

## “SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER YOU”

1 Timothy 3:1-13

Dr. John Crocker. Crossroads Church, Albert Lea, MN. May 8-9, 2010

There's a song we sang in Sunday School when I was a little boy. I think some of you may know it.

*Be careful little eyes, what you see.*

*Be careful little eyes, what you see.*

*For the Father up above is looking down in love,*

*So be careful little eyes, what you see.*

There were other verses to it too:

*Be careful little ears, what you hear.*

*Be careful little mouth, what you say.*

*Be careful little hands, what you do.*

*Be careful little feet, where you go.*

I suppose some versions of the song included other parts of the anatomy too. Each one had to include that clause: *For the Father up above is looking down in love.*

The song frightened me. It didn't cheer me. The part I remembered was that God was watching me and I'd better be careful.

*Be careful little John, what you do,*

*For the Father up above will surely punish you.*

There is something in the song about God's love, but it was lost in the warning that God has you under surveillance. God is watching, and if you mess up he'll make you pay!

· It's comforting to know that God is watching over us. But we're not so sure about God watching us. That seems like divine eavesdropping!

Little children should learn early in life that God is holy and we can't hide anything from God. A holy respect for God is a good thing.

But let us not try to use God to scare children into behaving. That won't help them love God. Let's emphasize that God is watching over them more than that God is watching them.

· Today we'll take a good look at those who have the heavy responsibility of watching over the church. They're actually called *overseers* or *elders*. But they are not there to spy on us.

Jesus Christ places overseers in his church to watch over his precious flock.

· After Christ's resurrection an important interchange took place between Jesus and the Apostle Peter. In the intensity of Jesus' arrest and trial, Peter had denied his Lord. Afterward he was overwhelmed with grief.

Jesus singled out forlorn Peter to reinstate him as an Apostle, He said to him: '*Feed my lambs; . . . Take care of my sheep; . . . Feed my sheep.*' (John 21:15-17)

· Later on Peter wrote to the elders in the churches in Asia Minor and urged them: '*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.*' (1 Peter 5:1-2)

Church leaders are first and foremost '*overseers.*' They exercise loving oversight. They watch over the church of our Lord, because Christ's church needs care and protection.

· The Apostle Paul, who had founded the church at Ephesus, commissioned his protégé, Timothy, to stay on as pastor at Ephesus.

The Ephesian church was under attack by false teachers.

· Today we are at the point in the letter where Paul tells Timothy to be sure that those he appoints to watch over the church are spiritually qualified for the immense responsibility of overseers/elders.

3:1 *Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.*

3:2 *Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.*

3:3 *not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.*

3:4 *He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.*

3:5 *(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)*

3:6 *He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.*

3:7 *He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.*

3:8 *Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.*

3:9 *They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.*

3:10 *They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.*

3:11 *In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.*

3:12 *A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.*

3:13 *Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.*

We'll only go as far as the first two verses in our text today.

*Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, (3:1,2a)*

I want to share some important background material, then we'll pick up again in a couple of weeks.

· There are two Greek words in the New Testament that are translated as *elder*. They are *episkopos*, (*episcopal; bishop*) '*overseer*', and *presbuteros*, '*presbyter.*' (priest) The Apostle Paul uses these words interchangeably.

In Acts 20 Luke writes that when Paul was on his way back to Jerusalem he called for the elders of the Church at Ephesus to meet him. The word he used for elders is *presbuteroi*. (v.17) When they came, he said to them, '*Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, episkopoi, to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with his own blood.*' (v.28)

The Apostle Peter did the same thing in the portion I read a few minutes ago, in 1Peter 5:1-2.

In two portions of Scripture the Apostles Peter and Paul address the same people as *elders* and *overseers*, and he tells them to give pastoral oversight to the church.

Elders, overseers, and pastors, all have the same crucial role: watching over the precious church of God.

The pastors and elders in a church serve the same essential function, namely, watching over God's precious flock.

Further along in this letter Paul says some elders have a special responsibility of preaching and teaching (5:17).

The people we call pastors today are usually identified as teaching elders. They have various other responsibilities too, but all are for the purpose of caring for God's flock, the church.

· To understand church leadership shared by the people we call pastors and elders and overseers, this is where we must begin.

The Senior Pastor search team has been carefully studying what God's Word says a pastor should be and do.

But the whole church family must also understand what it takes to qualify to be a pastor who serves alongside the elders in caring for Christ's church here at Crossroads.

If anyone runs for a national political office in the United States, that person must be prepared to submit every aspect of life and personal history to incredible scrutiny. It's called the vetting process. Their opponents and the media scratch for anything that can be spun and used against them. Their own party wants to be certain there are no skeletons in the closet that will be exposed and ruin their chances of a victory. In politics the question is usually, can the candidate win an election? The right question should be, is the candidate qualified by virtue of character and experience to hold public office? The search team and the elders here at Crossroads are committed to carefully vetting any potential candidate for senior pastor of Crossroads Church.

· That's exactly what Paul told Timothy to do when choosing elders to watch over God's flock in Ephesus.

The Apostle Paul's remarks in verses 1 and 2 suggest some key questions to use in the vetting of potential church leaders:

1. Why do you want to lead? (Your motive)
2. Who are you really? (Your integrity)

### **I. WHY DO YOU WANT TO LEAD? (Your motive) 1 Timothy 3:1**

The way Paul starts with the words, *'The saying is trustworthy.'* Literally, *'Faithful is the word.'*

This is a formula that Paul uses to get his readers and listeners to pay careful attention to what he's about to say.

It was Paul's way of saying, *'Now listen up. You'd better get this straight'*

There is no greater responsibility than being a leader in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not even being a leader in your family. Do you know why? Because you have to be a godly leader in your home to qualify to be a leader in the church.

· I have found that most conferences on church leadership draw heavily from business, corporate or political models

Christian executives who have succeeded in the corporate arena are usually principal resources.

It was that way 30 years ago when I was doing my doctoral work in Church leadership at a Graduate School of Theology, and don't think it has changed much.

I acknowledge that we can learn a lot from secular leaders. The seminal work of Dr. Chris Argyris has had an immense influence on my pastoral leadership.

· But there are more differences in leading Christ's church than similarities to leading a corporate enterprise.

Christian leadership is far more than secular management principles repackaged and rebadged for church consumption.

Church leadership is different because it has two dimensions. The church is both an organization and an organism. In this the church is unique.

· As an organization the church needs structures and procedures to provide order and to prevent chaos.

Among the gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed on the church is the organizational gift of Administration. (1 Cor. 12:28)

But those who provide organizational leadership to a church are not like secular leaders. The leader of a secular organization tends to be a high-profile power broker.

Sadly, that's exactly what some churches want most in a pastor—an impressive man with *savoir-faire*, who oozes a self-confident, commanding presence.

The Apostle Paul was not that sort of a leader. People said, '*in person he is unimpressive and his preaching amounts to nothing.*' (2 Corinthians 10:10) As an organizational man Paul was a dud.

· Christ's church is a structured organization, but it is first and foremost a living spiritual organism, the body of Christ—the body of which Christ is our Head. In the living organism, members of the church function as parts of the spiritual body of Christ. They use their spiritual gifts to serve where they fit in.

That's how the church gets strong and stays healthy and fulfills its God-given mission in the world.

· Here's another important way in which the church as a living spiritual organism is different from secular organizations: Power in the church as an organism is spiritual power. This kind of power comes not from the personality of the leader, but from the authority of the word of God

The elders or overseers in the church care for souls of God's people. They have a responsibility for the spiritual health and development of every part of the Body.

Paul expressed this so well in his letter to the Colossian church: '*We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect (mature) in Christ.*' (Colossians 1:28)

That's why in Hebrews 13:17 the writer boldly says, '*Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.*'

· Let me give you a biblical principle that we must all understand and never forget:

The church as a structured organization exists to serve the church as a spiritual organism. All our policies, programs, procedures, and buildings are worthwhile only if they serve the church's purpose as the living body of Christ.

The demands of the Church as an organization must never become a pastor's or an elder's chief concern. Matters pertaining to the organization are not an end in themselves. They serve a nobler purpose.

· The first Church in Jerusalem learned this the hard way.

*'In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.*

*So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.*

*Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:1-4)*

The physical needs of destitute widows were extremely important in the early church.

Paul deals extensively with them later in this letter (5:3-16)

But the Apostles learned that as spiritual leaders their priority is always the church as a living spiritual organism, not the organizational matters of the church.

In the same way, an elder or overseer or pastor is above all a leader who attends to the spiritual nurture and protection of the church.

· Let’s turn again to 1 Timothy 3.

**3:1** *‘If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.’*

Remember, our first question is, *Why do you want to be a leader in the church? What are your motives?*

I have had to deal with some who made no secret of the fact that they wanted to be elders to get power to promote their personal agenda for the church.

It’s not easy to do the right thing if you have the wrong motives.

Two explorers, camped in the heart of an African rain forest were sharing what motivated them to be there. One explained: *‘I came because city life suffocates me. I want to see the sun rise over new horizons and hear the songs of birds you don’t find in concrete jungles. I want to leave my footprints where perhaps none have been before. I wanted to enjoy the unspoiled pristine beauty of nature. What about you?’*

The other tourist gave a sigh and confessed, *‘I came because my son is practicing the saxophone at home.’*

We may never be absolutely sure what motivates some people to do what they do.

· Anyone who aspires to serve as an elder must have a worthy motive.

John the Baptist’s famous statement should be the watchwords of every church leader: *‘He (Christ) must become greater; I must become less.’ (John 3:30)*

Jesus dealt firmly with his disciples about personal ambition. Even at the last supper they argued about who was considered greatest. Jesus put a stop to it by assuming the role of a lowly servant and washing their feet.

J. Donald Walters wrote, *‘Leadership is an opportunity to serve. It is not a trumpet call to self-importance.’ (Secret of Life)*

Those who lead are to consider themselves servants. Their motives should be evident. They are zealous to serve our Lord by caring for his church.

## **II. WHO ARE YOU REALLY? (Your Character) 1 Timothy 3:2**

*Now the overseer must be above reproach (3:2a)*

A sincere motive is not enough. A church leader must be a person of integrity.

The most essential qualifications for overseers are in the area of personal character rather than professional expertise.

Not all who are willing or eager are qualified to be overseers.

When we get to the list of all the qualifications in this chapter we’ll see that they are mostly about the person’s character and spiritual maturity.

· A talented person without character or spiritual maturity will become a menace to a church.

I have some painful memories of church leaders who were extraordinarily talented. I think of one in particular. People flocked to hear him speak. But the truth came out that

his character had a crack in it big enough to drive a Mack Truck loaded with foul waste through it.

He was a phony who had no right to teach the holy word of God. He didn't qualify. Peter Kuzmic, a church leader in Central Europe said, '*Charisma without character is catastrophe*'

· Above all, church leaders must be people of integrity.

That also means they must humbly acknowledge their own frailty and need of God's grace. The Apostle Paul called himself the worst of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15)

Martin Loyd-Jones was the marvelously gifted and godly preacher at Westminster Chapel in London, and an able successor to Dr. G. Campbell Morgan. A member of the church was particularly effusive in lavishing praise on Dr. Loyd-Jones. He felt very uncomfortable and very unworthy. So he politely interrupted and said, '*Madam, if you could look in my heart you would spit in my face.*' And Martin Loyd-Jones was a faithful man of godly character who walked humbly with God.

Above all, elders, overseers, pastors, are to be people of godliness and integrity.

· The church in Ephesus was fighting a deadly infection of false teaching.

So Paul cautioned Pastor Timothy, '*Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, . . .*' (1 Timothy 5:22) Never be in a hurry when selecting overseers.

When it comes to selecting overseers, (which includes the calling of a pastor) an ounce of character is worth a ton of talent and charm.

· I urge you to pray daily for your elders and pastors.

Please also pray for your Search Team as it looks for the person we are trusting God to call to be the next Lead Pastor of this church.

Pray that they will have spiritual discernment in the vetting of potential candidates.

And if you feel a strong desire to offer your services as a church leader, please devote more attention to godly character than to your talents. Watching over God's flock is nothing to trifle with.