean that in the past there wasn't something that was wrong. What it means is in the present he is blameless. No one has been blameless all his life. It is not a question of what did he do years in the past...it may be a question of what he did a few months or weeks ago or maybe even a few years ago that is still a blight on his life, but the idea is present blamelessness. It doesn't mean he had to be perfect before he was a Christian...no one could do that. Everyone before they came to Christ lived in sin and more sin and only sin.

So the point here is that present tense...this man must have a life without blame. That is the overarching requirement. In fact, everything else that comes after that really in a sense defines what is meant by blameless. This is the general basic overall requirement.

Now the word means "not able to be held." It means not able to be taken hold of. In other words, you can't grab him as if he were a criminal and needed to be captured because of the necessary indictment or imprisonment or whatever that he had deserved because of what he had done. He is irreproachable. You can't lay anything on him. He is beyond accusation, that's the idea. There's nothing to accuse him of.

So, he must be a man whose life is not marred by some sin, some vice, some evil...be it a habit or be it an incident or be it an attitude. It could be anything that will cause him to be accused. He is to be beyond accusation. Now that doesn't mean he's going to be perfect and that doesn't mean that there won't be times when he fails, when he does something wrong. But it's not something in his life to which everyone points as an obvious defect. He has no obvious sinful defect in his character. He is to have no obvious sinful defect in his behavior. Nothing that would...that would mean that he couldn't be the supreme model for the congregation to follow. If he's going to say, "Follow me as I follow Christ," then he's going to have to be without defect. If he is going to have to do in the pulpit what all pastors are called to do, and that is to say "I'm the example, follow me," then he's going to have to be an example of virtue. He is not to have anything in his life which when followed by his people will lead them into sin.

If he is sinful in any area of life, maybe it's a preoccupation with material things, maybe it's an attitude problem, maybe it's an ego problem, maybe it's a lustful problem, whatever that thing might be...maybe it's an argumentative spirit, maybe it's a failure to care for those who are in need, he's

indifferent, whatever that might be...maybe it's some moral blight in the past, embezzlement or lying or cheating or stealing or some adulterous relationship, or whatever that might be, if there is that kind of blight on his life that allows him to demonstrate to others that you can live in imperfection and still be a spiritual leader, he's unqualified. And I'm not saying that I'm perfect because you all know that isn't so. But I'm saying there's not one single public sin in his life to which everybody points and everybody knows. If that's the case, he's not qualified.

Not only because of the positive side he ceases to be a model but because of the negative side. The malicious people who want to attack the church will find that and they'll use that to destroy the reputation of Christ and the reputation of Christ's church and to discredit the work. No, this isn't a double standard. You say, "Oh, this is a double...I'm glad I'm not a pastor. Boy, this is tough." Listen, this is not a double standard, this is not something for me and the pastors of Grace Church and the elders of Grace Church and not for you. Do you understand the point here? The reason blamelessness is called for at the pastoral level is because we are the example which you are all to follow. And if blamelessness is part of that example, then guess what is required of you? The same blamelessness. It's just that some things can be tolerated in the congregation that cannot be tolerated in the spiritual leaders because it's a question of example and modeling.

And repeatedly does Paul say, "Be followers of me...be followers of me," that's something that every spiritual leader has to be able to say. "Brethren," Philippians 3:17, "be followers together of me." He said it in the Corinthian letter twice. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 9 he says, "Make...we have made ourselves an example to you to follow us." In Hebrews 13, the congregation is called to pattern our faith after those over us. 1 Peter 5, we are to follow the example of those who are our shepherds. 1 Timothy 4, be an example to the believers in word and conduct, love, spirit, faith, purity. You see, spiritual leadership is primarily a matter of example, it's primarily a matter of setting a model for people to pattern their life after. And the truth is, as I said earlier, whatever the leadership is eventually will reflect in the church. And you can meet people from a church and if they've been going there a long time, they will mirror to you the standard established by the leaders of that church. And frankly, folks, it isn't so much what they say as what they are. People will only follow what you say if it's consistent with what you are. If you're less than you say, they'll follow the lesser standard and become what you are rather than what you say.

So, we are called then as those who lead in the church to be blameless. Now let me just say this for your own understanding. What I want you to grab out of this is not that we are sinless but that there is no issue in our life that is an ongoing problem of sin which would cause us to be blamed and would eliminate our example and create an opportunity for malicious people to undermine the integrity of our ministry, our church and the work of Christ.

Now note this, would you please, because it's important. If you aspire to the ministry you are called to this. And if you are called to this, in order to be effective for God you can be sure of one thing, and

that is that Satan will do everything he can to disrupt your life at this level. There is a reason, beloved, why so many pastors fall into sin. There's a reason why so many church leaders are not blameless and that is because the enemy works overtime to undermine their integrity, to destroy the ministry and to bring reproach on Christ.

And so having said that, I need to digress for a moment and share with you some things that are on my heart that I believe are very important for anyone who aspires to spiritual ministry and for you in your prayers on behalf of all of us. We must beware in the matter of blamelessness for many reasons. We must seek great spiritual strength for many reasons. Let me share them with you.

Number one, it is my belief that the devil will attack us with temptation more severe than any other person. I believe that. And I believe that's pretty obvious. If you are leading the forces of truth and light against the kingdom of darkness, if you're out there on the front line then you're going to feel the brunt of his opposition. There's no question about that. If Satan had a choice in this church and his demons had a choice in this church of having someone in the congregation fall into deep sin and having it be me, there would be little choice, right? Because the devastation that would result at this level of leadership would have ripples and farreaching effect beyond anything that happened to an individual member. So know it in your own mind that your prayers on behalf of those who are in spiritual leadership are well fit because therein lies the greatest attack of the enemy. If he hates Christ supremely, he hates supremely those who most represent Christ. And I also believe that the truer one is to the Word of God and the more boldly and courageously and uncompromisingly he preaches and teaches that Word of God, the more the attack will come against him.

So, we would say then that he will attack the one in the role of the pastor and the teacher more than any other. And the one who is more faithful in that role, he will attack more than the rest. So that's why we say this is a spiritual warfare. And we are ever and always engaged in that warfare. We get the most subtle insinuations, the most incessant solicitations and the most violent assaults of the enemy. And yet the strength that God gives for the task is strength enough by His grace to deal with that. And out of the conflict comes the victory that makes the strength even greater.

Secondly, it is important to beware and to pray for those in spiritual leadership because many watch our lives and would see our fall. And I already alluded to that. When someone in the front line goes down, everybody knows that. And there are many people who are devastated. I remember a few months ago a girl in a testimony meeting here at the church stood up the first time she had ever been here and confessed to the fact that she had been betrayed in a very terrible way by a prior pastor she had gone to for counseling. And that pastor had taken terrible advantage of her and she went on to explain that she was here in a church because she was trying her best to see if she could ever trust pastors again. She was absolutely devastated by that terrible experience. And we tried to encourage her that there are men who are faithful to the things of God and who are worthy of trust and confidence.

But there are many who when we fall will be devastated by that. On the other hand, many have eyes only of evil and malice and they look for the smallest fault in order to discredit the whole work. So we have to beware in maintaining blamelessness that many are watching our lives and many will see our fall. And when that happens the devastation is so farreaching.

Thirdly, we must beware in the matter of sin and beware in the matter of Satan's attacks because we are more likely to sin against knowledge because we have more knowledge and therefore to sin ourselves into the greatest chastening. The more we know the greater the sin is when we sin against that knowledge and therefore the greater the chastening. If you think for a minute that being in the ministry or the pastorate or church leadership as an elder insulates you from the chastening of God, in fact the opposite is true. It sets you up for a more severe chastening because when you sin you sin against knowledge and so the sin is blatant and the chastening fits the blatancy of the sin.

And along that line let me suggest a fourth reason for being alert and watchful and that is this, our sins...that is the sins of those who lead the church...are more hypocritical because we preach against that. So it is not only that we are more likely to sin against knowledge but that our sins have more hypocrisy in them than anybody else's sins because we preach against that very thing. And so there is a greater potential in the ministry for temptation, there is a greater potential in the ministry for disaster, there is a greatest...greater potential in the ministry for chastening, there is a greater potential in the ministry for hypocrisy. You understand that? With the high calling then comes a high level of spiritual conflict with a high level of spiritual accountability.

And that would lead me to the next thought that is that because of all of this our ministry requires greater grace and greater power than other men's because of the greater responsibility that comes with it. And I'm glad God knows that. But I encourage you to pray for us because we need that greater grace for the greater task.

You see, to sum it up, the honor of Christ lies more with us than with any other person. Is that not so? The honor of Christ lies more with us than any other person. Listen, if there was some great moral blot in my life, some...something that everyone knew about me that was inconsistent with what I preach, it would have been spread from one end of this country to the other. You would have seen it Thursday night, believe me. There's no question about that because the honor of Christ lies mostly with those who most outwardly and verbally represent Him, the leaders of the church. That is why it is so devastating when someone in the leadership of the church defaults into sin. You see, the nearer we are to God the more we can honor Him, and the nearer we are to God the more deeply we can wound Him and cripple His cause.

An unholy pastor is like a stained glass window. A stained glass window is a religious symbol that keeps the light out and an unholy pastor is nothing more than a religious symbol that keeps the light

out...a painted hypocrite. And so, when you come to the initial look at what the qualification is to be in the ministry as we know it, as a pastor, elder or overseer, you start with blamelessness.

I had occasion to be in central California this week attending a meeting of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Accrediting Group who accredit the Master's College and I took along a little book with me to read cause I had to fly a couple of times. When I left Monterey where the conference was and I was flying across to Fresno I was flying in one of these little noisy planes that flies from Monterey to Fresno, also flies to Pixley, I think...and every other little farm spot. But it was an interesting plane, very noisy and I was sitting underneath this prop the whole time, but I took out this book to read it and I found that in the midst of even the jerking and jolting and noise I somehow got lost in what the man was writing. And I guess in my mind vividly there was sort of a little time of heart searching that I'll always remember flying across central California as I read these words from Richard Baxter who wrote the book. He wrote it in 1656 and he reminded me of things that

I have to take to my own heart. In fact, I cut it out and put it here just to share it with you.

"Take heed to yourselves lest you live in those sins which you preach against in others and lest you be guilty of that which daily you condemn. Will you make it your work to magnify God? And when you have done that, dishonor Him as much as others? Will you proclaim Christ's governing power and yet condemn it and rebel yourselves? Will you preach His laws and willfully break them? If sin be evil, why do you live in it? If it be not evil, why do you dissuade men from it? If it be dangerous how dare you venture on it. If it be not dangerous, why do you tell men it is? If God's threatenings are true, why do you not fear them? If they are false, why do you needlessly trouble men with them and put them into such frights without a cause? Do you know the judgment of God that they who commit such things are worthy of death and yet will you do them? Thou that teachest another teachest thou not thyself? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery or be drunk or covetous, art thou such thyself? Thou that makest thy boast of the law through breaking the law dishonorest thou God? What...shall the same tongue speak evil that speaks against evil? Shall those lips censure and slander and backbite your neighbor that cry down these and the like things in others? Take heed to yourselves lest you cry down sin and yet do not overcome it, lest while you seek to bring it down in others you bow to it and become its slave yourselves. For of whom a man is overcome the same he is brought into bondage. To whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, His servants you are whom you obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness. O brethren, it is easier to chide at sin than it is to overcome it," end quote. Good reminder. The one who preaches must live consistently the message he preaches.

And so, Paul says, "Look, Timothy, if you've got problems in your church, you've got to get rid of leaders and you've got to bring in leaders but do this, make sure to start with they are blameless." Their moral character is absolutely the bottom line...the bottom line.

I read further from Richard Baxter these words, "When your minds are in a holy heavenly frame, your people are likely to partake of the fruit of it. Your prayers and praises and doctrine will be sweet and heavenly to them. They will likely feel when you have been much with God. That which is most on your hearts is like to be most in their ears. When I let my heart grow cold, my preaching is cold. And when it is confused, my preaching is confused. And so I can often observe also in the best of my hearers that when I have grown cold in preaching, they have grown cold, too. And the next prayers I have heard from them have been too much like my preaching. O brethren, watch therefore over your own hearts, keep out lusts and passions and worldly inclinations. Keep up the life of faith and love and zeal. Be much at home and be much with God. Take heed to yourselves lest your example contradict your doctrine...lest you unsay with your lives what you say with your tongues and be the greatest hindrance of the success of your own labors. One proud surly lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action may cut the throat of many a sermon and blast the fruit of all that you have been doing," end quote.

And so, whatever the aspiration, understand it is a noble task but it does bring you into great conflict with the enemy and it calls for blamelessness. Now how does a man of God protect himself? How...how do we in the midst of this spiritual battle insulate ourselves from the fall that Satan would bring about? Let me tell you from my own personal experience it's a very simple thing to answer. I spend at least three days a week in the in depth study of God's Word. And that is not necessarily to make sermons, I could make sermons in less time. In fact, I could make sermons in a lot less time. But I do not study the Bible to make sermons. Bernard a long time ago said this, "Some desire to know...speaking of the Word of God...some desire to know merely for the sake of knowing and that is shameful curiosity. Some desire to know that they may sell their knowledge and that too is shameful. Some desire to know for reputation sake and that is shameful vanity. But there are some who desire to know that they may edify others and that is praise worthy. And there are some who desire to know that they themselves may be edified and that is wisdom.

It's my commitment in the study of the Word of God not to learn so that you can know and not to learn so that you can be edified but to learn so that I can know so that I can be edified because I know that David's axiom is true, "Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee." And the only insulation I know about for the life of the man of God is that he be continuously exposed to the living Word of God. And in that living Word comes what Jesus said in John 15, "You are made pure by the Word."

And what happens so tragically to men in spiritual leadership is that they get away from the Word of God. Maybe they move around a little bit and they keep giving old material, repeating old sermons and they're not fresh and their life isn't brought to the test of the Word of God day in and day out. Or maybe they just don't look into the Word of God with any real commitment to let the Spirit of God speak. But the insulation that comes to us to protect us against all that's going around us primarily

comes from the Word of God...obviously also the spiritual armor of prayer as we take up our dependency upon God.

And I would add one other thing, the Word and prayer, and then spiritual fellowship. I find great strength in my own battle from the strength of those around me who fight on the same line. And I thank God for those men of God here who stand with me and strengthen me for the responsibility at hand.

Who is to be a pastor, an elder, a leader in the church? Not just anybody, but someone in whose heart the Spirit of God has given strong desire and whose life matches the qualification of blamelessness. Now that's just the start. There are many more and we'll cover them in our next time together. Let's pray.

None of us, Lord, not one of us is either worthy or deserving or capable for this task but You are able and Your Spirit is able and You have chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, the things which are not. There are not many noble and not many mighty. And in our own weakness Your strength is made perfect and we thank You for that. I pray for the spiritual leaders of this church. I pray that You will keep them pure and holy and virtuous and blameless. I pray that You will cause them to be diligent in the Word and prayer and diligent in spiritual fellowship to be strengthened by those around them. I pray, O God, that You will raise up in our congregation many more like them, many young men that can go around this country and around this world and be spiritual leaders. I pray that You'll raise them up at the college, in the seminaries, that we may send around this world men not only who are trained in their mind but who are godly in their heart, who are blameless men whose spiritual virtue runs wide and deep, who can change the face of a vacillating church, who can bring true spiritual leadership where there is simply human ingenuity.

I pray, Lord, that this church will be a place in the next years as You give us years before the coming of Christ where there will come a flood of leaders to touch Your church around the world. Do that among us in order that the church may have the kind of pattern and model to follow that pleases You that the people may become like the one they love and serve. Help us to be faithful to this calling, even though unworthy, and we give You thanks in Christ's name. Amen.

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