

1 Timothy 3:1-7. Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

Build Bridges to the Gospel! Do not put up roadblocks!

I. Thank God for faithful public ministers

II. Follow the example of your spiritual leaders

Today is Sunday July 22, which is an important date for me. On July 22, 2007 I was ordained and installed as a minister of the gospel. It has been 5 years, to the day, since I was installed as your pastor, and I think it is safe to say that I have a greater appreciation for these words that Paul writes to Timothy. Five years ago I knew these words. I knew this was a noble task. I knew there would be a great many joys, but there would also be challenges. As I sat in that front pew and listened to my father preach, I knew that people would now look to me to hear God's Word. What a privilege! What a tremendous honor! What a noble task!

I can remember sitting in awe of the situation and thinking, "Wow! I am a pastor!" And I can also remember sitting in that front pew and saying to myself, "Ok, Mike. Don't mess this up!" Then that next week, the first time I stood up before you to preach, I can recall the advice that I received in the class room as a college student and as a student at the seminary. "Try your best to get out of the way and let the gospel do its work."

We could say that in a way this was Paul's advice to Timothy as well. As we look at this list of characteristics and qualifications of an overseer Paul was helping Timothy realize that there was a lot of different ways to get in the way of the proclaiming the message effectively. So Paul's advice wasn't so much, "Ok, Timothy don't mess this up!", but it was "This is a noble calling so do your best not to be a distraction. Do your best to not get in the way of the gospel message."

Last week we talked about the power of God's Word. We talked about the fact that despite the many challenges that the next generation will have to face in their lives, the word has the power Paul's message to create and sustain faith in the hearts of the next generation. The Word of God is powerful. It is living, it is active. But the message of God's Word does not simply fall out of the sky and suddenly people have it and believe it. As Paul writes in Romans chapter 10 God brings his message to human hearts

and minds through human messengers. ***How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can they preach unless they are sent?***

God in his grace wisdom chose to deliver his message of salvation through human beings. He gave the very words of Scripture to the men he had write the Bible. He called and appointed prophets, some of them simple ordinary men - shepherds and farmers like Amos in our Old Testament lesson for today. Our Lord Jesus Christ chose 12 men to be his disciples and he sent them out two by two to preach repentance and then later he sent them to go out into all the world to make disciples by preaching and baptizing. These too were ordinary men and yet God would use them to carry the message of salvation to the world; these ordinary imperfect men, these simple human vessels of God's Word of grace. What a privilege! What an honor! What a noble task!

But because there is this human element of sharing the gospel, there can be the distractions that come with a sinful man going out with God's Word of truth. I'm sure it was quite the challenge for Paul to go out receive an audience when he was known as the one who formerly persecuted Christians. But God was able to use that incredible conversion of Paul to his advantage and for the benefit of his kingdom. This was of course more the exception rather than the rule, however. And so Paul gives Timothy this reminder that it there is a lot of ways that a messenger of God can be a distraction to the word but there are also ways that a public minister can build bridges to the gospel through his personal life. This morning we will look at this list of qualifications.

Now the overseer must be above reproach. God has not called his public ministers to be perfect. Pastors are certainly sinners too, but the Lord reminds us of the importance of maintaining a good reputation not only for the sake of the individual, but for the sake of the congregation, and most importantly for the sake of Christ. A good reputation may take a while to build but it can go a long way in a congregation and throughout the community. It can build bridges to the gospel.

The opposite, however, is also true. Certain character flaws or sinful habits not only can quickly tear down a reputation, but such things can immediately build roadblocks to the gospel. Paul says an overseer must be above reproach, and then continues, {He must be} the ***husband of but one wife***. Literally Paul says to Timothy that an overseer is to be a "one woman man", and so this does not mean that a pastor has to be married. But a spiritual leader must, whether married or unmarried, display a godly honor of marriage and a respect for the opposite sex. You can imagine the problems it would cause if married pastor did not honor marriage with his actions, or a young single pastor was out with a different woman every other night – unwise distractions, roadblocks to the gospel that are to be avoided.

Paul's list continues with a series of warnings and encouragements. {He must be} ***temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money***. As a spiritual leader one must not just preach and teach, but must be able to practice what he preaches. How can

a public minister expect people to listen to him about forgiveness and self control and treating others with kindness and respect if he does not act in such a way? How can a public minister expect people to take him seriously when he speaks about the dangers of drunkenness and greed if he willingly and regularly gives himself over to such sins? Friends in Christ, pray for faithful ministers who practice what they preach. Pray for faithful ministers who display the love and peace of Christ in the way they act and the way they interact with others. Pray for ministers who build bridges with their personal lives rather than putting up roadblocks.

What a blessing it is to have such faithful ministers within our midst! As I look at our situation within our family of WELS churches in our area I can easily count 6 active pastors and a school full of teachers that fit these qualifications within 25 miles of here and I know there are many more outside of our circuit, our state, and throughout the whole world. What a blessing to have such spiritual leadership among us who have a good reputation, who are respected in the congregation and in the community, who are gentle, kind, and faithful! What a blessing to have such models of Christian love and service as the spiritual leaders among us, as an example of faith to look up to and emulate.

Paul's next piece of advice is a quality that is an example of leading by example. ⁴ ***He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.*** ⁵ ***(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)*** Somewhere along the line I was asked by some individual if it was difficult to be a pastor in a small town. The essence of their question was if it felt like you were living in a glass house of sorts and was it difficult or uncomfortable for you knowing that people might be watching how you raise your family? Growing up as the pastor's son, I guess I had a certain awareness that people had that kind of idea, but I hadn't really thought about it concerning my own family. The conclusion I came to during that conversation several years ago was: If people are watching, that is fine. It is an opportunity to let our light shine so that others may see our good deeds and praise our father in heaven.

Sure, there are certainly times that I don't handle the noble task of being a husband and a father like I should. I am not perfect. But as my wife and I raise our children we do so with the goal in mind to raise them to fear God and to respect and love their parents. And for me this is an opportunity to lead by example. This is an opportunity to display the love of God in the way that I raise and even discipline my children. And so if people are watching I hope they will pick up on the love that Christ has given to me, that I might show it to my children and teach them the lessons that I have learned from God's Word.

These words from Paul to Timothy show us that it is important to have leaders who not only preach, but they practice what they preach. It is hard enough to reach out to sinful human beings who are by nature enemies of God; it is even more difficult to reach out to the gospel when we ruin the reputation of our God and his church with our sinful words and actions. And so it is so very important to have leaders in the church

who build bridges to the gospel rather than throw up roadblocks. It is important that we have leaders who do not cause distractions and take away from the word, but with God's help they bring attention to the gospel. With God's help we pray that our leaders may have the ability to live a Christian life that helps make the gospel attractive to others. We pray that our leaders with God's help might preach and represent their Savior faithfully. Paul would summarize this advice to Timothy again at the end of chapter 4 saying, ¹⁶ ***Watch your life and doctrine closely.***

¹⁶ ***Watch your life and doctrine closely.*** This could be said of all of us, of course, not just pastors and called workers. As Christians we all are to watch our life and doctrine closely. If you look at this section of scripture, this list of qualifications - except for the ability to teach - this list it is not really that specifically tailored to a pastor or a teacher or any other form of called worker or church leader. This list of qualifications is one that could apply to any Christian. It is a list, therefore, that any one of you can use to examine your life by. Are you putting up roadblocks to the gospel or are you building bridges?

As we consider that I know that this list is a humbling list. It is one that makes us take a good hard look at our lives. The last few weeks have been a unique time of self evaluation, from analyzing my ministry during my recent call deliberation, to going back to summer school and checking up on how I have been maintaining the tools I gained in my training for the ministry, and finally having this text put before me 5 years after I was installed. It has been all part of a humbling and yet beneficial experience. More than a few times I have fallen short on these items listed. And yet God still wants to use me to share the gospel with others. He wants my life to demonstrate Christ's love. He wants my lips to speak of his praise.

I know this list exposes some flaws and sins in you as well. And with these sins we have misrepresented our God, we have misrepresented our Savior. We may have even put up road blocks to the gospel. We have not been gentle. We have been quarrelsome. We have failed to control ourselves. We have given ourselves over to sin, and yet God in his love forgives us. He is gentle and kind with us. Our Savior lived a life of perfect self control. He has made a quarrelsome people at peace with God. Our Savior gave up the glory of heaven for a time to live and to die for us so that we might have the riches of heaven.

Dear friends. Let us display the good news of Jesus in your life. Let us live for him who died for us and was raised again so that in every way we will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive. Pray for good Christian leaders, for pastors and teachers who are faithful and who watch their life and doctrine closely, pray that God would bless those who currently serve and that He would continue to send out more and more faithful public ministers. And pray that God would lead you to remember your spiritual leaders, to learn from their example, so that you lead a life that reflects the love of your Savior and builds bridges to the gospel - because God uses us, imperfect human being to bring the message of salvation to others. What a privilege! What an honor! What a noble task! Amen.