

life group study guide

ELDERSHIP: A NOBLE TASK

September 30, 2012



Eldership - A Noble task 1 Timothy 3:1-7 & 1 Timothy 5:17-25

Greek civilization during New Testament times grew and spread through the planting of new cities by a mother city – much the same way that we plant churches today. A group of people would go out from the mother city with the idea of starting a new city some distance away where no other Greek city existed. Its mission was to spread Greek culture into areas where there was none.

The mother city would supply building materials, soldiers, food, money and most of the necessities needed for the new city to be successful. But because these resources were limited, and because there would be no more of these things given from the mother city, a group of people were sent with the new settlers who were called the *Episkopos*. Their job was to do things such as approve sites for settlement, approve building plans, approve the use of funds and resources, and give direction for how the city would look and function. The "*episkopos*" also would oversee the sale of food, the planting of new crops, and law-enforcement.

In short, the job of the *Episkopos* was to inspect the progress of the new city, identify where things were not going as well as they should, and give relief or help from the supplies that had been sent with them by the mother city.

When you think about the elders of our church, "*Episkopos*" is a very appropriate term! Our elected elders need to be inspectors of our church, who give relief, who encourage, who give oversight and direction, who make sure we work within the rules of our Constitution, and with the resources we have, so that the Church can thrive and be successful by God's standards – not human standards!

1 Timothy 1:1 - "*If a man desire (sets his heart on) the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work*". The word used for desire is *orego*. It literally means stretching oneself, to reach as far as you can reach, longing after, with stress on the object longed for. The things for which Paul is telling us to reach are the qualifications of an overseer that are listed in verses 2-7 - lifestyle and attitude decisions that result from a person's commitment to following Jesus Christ as the leader of his or her life. They are specific positive and negative qualifications.

Being a leader in God's church is a stretching process – the same can be said for growing in our faith. They are one in the same. We all need this stretching in our lives in order to be useful men and women in God's Kingdom.

Q. Should we try to imitate our leaders? Why? To what extent?

Q. Notice that Paul expected to be imitated. (1 Corinthians 11:1)

1 John 2:6 - "*He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as walked*".

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Even though we might never be leaders, we should still strive to be as Godly as possible. Making the characteristics of leadership in these verses our goal will help us live Godly lives. We need more people in this church to "set their hearts on being overseers" and less people who set their hearts on being spectators! No matter how good it is to be a spectator of something, it is much greater to be a participant. Our church needs to be an army of people who are making a commitment to stretch their lives and grasp hold of some very specific things, and put those actions and attitudes into practice to be used by God to do whatever it takes to help this church fulfill its mission. Noble means "the best". Noble Task literally means, "The best use of doing labor". God does expect some things from his people. I think that one of the most prominent themes in Scripture however is the concept that God expects us to serve Him.

That's why the things listed in 1 Timothy 3 are so important to every one of us. They just aren't the qualifications for leaders in the church—they are the evidences of Christian maturity in each of our lives, as we all seek to become more like our Lord, Jesus Christ. Paul refers to the example that the prophet Isaiah records, regarding Satan's fall. **Read Isaiah 14:12-14** (How many times does the word "I" appear?)

- Q. What things develop our Christian maturity?
- Q. Why do Christians need experience before they can lead?
- Q. Why is the testimony of leaders and Christians to unbelievers so important?
- Q. What type of leader do you want to follow?
- Q. Why do you think most churches lack qualified leaders?

On the same par as spiritual maturity, Paul places the concept of integrity. That's the issue in verse 7. The word for good reputation is the Greek word, "*Marturia*", from which we get our word martyr. A person who has a good reputation (a *marturia*) stands with God, no matter what. In other words, that person has a faith in God that is characterized by integrity when viewed by those outside the faith. God wants us to be men and women who go beyond merely following a list of "do's and don'ts" for our Christian identity.

We must also have a good reputation with outsiders, "*...so you will not fall into disgrace...*" The first reason is so you won't bring reproach or disgrace on the cause of Christ. This is serious business to God. Look at God's indictment against Israel who said one thing, then did another. **Read Romans 2:23-24**

Israel was meant to be a light among the nations, instead it caused people to blaspheme God. God will not tolerate that! God expects every believer's life to be a positive testimony to the circle of influence He's given them—that is especially true of those who lead—we are example setters for the rest of the church. You see, God cares about how non-Christians view Christians. **Read 1 Peter 2:12**

A second reason why integrity with those outside the faith is so important to God is so...you won't "*fall into the devil's trap*". First, the trap of discouragement. Discouragement happens when we experience the consequences of believing and acting as though we or some other person is indispensable to God's plans. Another trap is the temptation to take the path of

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least resistance: doing something insignificant, rather than confront a problem or difficulty in the church that may be unpleasant. A third trap is to give in to public opinion. You have to love this quote from President Harry Truman...

"How far would Moses have gone if he had taken a poll in Egypt? What would Jesus Christ have preached if he had taken a poll in the land of Israel? What would have happened to the Reformation if Martin Luther had taken a poll? It isn't polls or public opinion of the moment that counts. It is right and wrong leadership."

Paul told us the qualifications and attitudes of those we choose as Elders and other leaders in our church. What should our attitudes and conduct toward our Elders? We are to -

- Give them recognition - 1 Thessalonians 5:12
- Esteem them highly in love - 1 Thessalonians 5:13
- Entreat them as we would our Father - 1 Timothy 5:1
- Count them worthy of double honor - 1 Timothy 5:17-18
- Receive no accusation without proof - 1 Timothy 5:19
- Be at peace with them - 1 Thessalonians 5:13
- Obey them - Hebrews 13:17
- Imitate them - Hebrews 13:7
- Call them when we are in need - James 5:14

The work of Elders is a great work, and their responsibility is grave - *"..They watch out for our souls, as those who must give account"*. (Hebrews 13:17) We have a serious responsibility as well, in regards to Elders who watch over us - *"Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you"*. (Hebrews 13:17)

Just a reminder – there are 189 *"stretch yourself"* opportunities right now to serve at Kingsway!!!!