

## **The Moral Character of a Pastor**

Titus 1:5-6

56-5

Let's open our Bibles to Titus chapter 1. We have completed our study of the first four verses, which is the opening greeting. And now we move into the next section of this tremendous letter. And this particular section from verses 5 through 9 could be titled, "The Required Character of a Pastor," "The Required Character of a Pastor."

There are many trends in the church today, and I have tried to address them very often from this pulpit, as you know, and in books that I write. And part of my task as the servant of the Lord is to warn the church about encroaching danger. And as I began, of course, to study this particular text it hit me that these qualifications for one who is a pastor are for the most part today being ignored or selectively applied, and they couldn't be more clear. Look at verse 5, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man be above reproach, a one-woman man, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."

When you read that, it's fairly apparent that the standard for being a pastor or an elder or overseer - all those words are used interchangeably in the New Testament - the standard is very, very high. But there is a disturbing trend, as I noted a moment ago, in the church today and that is a trend toward lowering these standards or applying them selectively. That is to say, picking and choosing from among the list what you want to apply, or on other occasions applying all of it to some people but not to other people.

No trend, in my mind, no trend is more disturbing or threatening than the shocking moral sins of a gross kind that pastors today commit, only to step right back into ministry as soon as the publicity cools down. I have received inquiries from other churches wondering if our church had some written guidelines or a workbook for restoring fallen pastors to pulpits and ministries of spiritual leadership. We have to tell people we don't have such a book or such a process because we believe that the Bible is so explicit that once a man fails in the moral, sexual area, he is unqualified. No doubt many suppose that a church our size perhaps would have some systematic restoration process to bring back sinning pastors. Certainly we want them restored to the Lord and to the fellowship, but there are qualifications for one who preaches God's Word and is identified as pastor, overseer, elder that we must subscribe to. Such sin among pastors is a serious, serious trend that threatens to destroy the integrity of the church. But more disturbing to me, in some ways, than the sin that discredits them, and ultimately more destructive than that sin, is lowering the biblical standard to let them back in to the ministry. The fact that the churches are so eager to bring these men back into leadership reveals

there is a corruption at the heart of how the church thinks and what the church believes about the required character of one who is a pastor.

This is a disheartening thing to me. This is a grievous thing. This kind of tolerance of sin - lowering of God's standards for those who represent Him - because it spells such a terrible future for the church. Where do people get the idea that a year or a few months or few weeks can somehow restore integrity to a man who has squandered his reputation, who has stained the pulpit with his sin, who has destroyed people's trust and, most heinously, sinned against the gracious God who called him to preach? Once purity is sacrificed, the privilege of leadership by example and proclamation is gone.

Certainly example is the heart of ministry. When Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12 he said, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity show yourself an example." That is required for one who ascends to ministry.

Now by all means if a man is truly repentant, we should embrace that man and love that man and forgive him seventy times seven and let him share in the joy of Christian fellowship when his repentance is real. But that does not mean that he should be put back into the place of spiritual ruling and teaching. We cannot erase the consequences of sin by a simple prayer or an elaborate recommissioning service. We have to measure every man who seeks to minister by the scriptural standard. But sin is so pervasive in our world, it's so pervasive even in the church that there is a tolerance for sin that I don't think, certainly in my lifetime, we've ever seen. And there are many - I suppose you could call them casual Christians, or carnal Christians, or professing Christians - who want to lower the level of holiness in their leaders because it makes them feel much more comfortable about their own sin. It is even true that modern religion, modern Christianity, has spawned the evil notion that experiencing the worst kind of sin makes you a more effective servant. You all of a sudden become more sympathetic and more effective because you have sinned greatly. The implications of that kind of thinking are frightening. And the trend, as I said, of a restored clergy who supposedly understand and are more sympathetic because they've sinned greatly is a spiritual tragedy, but it is increasingly the case.

Evangelical Christianity, for the most of this century, has focused on the battle for doctrinal purity, and it's right that we have, but we're losing the battle for moral purity. So we have people with the right theology living an impure life. And the worst defeats the church is experiencing may be coming at the very hands of its leadership. We cannot lower God's standard for the sake of sympathy. We don't need to. We can be loving and forgiving and gracious and merciful and kind without lowering God's standard. We have to hold it higher so that purity can be regained. In fact, all of the battles that we have fought for orthodoxy, all the battles for the integrity of Scripture, fall uselessly by the wayside if preachers of it are corrupt and if their people no longer follow their shepherds as models of holiness. What's the point? Because the reason we fight for a pure Scripture and a pure theology is that we might have a pure standard to live by, held up by pure men who are the models of it. The church has to have leaders who are pure and holy and above reproach. And anything less than that is an abomination to God and spells disaster for the life of the church.

In fact, I would be so bold as to say entrance into and continuance in the pastorate, the eldership of the church of Christ, must be barred - it must be barred to men whose character does not meet the divine requirements. That is precisely what Paul is telling Titus, precisely what he is saying. If a man is to be an elder, this is the kind of man he must be.

Now the list in verses 5 to 9 falls into four categories. First, his personal or sexual morality. Secondly, his family leadership. Thirdly, his general character. And fourthly, his teaching skill. So, if you're looking for someone to be a pastor or an elder, you must consider his morality, his family leadership, his general character, and his skill as a teacher and preacher.

For this morning we're going to begin with the first category, personal or sexual morality. And there's simply one statement to that effect in verse 6, "The husband of one wife," it says in most versions, the literal Greek says, "a one-woman man." And in a few moments we will direct our attention to that issue. Prior to that, however, there is a general statement in verse 6 that a man must be "above reproach." That is the general statement dissected and explained in the following statements that come after it.

But let's set the context before we look at the moral, sexual character of one who is a pastor. Verse 5 says, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you." Now dear Titus, this wonderful son in the faith to Paul, of whom we have learned so much in the first four verses, has been left on this large island in the eastern Mediterranean. In fact, Crete really sits kind of in the center of a triangle of Europe, Asia, and Africa. It is in the eastern Mediterranean, southeast a little bit of the Greek mainland. Crete is 160 miles long and anywhere from 7 to 35 miles wide, highly civilized, right there, of course, in the middle of the world, as it were. It has always been civilized, and for centuries prior to the writing of Paul civilization was there. Of late the civilization had become very corrupt. In fact it tells us down in verse 12 that one of their own prophets "said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons.'" So there had been a severe decline in the culture.

The first time we see anything about Crete is at Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost, you remember of course, the Spirit of God came and the church was begun, but the feast of Pentecost was celebrated annually by Jews from all over the world. And according to Acts 2:11 there were Jews there from Crete. So we know there was a population of Jews living in Crete, worshiping the true God who came to Pentecost. And some of them may have been converted to Christ that day because you'll remember that when the 120 received the ability to speak in languages, they spoke in a myriad of languages - one of those languages was the language of Crete. And so the Cretans heard it in their own language, the wonderful works of God, and then heard the preaching of the gospel by Peter that may well have been where the seed of the church was originally planted.

Also going kind of to the opposite end of the book of Acts, in Acts 27 when Paul was on his ship traveling to Rome, he stopped at Crete, part of the journey there. And if you read Acts 27 you will note that. It may well have been that in Paul's brief stop in Crete he had influence for the gospel of Jesus Christ as well.

The church by the time this letter is written had extended throughout the whole island. That's obvious because he is to appoint elders in every city. That's a fairly comprehensive statement. The church must have found its way all over that island, and there was the responsibility now to organize the church and give it some leadership. We don't know who founded the church, it's speculative. As I say, it could have been someone from Pentecost. Paul could have an influence passing by, but someone other than Paul, no doubt, founded it, or Paul would have long ago have taken care of these basic things of setting it in order and ordaining the elders, as his custom was everywhere else that he went. He had been there some time, but that perhaps was not a founding time.

Now just prior to the writing of Titus he went there. We know that. This would be other than the time he was traveling to Rome in Acts 27. Sometime after the end of the book of Acts, after his first imprisonment with which the book of Acts ends, after that Paul went there, met Titus. Look at verse 5, he says, "I left you in Crete," which means they had been there together and Paul did some work there among the churches and left Titus in Crete. Now Acts says nothing, as I said, about Paul being there, except that mention in Acts 27 where he went by on a ship. So we would assume that this is after the book of Acts is over. Paul goes there with Titus, and between his first and second imprisonment does a basic work there - can't stay; he's got other things to do. He's promised to go and see, you remember, Philemon, as he noted in verse 22 of that epistle. He also wrote to the Philippians in chapter 1, verse 25 and 26, about coming there. There were other things he needed to do.

Now how long Paul and Titus were there we don't know. But just circulating over the island would be difficult. Homer, this is interesting, Homer called Crete "the island of one hundred cities," "the island of a hundred cities." So if there was a church in every city, or a church in most of the cities, you can imagine what a tremendous job it was to cover them all. They may have been there for some time. It sounds as though the church was wide-spread through the island of Crete. I read one history book a couple of weeks ago that said even to this day over ninety percent of the occupants of the island of Crete still claim to be Christians. Probably more a sacramental type of Christianity than the real thing; but nonetheless, the effect of this has lingered even though there were years and years of Muslim influence.

Paul had to leave then and go to other ministries, so he left Titus. You remember Titus was a man of like passion with Paul, according to 2 Corinthians 8. He was a trusted partner and a fellow worker. He was a skilled and able leader and peacemaker as he had proven in ministering to the Corinthian church, of which he brought to his knees, as it indicates in 2 Corinthians 7:6 and 7. So Paul left this very able, capable man there. For what reason? - back to verse 5 - "That you might set in order what remains." That's the first reason. The second reason, "To appoint elders in every city as I directed you."

Now just very briefly to say this, "that you might set in order what remains." "Set in order" is kind of an interesting Greek word, *epidiorthoō*. The first two, *epi* and *dio*, are prepositions. The word *orthoō* is the word from which we get *orthodontics*, *orthopedics*, *orthodics* - and all of those mean "straightening." When you go to the orthodontist, he straightens your teeth. When you go to the orthopedist, he straightens your bones. That's what that means. And so what he is saying, intensified by two prepositions, is "thoroughly and completely and fully straighten out what still isn't straight." In ancient times that word was used by secular medical writers for the setting of bones or the straightening of bent limbs. So he says "I want you to completely set things straight."

Obviously Paul had begun some process. We don't know what the process was, but the process of getting the church right, maybe dealing with some sin, maybe dealing with some leaders that were not godly. Maybe it was a matter of dealing with some theological things that weren't in place, or maybe they hadn't yet formulated - obviously - leadership, because they didn't have elders. And so they didn't know who was in charge and things were a bit chaotic.

"Whatever remains" - we don't know what that means; it could be correction, but it could be construction. It could be repairing something, but it could be building something new. He's just saying "get the church together; get the church organized the way it ought to be, around the truth with

proper spiritual leadership and response among the people.” This, of course, would be very challenging. Down in verse 10 it says “there are many rebellious men, there are empty talkers, there are deceivers, especially those of the circumcision.” By the way, that does indicate to us that the church was probably around for quite a while, long enough for the Jewish Judaizers to come in and try to sell the gospel of circumcision, long enough for false teachers to have arisen. There were, down in verse 14, “Jewish myths and commandments of men.” They were struggling with a lot of things that were not right in that church. Over in chapter 3, verse 10 - verse 9 rather - it says, "Shun foolish controversies, genealogies, strife, disputes about the Law." Here again we see the Jews, the specter, the shadow of the Jews over the church as they try to tie everybody into the Mosaic Law. Verse 10, "Reject the factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and sinning, being self-condemned." So they were dealing with people here - not just organizing the church, but dealing with error, dealing with Judaism imposing itself on the church, dealing with some kind of Gentile heresies, dealing with sinful people.

In chapter 2 he starts by saying, "Speak things fitting for sound doctrine," so obviously that speaks about unsound doctrine. He tells older men how to conduct themselves, older women how to conduct themselves. He talks about what should happen in the home, what should happen with young women, what should happen with young men. Down in verse 12, he says, we're "to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and live sensibly." So we're talking here about ordering and organizing the church around the truth - very challenging. Over in 3:12 Titus had to do it in a short time because he says, "When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for I decided to spend the winter there." "Now I'm going to send somebody to replace you. When he gets there you come to Nicopolis and meet me." So he had a very hard task - strengthening believers, establishing effective ministry in the homes and the churches, opposing false teachers and their errors, teaching sound doctrine.

And then, secondly - and here is the specific thing - "appoint elders in every city." Obviously, then, the church was wide spread through the island. "In every city" - while it may not mean "all without exception" - surely means that there were churches scattered all over the place. And this may well indicate, as I said, that Paul was not the founder, since he usually would have done this early. So he's stepping in to someone else's work. The church has lacked leadership. The word "appoint" means "to ordain, to set in place, to put in office." I don't want to beg the issue, because we've studied it so often in the past.

"Elder," *presbuteros*, simply means "an older man." It's just the Greek word for older men - "put older men in leadership." But it came to mean more than just a generic older man. It came to be the official office of the one who was the pastor or the overseer. Here it speaks of ordaining elders. In 1 Timothy 3, where the same qualifications are closely to it are given, they're called "overseers." Several times they're called "pastors" - Acts 20 and 1 Peter, chapter 5. Whether they are pastors, overseers, bishops, elders, they are all the same. It's the spiritual leaders of the church. And the New Testament says they are to be highly regarded, and they are to be given high responsibility. They have responsibility to feed and lead the flock, and they are to be honored, lifted up, appreciated, obeyed, and followed for their leadership. Now, if you want a full detail on that you can get our book, *The Master's Plan for the Church*, and there's much, much that is there. But I don't want to belabor that point because we've talked about it in the past, but it's talking about pastors.

The appointment of such pastors is Titus' primary task. Now remember, there's more than just a human deal going on here. In Acts 20 - just one footnote to the elder discussion, and I don't, as I

said, I don't want to get into it in any more detail - but in Acts 20, verse 28, to remind you of one thing: "Be on guard for yourselves and all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church." It is the Holy Spirit who appoints pastors. So what Titus was to do was to get in line with the mind of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit had a plan. He's the one who calls, and He's the one who ordains, and He's the one who gifts, and He's the one who sets apart. But the apostles - and in this case, the delegated envoy of the apostles, Titus - were responsible for knowing the mind of the Spirit in carrying that work out in the church. You remember in Acts 14, the apostle Paul gives us there really what is his pattern. Acts 14:20, it says, "But while the disciples stood around him, he arose and entered the city. The next day he went with Barnabas to Derbe. And after they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them...in the faith," and so forth. Then in verse 23, "And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."

So here the apostles did it. But the apostles did it knowing the mind of the Spirit of God, through prayer and fasting as was indicated in Acts chapter 13. In Acts 13 the Holy Spirit separated Paul and Barnabas, and the Holy Spirit is still doing that. I make this point because you need to understand that men are not into the ministry on their own whim. They're called by the Holy Spirit. That calling was affirmed by the apostles or their delegated envoys, and furthermore, it was usually stamped by the affirmation of the congregation, such as is exemplified in Acts chapter 6.

Now at the end of verse 5 he says, "I directed you," which simply means "I already told you to do this, now I'm just putting it in print. I already gave you verbal instruction to do these two tasks, now I'm reiterating them to you in print. I want everybody to know this is what you're supposed to be doing. I want it written down so the whole church, so the whole church will know, and they won't resist you."

We want to look and see what the qualifications were. Let's look then at verse 6. Namely, "If any man be above reproach." This is a general qualification. This is the first sort of overarching statement to which all the others somehow relate. Saying "above reproach" and then defining it throughout verse 6, 7, 8, and 9. What does it mean to be "above reproach?" Well in the specific sense it means to be "a one-woman man, having children who believe, not accused of," so forth and so forth, all the way down through verse 9. But let's just look at that general category of being "above reproach."

Any man who is going to be an elder, a pastor, an overseer in the church, called to the "noble work," as Paul calls it in 1 Timothy 3:1, must be a noble person. He must be a noble person. In 1 Timothy 3, where you have the parallel qualifications for leadership, verse 2, it says, "An overseer, then must be above reproach"; *dei*, "it is absolutely necessary," it is not something about which you can equivocate or debate. He is to be "above reproach"; so says 1 Timothy 3:2; so says Titus 1:6.

Now look at the term "above reproach" in Titus 1:6. It's an interesting Greek word, *anegklētos*. I mention the word for those of you who will be interested in that. It means "to be without fault, unchargeable, without indictment, without accusation." The verb in the middle, or the end of the word, is *kaleō*, "to call." It has an alpha privative, which negates the word so that simply it has the idea of "not being called," that is to say, not being called before the court, not being called before the tribunal, not being called into question, not being called to account for what you've done, not being called to indictment - that's the idea. It is used also of deacons, by the way - the same word - in 1 Timothy 3:10.

In other words, there's no charge that can be affixed against this person. He is unchargeable. There is no indictment against him. There is no fault for which he has been confronted. First Timothy 3:2 uses the same English term, "above reproach," but it uses a different Greek word. In 1 Timothy 3:2 the word is *anepilēptos*. It means "not able to be held." What does that mean? – "not able to be made a prisoner, not able to be taken captive, not able to be laid hold of," as if you were taking a prisoner. Here was a man who cannot be indicted and who cannot be held for his sin - is a man who has no mark, no vice, no sinful defect in his life that calls his virtue, his godliness, his righteousness into question. There is no one asking and successfully bringing against him a charge. There is nothing in his life present. There is nothing in his life past that would disqualify him from being a model of spiritual character for all to follow; there's no indictment against his life. There's nothing for which he can be laid hold of, and taken, as it were, prisoner. He is a man who is without accusation. One writer says, "Not one about whose past or present accusations are being circulated among the people."

In the ears of all here is a faultless, exemplary man whose life is a model for spiritual conduct. He has to be a model because that's what shepherding is. They don't just listen, they follow. Philippians 3:17, "Brethren," Paul writes, "join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." "Find somebody who follows our pattern and follow them" - that's spiritual leadership. First Thessalonians 5:12, "We request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work" - not just their word, their work; not just what they say, what they are, what they do.

Second Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 9, says Paul is offering this: "We offer ourselves as a model for you that you might follow our example." In Hebrews chapter 13, verse 7: "Remember those who led you [your pastors], who spoke the word...[yes] and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." "Listen to what they say, see what they're like, follow their life." First Peter 5, "Don't lord it over the flock, don't dominate the flock, but prove to be examples to the flock." That's the issue. And then 1 Timothy 4:12, "in speech and conduct," in every area of life be an example.

This kind of man can be a pastor. The man whose life is the model, whose life is the pattern, whose life is without indictment, without accusation, without guilt.

Now let me explore this a little further in Scripture. Go back to Psalm 15, Psalm 15, one of the really great, rich psalms. In Psalm 15 we have a question - two questions really - in verse 1, "O Lord, who may abide in Thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill?" Both those verbs, "abide" and "dwell," speak of a prolonged time. Who can associate with You? Who can be in Your presence? "Who can come into Your tent," Your tabernacle, the place You are? "Who can come to Your holy hill?" Who has access to You? Who comes into Your presence? Who is a true worshiper? Who will You receive for ongoing communion? Answer? Verse 2, "He who walks with integrity." "Integrity?" What's that? *Tamim* in Hebrew. What does it mean? "Complete, sound, perfect, upright, unblemished, without defect, blameless, above reproach." Same concept.

It would seem to me that any man who would purport to speak for God from a pulpit would have to have come out of the presence of God, would he not? And it would seem to me, then, that if a man is going to speak for God out of the presence of God, he would therefore have to be the kind of man God would accept into His communion. And what kind does God accept? Those who walk with

*tamim*. They're above reproach; they're blameless. And he shows it both outwardly and inwardly. Outwardly they work righteousness, and inwardly they speak truth in their hearts. Outwardly righteousness is the pattern of their life, and inwardly there is no hypocrisy.

They are further described - these kinds of people in verses 3 to 5 - as being honest, gracious in speech, kind, loving to others, forgiving, discerning, wise, respectful, trustworthy, generous, and just. That's the kind of man who can enter into God's presence.

I don't know about you but I wouldn't want, I wouldn't want to be under any other kind of man - Would you? - than one who had come from the presence of God.

This is a worshiper. This is a man who has communion with God, who is welcome to His presence, who therefore speaks as one who has come from God. Look at Isaiah 33, Isaiah 33, verse 14 - most interesting. This looks at that same perspective from the backside, the negative side. Not who can enter His presence, but who can avoid His judgment, verse 14, Isaiah 33, the second half of the verse: "Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?" Who can avoid God's judgment, who can escape God's chastening? Answer, verse 15, "He who walks righteously." There's the outside righteousness. "And speaks with sincerity." There's the inner integrity, *tamim*, "blameless, above reproach." This is the kind of man who avoids the chastening of God.

Go to Psalm 101, Psalm 101, and here is one of the most definitive and helpful texts in all of Scripture on this issue. David is making a real commitment here - a real covenant, if you will - with the Lord. And he's saying to the Lord, "I want my life to really be right. I will sing of loving kindness and justice to Thee, O Lord, I'll sing praises." Now one of the components of a right life is worship, so "I'm going to worship You, I'm going to sing to You, I'm going to sing about Your lovingkindness and Your justice, and I'm going to sing praises to You." But more than just worship, verse 2, he says "it's going to affect my conduct." "I will give heed to the blameless way, I'm going to walk in a blameless way." Then he says, "When will You come to me?" Why does he say that? Because he knows that God communes with people who walk in a blameless way. He knows the truth of Psalm 15 well. "Lord, I'm singing Your praises and I'm walking in the blameless way. Come to me; let me enjoy the fellowship."

Then he says, "I will walk within my house in the integrity of my heart" – "I'm going to live in my own home in a godly way without hypocrisy." "I will set no worthless thing before my eyes" – "I won't watch anything that has a negative impact on my spirituality." "I hate the work of those who fall away, and it will not fasten its grip on me" – "I'm not going to get involved in activities that people are doing who have fallen away from the truth and from You." "A perverse heart shall depart from me" – "I will know no evil." "Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I'll destroy" – "No one who has a haughty look and an arrogant heart will I endure." "I'm not even going to hang around those people; I'm going to deal with them." Wow.

In verse 6 he says, "My eyes will be on the faithful of the land that they may dwell with me" – "I'm going to spend my time with faithful people. I'm going to stay away from the proud and the arrogant. I'm going to deal with the slanderers. I'm going to know no evil. I'm going to make sure my heart is right. I'm not going to do anything in any enterprise engaging with people who have fallen away from You. I'm not going to watch anything that isn't right. I'm going to be honest before God in my heart, without hypocrisy in my own house. And, Lord, I'm going to walk the blameless way, sing Your

praises. I'm going to be the kind of man You want me to be, because I want You to come and be with me."

And then he says this most fascinating thing in verse 6, second half, "He who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me" – "I don't want anybody in my life ministering to me who doesn't walk in the blameless way" - Why? – "Because this is my covenant, this is what I want for my life. I have chosen the highest level. I want to walk on a holy level. I don't want to follow and be ministered to by people who have a lower standard." Understand that? And by the way, in verse 6 he says, "He who walks in a blameless way." "Blameless" is that word again, *tamim* – "who walks above reproach, who walks complete, sound, perfect, upright, unblemished and without defect." "I'm going to stay away from people who are deceitful, in verse 7, who lie. I'm going to make sure we punish the wicked."

The Lord has set a standard for those who fellowship with Him. The Lord has set a standard for those who represent Him, to say nothing of those who minister for Him. David said, "I don't want anybody ministering to me, anybody serving me, who doesn't walk in a blameless way." I think that's fair. I think every congregation should rise up and say the same thing. I think you have to say that if you have for yourself done what David did, and that is to set the highest standard. If you say this is the way I want to live and so I want someone who can show me how to live that way.

I would hope that as a church you wouldn't let a man be a Sunday school teacher or an usher or a children's worker or an adult worker or a deacon or a discipler - you wouldn't let a man or a woman minister who had some sinful blight on their life. I imagine you wouldn't. If someone came into the Sunday school department and said, "I want to teach children. I want to work with young people. Maybe I want to teach in junior high. I've ministered to junior high." "Well tell me about yourself." "Well, I've just been through an adulterous situation but I'm okay." I don't think many churches would even touch a person like that. Somebody who bears that kind of reproach, somebody who was justifiably blamed for some kind of transgression, accused of some kind of wickedness, blameworthy and failed to live pleasing to the Lord - if we wouldn't do it at those levels, why is it that we would want to do it at the level of the pastor? Again, it's back to that idea that personality and fame and popularity and giftedness somehow seem to us a more important qualification than virtue and godliness and holiness. And that's why we have the kind of church we have in many cases.

In the New Testament, another scripture that relates, is 1 Timothy chapter - 2 Timothy chapter 2; 2 Timothy 2:19 and following. I don't have time to develop this, but just hurriedly. In 2:19, at the end of the verse, it says, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness." Nobody names the name of the Lord more than a preacher, pastor. "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness. In a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and earthenware and some to honor and some to dishonor." I mean, that's how it is in your house. You've got some stuff you bring out when the company comes. It's the fancy stuff, the china and the silver and whatever else. And then there's the other regular stuff. Some of it's honorable; some of it's not. That analogy is drawn into the spiritual dimension in verse 21, "If a man cleanses himself from these things he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the master." Not everybody is honored. Not everybody is useful. Not everybody is sanctified. And the reason is not everybody is cleansed, not everybody is clean.

The useful vessel - the honored one, the sanctified one, the one the Master wants, the one that's prepared for every good work - stays away from wickedness. Verse 22, "Flees youthful lusts,

pursues righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart." He is among the pure hearted, and he with them is pursuing righteousness. How can he lead if he isn't? How can he be a vessel unto honor? He can't be. And yet many, many today are in a hurry to put back into pastoral leadership those men who are not qualified - they're not above reproach, they're not blameless. They have a blight on their life that has stigmatized them.

Now the first specific that he gives in verse 6, following this general statement about being "above reproach," is in the Greek "a one-woman man," "a one-woman man." That's literally what the Greek text says. "The husband of one wife," which probably says in most Bibles could give you the idea that he's talking about polygamy; you can't be a polygamist man. Obviously that was forbidden, but that was forbidden for everybody, that's not anything special. That was a given. Some people think it means that, well, "the husband of one wife," so if he was widowed and he remarried he'd be disqualified. No - because even in Romans 7 the Lord is very clear that if your partner dies you're completely free. You're no longer bound by that union. You're free from that. That's a beautiful picture even of us once being married to sin and now being freed to be married to Christ in the new life.

Some people think it means - well, no, he has to be the husband of one wife, therefore he can't be single. The emphatic inclusion of the word "one" argues against that. If he wanted to talk about being married as opposed to being single he could have said they have to be married, or they have to be the husband of a wife. But "a one-woman man" is explicit here. It's explicit. He isn't saying it can't be single people, it can't be remarried widowers. He isn't talking about polygamy.

You say, "Well, is he saying anything here about divorce?" Well, I think something about divorce was said just if a man be "above reproach." If he has no blight on his life, no stain, no taint. But I think we have to in all fairness look at this "one-woman man" phrase and see some implications there with regard to the issue of divorce, though it isn't explicit. I believe it could be part of what the Holy Spirit is saying here. Let me tell you what I mean. In the first century, divorce was rampant among Jews and Gentiles; it was common; it was easy to acquire. The Lord hates it; He's always hated it. He does recognize there are times when divorce occurs and a partner is not sinning. For example, if you have a partner who is continuing in unrepentant adultery, then there is no way you can resolve that - divorce is legitimized and you're free to remarry, according to Matthew 5, Matthew 19. If you have a partner who is an unbeliever who departs, 1 Corinthians 7:15, you're not under bondage. In the case of unrepentant and continual adultery or the leaving of an unsaved partner, there is a severing of the union and a freedom for remarriage. I think that's discussed in 1 Corinthians 7 very clearly. I think the unmarried there - that term "unmarried" refers to people who have been divorced. It does happen. The Lord hates it. He even gave a bill of divorce to Israel on one occasion because of her continual unrepentant adultery. He instructed on one occasion Jews to divorce their pagan wives because the greater evil of the dissolution of the race was potentiated. It is a last-ditch thing that God hates, but He does recognize it.

But when it comes to someone in the ministry as an elder or a pastor, "a one-woman man" certainly does seem to have some significance with regard to this issue of divorce. And it is possible to conclude, and I think fairly, that an elder was to be chosen from men who were known as one-woman men, who even before their salvation had not been divorced, so that their lives were the proper model of God's marital ideal, because that's, after all, what leadership was all about. There would be then no opportunity for prior wives, or prior children to compromise, confuse, or attack the credibility of the highest office in the church and to destroy the reputation of the man by saying things

about him. I would think that if the Lord was going to set up the model of virtue in the church in the elder, it would be “a one-woman man,” and that is to say he would be known in the community far and wide, both in the church and out of the church, as a man who had a wife, was devoted to her, and that was his reputation and nothing more.

Certainly the task of building strong families, godly marriages, necessitated the most impeccable marriage history in his own life. And the need for confronting sin demanded the cleanest history in his own marriage. And having one who had never been divorced but had singularly been married to the same woman would be the kind of premium example God would want. The intent of this is a man who is a model of God's design - one man, one woman together for life - he's the model of that.

Having said all that, we still haven't really hit what this is about. “A one-woman man” simply means “a man devoted to the woman who is his wife” – “a one-woman man.” Listen, there are a lot of men who have only had one wife but aren't one-woman men, right? They're the husband of one wife but the lover of two or three more. There are men, if we interpret this “the husband of one wife,” then people can stay in the ministry if they just stay with their wife, right? They could have partners and liaisons and sexual affairs, but they're still with their wife - Is that what it's saying? It's important to understand “a one-woman man.” Listen, you know what was rampant in the ancient world? What was rampant in the ancient world was false religion, and connected with false religion was prostitution - temple priestesses were prostitutes; men went in there and it was their form of worship to get the sexual attention of those prostitutes. Society had *hetaerai*, which is the term for girls from non-citizen families who were used by men for sexual pleasure - just another form of prostitution, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, concubinage - it was rampant. In fact one of the ancient writers, Ovid, said, “Only the ugly are loyal.” The only people who aren't doing this are people with whom nobody wants to do it.

Here's a world filled with sexual sin, and what Paul is saying is “find men who have an impeccable reputation.” I don't think just at the moment you're talking to them, but it stretches - they are known for this, maybe even before they were converted. Is the man “above reproach” without blame in the sense that he has been and now is loyal to the woman who is his wife? Does he have some kind of a sexual career in the past? Maybe lately come to a screeching halt, but everybody around town knows? This is not a man who can stand up and say, “Here, beloved, is God's divine model.” The issue is not primarily marital status; it is moral character. Find men whose life is above reproach in the eyes of everybody in regard to their marital situation, one woman, one wife for life and totally loyal to her. He must have a reputation of being sexually pure, devoted to his one wife, not being scandalized by past mistresses or past illegitimate children or present adulteries. A man who is an elder loves and desires only one woman, and he has been faithful to her.

And I believe this is the kind of man God was looking for in His church to set up as the pattern. It doesn't mean that they're better than other men. It doesn't mean they're more spiritual than other men. It doesn't mean they're more gifted than other men. It doesn't mean that they will be used more than other men. It means they fit the unique role. No less than this standard is tolerable.

You say, “Well now what happens? What happens if a man is doing pretty good and - but he's got some sin, he falls into sin like all these people today? Can they come back? Can't they be restored if they have shattered that? Isn't there hope for restoration?” Go with me to Proverbs chapter 6 - very important, very important. And we're winding to the end; listen carefully. Proverbs 6, verse 27 - this context is talking about adultery, a man getting involved with an adulteress, and again we see

questions - verse 27, 28, "Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?" Stop there.

What the writer is saying is this: "Do you think you can engage yourself in sexual sin and not be scarred? Do you think you can involve yourself in adultery and not have painful consequences? Painful?" You can't, you can't take fire into your bosom and not burn your clothes. You can't walk on hot coals and not scorch your feet. If you get involved in adultery the consequences are severe. Verse 29, "So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife" – "neighbor" simply means any other than his own, somebody that he knows or is available to him – "so is the one who goes in to his neighbor's" - What do you mean? If you do, if you go to your neighbor's wife, commit adultery, you're taking fire into your bosom and you're walking on hot coals. Verse 29, "Whoever touches her will not go unpunished," or "will not be innocent." You do that, you're not going to go unpunished; you're not going to be innocent.

Verse 30, he compares it to thievery, "Men do not despise a thief if he steals, to satisfy himself when he's hungry." We understand that. "But when he's found, he must repay sevenfold, he must give all the substance of his house." He says, "Look, take a look at a thief. We understand why a thief steals if he's hungry. We understand that." And there's a way for him to undo that. He can, he can compensate. He can make amends. He can make it right. He can pay it back sevenfold. He can undo what he did. And so it doesn't last that long; he can fix it. Verse 32, "The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense." Why? Because it's not like a thief; it's not like stealing. He who would destroy himself does that. You can't come back; you can't fix it. You can't repair it; you can't undo it. Verse 33, "Wounds and disgrace he will find, and his reproach will not be blotted out." It never goes away - never. It is not blotted out. You took fire into your bosom, you're burned. You walked on the hot coals, you're scorched. You can't fix it. You can't make it right. It just stays for good.

The word "reproach" in verse 33, *cherpah* - "disgrace, contempt, shame" are synonyms. The thief can pay it back. He can offer compensation. The adulterer is lacking sense because he will destroy himself, because this "reproach" will bring him wounds and disgrace; he will never be able to blot out. In Genesis 49:4 we read about Reuben. "Reuben," verse 3, "you're my firstborn;" Jacob says, "my might in the beginning of my strength" - Reuben. "Preeminent in dignity...preeminent in power" - listen to this – "but uncontrolled as water." Isn't that sad? "Preeminent" - he had the gifts; he had the might; he had the dignity; he had it all; but he couldn't control himself - so "you will not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed and you defiled it." Sin defiles, and preeminence and dignity is gone.

Keil and Delitzsch, the classic commentators of decades back on the Old Testament, in writing on this section, in Proverbs 6, say this: "What is said here is perfectly just, that is, the reproach will never be blotted out." They say, "One does not condemn a man who is a thief, through poverty he is pitied, while the adulterer goes to ruin under all circumstances of contempt and scorn. Theft may be made good and that abundantly. But adultery and its consequences are irreparable." They go on to say, "A self-murderer, i.e., he intends to ruin his position and his prosperity in life who does this, who touches the wife of another, it is the worst and most inextinguishable dishonoring of oneself," end quote. "The worst, the most inextinguishable dishonoring of oneself."

It's inextinguishable. You can't blot it out. You might try. Look at verses 34 and 35. "For jealousy enrages a man and he will not spare in the day of vengeance." You know what that means? There's

a husband somewhere, folks. There's a husband or a father, and his vengeance is going to come after you. And you might want to cover it up, but he's not going to let you. Verse 35, "He'll not accept any ransom nor will he be contempt though you give him many gifts." You can't buy him off, you can't make it right. Keil and Delitzsch again say, "When the day comes in which the adultery brought to light demands and admits a vengeance, then wounded in his right and in his honor this man knows no mercy, he pays no regard to any atonement or recompense by which the adulterer seeks to appease him and induce him not to inflict the punishment that is due. He does not consent even though thou makest ever so great the gift whereby thou thinkest to gain him." You can't fix it. And it sends ripples through other people - long term vengeance. The reproach isn't going to be blotted away.

A man who is above reproach is a man who has never sinned sexually. If he sinned sexually, he has a reproach that will never be blotted away. He is barred from being a pastor or an elder. People always say, "Oh but what about David? But what about David? David was a man after God's own heart and David certainly sinned." First Kings - let me just read you this - 1 Kings, chapter 15, verse 5, "David did what was right in the sight of the Lord, had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the case of Uriah the Hittite." That's when he committed sexual sin with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. David, he said, did what was right and he didn't turn aside from anything all through his life except that. In Nehemiah chapter 13, speaking of Solomon, David's son - who by the way followed the lead of his father in that area - "Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin regarding these things? Yet among the many nations there was no king like him, he was loved by his God and God made him king over all Israel; except the foreign women caused him to sin." There was an "except" in David's life; there was an "except" in Solomon's life. You say, "But, but weren't they kings?" Yes, they were kings but they could never be pastors - never. And God put it down, chronicled it, 1 Kings 15:5, Nehemiah 13:26; they lived a life that honored God "except" - "except."

First Corinthians 9:27 - our last text - 1 Corinthians 9:27 - very, very important word. Paul, talking about his own ministry here, writes, last verse of chapter 9, "I buffet my body." That literally means "I punch it, I hit it with my fist." It's very strong terminology - "I beat it and make it my slave. I have control over my body." Why? "Lest possibly after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified." Paul says "if I don't control my body, I'm disqualified." Plain and simple. "If I don't keep my body in subjection, I am disqualified." "Why, Paul?" "Because I'll have a reproach that can't be blotted out."

Adultery, any kind of sexual sin, is a permanent reproach, making a man disqualified. And we may love that man and we may restore that man to fellowship. God may find a place for him to be useful, somehow some way, but to lift him up to a pulpit is to fly in the face of the clear instruction of Scripture and to set a standard for spiritual leadership that lowers the expected level of commitment of the congregation and thus ignores God's own will.

Father, we thank You this morning that You have given us a word like this. I feel this message in my own heart and its importance. I'm not a perfect man, but I thank You that You have protected me from that reproach, that You have protected me from some scandal, from some thing that might have been done to have rendered me disqualified. I thank You for the grace that is granted to us in the Spirit and in the Word to maintain and pursue righteousness. Lord, I pray for the leaders who have fallen, the pastors who have fallen - some of them friends - I pray for them to be restored fully to You and to the family of God. I pray, too, that they would know what is barred to them, what is open to

them as far as serving You. I pray that the church would not lower the standard but elevate it that we might say with the psalmist, "He who walks in a blameless way will minister to me because that's the way I want to live. And that's the model I want to follow." We grieve, Lord, that we have fought so long to preserve the inerrancy of Your Scripture in order that its holy message might make holy Your people. And now we find those whose task it is to preach it wanting to lower the standard that it upholds. Forgive us all for doing that, and keep the standard where it should be, preserve a holy leadership in Your church in this generation and those ahead till Jesus comes, that the bride presented to You in that day may be without blemish. In our Savior's name we pray. Amen.

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