

- Welcome back everyone and good to see you!
 - Last week, we broke down and studied 2 Peter 2:9-16 where we unpacked and unraveled a strange set of verses.
 - The central theme of those verses revolved around certain men and or women who Peter called “false teachers”.
 - In verses 9:16 Peter introduced us to a description of these people which is what led to those strange set of verses.
- What’s interesting is, when we dug deep into those verses and began to truly understand what those descriptors were, we could see where Peter’s words were just as applicable to the church of today (I would say, maybe even more applicable today) – than it was back then.
 - And I gave you some examples of what I meant last week.
 - Churches – and church leadership – who have made insane decisions to allow preachers to continue preaching, but only after they had proven themselves to be “rehabilitated”.
 - Even after abusing children
- Now, throughout the years, I have thought hard about this type of thing – and last week I actually had a discussion with another Pastor friend of mine, and it was in that discussion that it became apparent to me, how it is that this type of thing happens.
 - Meaning why it would be that anyone in church leadership would ever be in agreeance with allowing someone to remain in ministry after committing such a crime.
 - Well I think I may have finally figured it out, and I could be wrong but I don’t think so.
 - I would like to share my theory and thoughts with you this morning, because (as I said) this revelation came to light when I began talking to this Pastor friend of mine this week – specifically as it relates to the qualifications of Elders and or Overseers.
 - Which just in case you didn’t know, the Pastor is an Elder – he is simply a teaching Elder.
 - And the church (according to Paul), is supposed to be overseen by a plurality of Elders.
- By the way, let me just expound on this for just a minute on the word Elder – the word itself speaks to AGE!!
 - To be an Elder, you must be older.
 - How old? Well, we are not told – but we do know however that the youngest Pastor we see in scripture is Timothy. And according to Biblical scholars and theologians alike, Timothy was somewhere around 37-38 when he began to Pastor.
 - And of course a 37–38-year-old then is probably more like a 60-65 years-old now.
 - Mainly because people married young then, and they experienced hardship at a level that our generation has never known

- Also – they did not live very long back then, so they matured a lot faster!
- Anyways, back to this concept of Elders – the word "Elder" derives its name from the Greek word "Presbyterous".
 - And you can probably guess, Presbyterous is where the Presbyterians take their name from.
- Now – what's interesting about this concept of Elders is Elders have qualifications – and those qualifications are clearly laid out in the Pastoral Epistles, namely 1 Timothy and Titus.
 - Also, in the Pastoral Epistles we have another group of church leaders who are identified as well, and the Bible calls them Deacons.
- Now just for the record, Deacons have a different set of qualifications along with a different job description (for a lack of better words).
 - Which means they are two totally separate positions held in church leadership – and I bring this up because there are some denominations who try and blend the two positions together.
 - I am not sure why, but they do, and I was a part of one of those denominations for years.
 - I remember when I served in that church as a Deacon, I was never able to get a straight answer as to why they didn't acknowledge the separation of the two.
 - Anyways, that's neither here nor there, but it's noteworthy.
- Now I'm drifting off track a little bit so let me get back to the point which includes my "revelation" on why Church leadership makes some of the most insane decisions as it relates to reinstating a Preacher back in the pulpit – and to get to that revelation I want to read to you from Titus 1:5 where Paul instructs Titus to do something in his absence.
 - And what is it? Well here's what he wrote –

Titus 1:5 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,

Titus 1:6 *namely*, if any man is beyond reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of indecent behavior or rebellion.

Titus 1:7 For the overseer must be beyond reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not overindulging in wine, not a bully, not greedy for money,

Titus 1:8 but hospitable, loving what is good, self-controlled, righteous, holy, disciplined,

Titus 1:9 holding firmly the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict *it*.

- So, there you have it – a list and or descriptors of the qualifications of Elder.
 - Now let me say this is not an exhaustive list. It's one list and there is another one in 1

Timothy.

- Anyways, after reading Titus with my Pastor friend he said, wait a minute – you must be careful because you are entering a slippery slope because honestly can you personally say you have always been above reproach?
 - Now hang with me here for just a minute. I want you to follow me on this – my Pastor friend said (Paraphrasing my conversation for just a minute) – once you start going down that road you open Pandora's box.
 - At which point I said, really – do you open Pandora's Box?
 - He said yea you do – Because I believe we all fall short and no one can say they have always been above reproach.
- Now throughout the years when I have conversations like this, I always end up taking the opposite view – primarily because of the old saying that says: “When the plain sense makes common sense – we seek no other sense. But if it doesn't make sense – we dig deeper”.
 - When we apply that saying to these qualifications, we take them for what they are.
 - Or we go to the opposite end of the extreme and say a man cannot be an Elder unless he has lived a 100 percent perfect life “above reproach”.
 - Now I know that 100% perfection cannot be the case. I mean seriously, does that make sense at all?
 - I don't think so because if it is, well then right out of the gate that would eliminate every single human being from the office of Elder except for 1 – and that person would be Jesus Christ.
 - So because we know that can't be what Paul meant, then we know this doesn't make sense – and therefore, that can't be the case.
 - And so, if that's not the case then what is the answer?
 - Well to get to the heart of Paul's statement you first must ask yourself some basic questions. And what would that be?
 - What is the context of 1 Titus?
 - Why did Paul write the letter in the first place?
 - And who was he writing it to?
 - And so, this morning, since we don't have anything better to do why don't we answer those questions.
 - I say we get to the bottom of the “who” and “why” of why Paul wrote Titus, and to begin this journey we must first ask ourselves the question:
- Who was the letter of Titus written to?
 - If you guess Titus – you would be correct.
 - But who in the world was Titus?
 - He was a man led to faith by Paul. Which led him to become one of Paul's early Church Leaders.
 - He was also a Gentile Convert rather than a Jew.

- Later in Paul's ministry, Titus and Paul traveled together to the Island of Crete, which is the largest island of Greece – located in the Mediterranean Sea.
 - Crete is also the 5th largest Island in the Mediterranean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea also connects with Israel.
 - Crete is roughly some 600 plus miles away from the shore of Israel.
- So, Paul and Titus travel to Crete where Paul leaves Titus to carry on the ministry.
 - Which is what led him to write the letter of Titus where he specifically addresses some issues.
 - One of which was how to set up the church, all for the purpose of setting things in order!
- So – what does that tell us?
 - It tells us that the Church has an established order.
 - If we want to know what it is, all we must do is read 1 Timothy and Titus which are as I said, known as the Pastoral Epistles.
- Anyways, moving on – so there you have some context for our study.
- Remember, Paul was an Apostle and he traveled extensively setting up Churches all throughout the region of Israel – Asia Minor and Greece and Rome and Spain.
 - And once he established or planted a church – he had to put a leader in place. Which (in this case) was Titus.
 - And of course as with any good leader, he must leave instructions that will help guide this new church leader.
 - Because Paul knows, trouble is waiting right around the corner for Titus – therefore, he wants him to have support!
- Now – back to my point, or my revelation if you will. Paul writes to Titus and tells him to Appoint Elders.
 - Not wait on them to step up, but appoint them.
 - And just in case he is confused about who to appoint he gives him a set of criteria that will guide him in deciding who to appoint.
 - And one more time – what is the criteria?
 - Let me read them off for you: An Elder must be:
 - Above Reproach
 - Husband of one wife
 - Children who believe
 - Not accused of indecent behavior nor rebellion
 - Not self-willed
 - Not quick tempered
 - Not overindulging in wine
 - Not a bully

- Not greedy for money
 - Hospitable
 - Loving what is good
 - Self-Controlled
 - Righteous
 - Holy
 - Disciplined
 - Holding firmly the faithful word which is accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able to both exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it
- Now – for the sake of time, I am not going to address each one of these. I am simply going to go take you through an exercise that will help you understand what he is saying – as it relates to each one of these.
 - And to do that, this morning I am going to break down the concept of being “Above Reproach. The main reason for this being this is the topic that my friend and I debated over this past week.
 - Now, to address the issue of who and who can’t be an Elder we must first start with a basis or standard. And the one my friend chose was that of perfection! In other words, he said – are any of us above reproach?
 - He was saying, because none of us are 100% above reproach we cannot have an opinion.
 - Which leaves me asking the question, is perfection what Paul is striving for? Is Paul saying the individual being considered for Eldership must be perfect in every category?
 - One more time – the obvious answer is no. But if what I just said is true, then how in the world can we know what the standard is?
 - Well first, you know it’s not perfection. So, what is it?
 - Well to answer that question, let’s begin by studying the words “Above reproach”. Which is also translated “Beyond Reproach” – in the Greek it’s the word blameless.
 - Which in my mind, based on perfection being the standard, makes our question an even harder one to answer.
 - Now, to kind of bring a little more context to all of this I want you to remember – Crete wasn’t a good place. And the people of Crete weren’t very good people.
 - They were Pagan. They were known to be liars, even referred to as Evil Beast. They were also known to be lazy and gluttons.
 - The concepts found in Paul’s writings to Titus and Timothy are simple to understand: We as Christians should hold a standard opposite of those in Crete, opposite of those in the world.
 - If the world is a liar – we should tell the truth.
 - If the world is lazy – we should be hard working.

- If the world loves evil – we should hate it.
 - You get the point!
- But let me say one more thing about Paul’s words before we move on. And that is the central theme behind this letter revolves around Spiritual Maturity in the life of the believer. Which comes from protecting and adhering to Gods Word of Truth – i.e... His Word.
 - Paul is consistently and constantly emphasizing this point. That above all things we are to hold His Word in the highest esteem.
 - And if we do the byproduct of this will be our continual conforming to the image of God.
 - Which is opposite to conforming to the image of the world.
 - So – what does that tell us? It tells us that we better be students and lovers of His Word!
 - But back to this whole above or beyond reproach thing.
- What is the standard or level an Elder should achieve so that he may fulfill that office inside the church? Well before we answer that question, let me mention one other requirement of Elder that shows up in 1 Timothy. Which is the elder must not be a new believer.
 - And why is that important? Because of this thing we call T.O.P. “Time on the Planet”.
 - The concept here is that of a seasoned veteran. Someone who is battle tested – someone who is older and mature (hence the word Elder).
- So with that context in mind, Paul is not saying an elder must be perfect.
 - He is saying at the time of His appointment he must be blameless in the eyes of the society around him.
 - He must appear and be opposite the world he lives in!
 - Meaning there shouldn’t be a black cloud following him around
 - Another way to say it is he has established a standard in his life, and he is trying hard to live up to it!
 - Which means he doesn’t show up one way throughout the week and another way on Sunday.
 - The result of which is – NOT PERFECTION – But in the eyes of the world around him he does appear to be blameless.
 - Where the people around him say for example:
 - He is not a crook
 - He is not a drunk
 - Greedy – lover of money
 - He is not a thief
 - An adulterer

- He is not a liar
- Lazy
- The sense here is that of a consensus. Meaning if you polled 100 people the majority would say that man is a candidate for Elder.
 - And of course once again, Perfection is not the key. Although to the world around him he might appear perfect, but of course we know he is not.
- Now I'm sure all of you by now know, I have been self-employed for as long as I have been in ministry. And for years the old school of thought was you cannot be in business and be in ministry at the same time.
 - That these two are mutually exclusive. And why is that the case?
 - Because, in some cases (not all), but in some cases businesspeople are considered greedy.
 - Lovers of self and money.
 - And trust me, this description of some businesspeople has been a true characterization of their character
- Throughout my career I have been in many tough situations. Situations where the lines of truth could be blurred.
 - And I will tell you there are some out there who might say that my choice in certain matters may have appeared not to be the right one, simply because the person on the other side of the business transaction didn't like the outcome of their situation.
 - Even when I made the right decision!
- This issue in business has pushed me and my people to do something, something that will help keep me and my organization above reproach. And that is – we try our very best to put everything in writing.
 - And we even have taken that a step further and say to ourselves, if it isn't in writing it doesn't exist. And if it doesn't exist – well then, it's automatically our fault.
 - Which means we will always err on the side of the other individual. And this is just one way that I hold myself accountable.
 - Matter a fact, living this way in business has helped protect us and keep us from looking like Crooked Businesspeople.
- What has also helped me in business is the fact that I don't care that much about money. On the contrary, what drives me in business is understanding business as a whole.
 - Solving problems – and developing systems and processes that help ensure the result we are looking for.
 - So – why am I telling you all this.
 - Because I feel 100% confident that if you contacted all the people who have done business with me over this past 30 years, they wouldn't tell you I was perfect.
 - But they would tell you I had been above reproach in my business dealings.
 - You can talk to my bankers, past employees (even the ones that we had to let go)

and if they were honest with themselves, they would concur with what I am saying.

- Now – does this mean I was perfect and that everyone liked me? No, it doesn't – but if someone says I was dishonest, I will ask them what was I dishonest about? And they won't be able to give you a good answer.
 - Once again, I am not telling you this so I can say I am or was perfect.
 - I am telling you that when Daffney and I went through extreme financial hardship we stood on God's Word.
 - We didn't shun our responsibility.
 - We didn't blame our situation on others.
 - Instead, we prayed and asked God to lead us out of it – All for His Glory.
 - And He did exactly that!
- So – back to the revelation that came from my conversation. I believe we have come to place in this country where we now struggle to call an ace an ace, and a spade a spade.
 - All because when faced with the question, do we feel this or that individual is qualified to be an Elder? Or is he (for example) "above reproach"?
 - We automatically begin to examine ourselves first (which by the way we should do) nothing wrong with that.
 - And so, we asked ourselves the question: Do I personally hold up to this standard?
 - And if I am not perfect in that category, or if any part of life is not 100 percent meeting that standard – then I really can't give my opinion.
 - Which leads us to a place where there is no standard. You see the problem with this type of thinking?
- Also I think many times we also say to ourselves, what happens if "I" at some point fail in the future in whatever category it may be, the I will be looked at as a hypocrite.
 - Therefore in the Spirit of Tolerance, which by the way that phrase is killing this country, but in the Spirit of Tolerance, we must be Tolerant and keep our mouth shut!
 - And I agree – but not totally.
 - I agree we should judge ourselves first and love everyone. But that doesn't mean we cannot hold a standard of conduct in our lives. That would be ridiculous!
 - Because if we do that we will end up with a society where anything goes.
 - Wait – that is where we are as a society.
- Getting back to my point, let me say I personally have no standard – I only have the standard God gave me. He is absolute truth, and without His guidance, without His standard, we will be a people no different than that of the Cretans (or Ephesians or Corinthians).
 - OR the people of Sodom and Gomorrah!
- Let me also say this before moving on this morning, I am no man's judge. What a person does or does not do – is not between me and them. It's between them and God!

- And none of us will go to our judgement seat on the buddy program.
- Instead we will all stand alone one day, and we will answer for what we've done and have not done!
 - And I know when I meet our Savior I will not get a 100 on my examination!
 - But once again – perfection is not the standard.
- Now – one more thing as it relates to this issue, I can tell you that mixed into this equation is the heart of the believer and only God knows the heart!
 - I have known plenty of people throughout my life (including myself) who, out of anger, said or did things they shouldn't have done. But at the end of the day – God knows our heart!
- Last Sunday afternoon – I played golf with one of my oldest and dearest friends. He was my golfing buddy back in the day.
 - Anyways, he invited me to play with him and a couple of younger Christian brothers from his church. They were all reminiscing about a time when one of these men would – (when he hit a bad shot) – he would get mad on the golf course and throw his clubs and cuss a little.
 - But not say the cuss word, just an abbreviated version of it.
 - As this story was being told this young man turned and said to me – Speaking specifically about my buddy – He said, you know one day after we played golf my friend called him and said:
 - Hey man, I want you to know, you are better than that.
 - My buddy said to him, “People are watching, and you are better than that!”
- Guess what? That's exactly what the Bible says we should do: The older men should teach the younger men. And the older women should teach the younger women.
 - You see on that day this young man did not meet the requirements of being a Deacon or Elder because of his behavior and his behavior's reflection on the world around him!
 - But that's okay – life happens.
 - This young man told me last Sunday afternoon that he was thankful for my buddy, that he held him accountable and now he tries very hard not to act like that anymore.
 - He tries very hard to be “above reproach”, blameless.
- But that leads me to a question. Above Reproach about what?
 - Well it depends, what is the sin that so easily beseeches you? For me it's one thing – for you it's something else.
 - For me it might be number 6 on Paul's list – Not being quick tempered! And for you it's something else!
- So it's not about perfection, and it's not about previous or future perfection. It's about asking a question – has this man's life (as a whole and as a consensus) – is he working diligently in a way that his life shows up to the world around him as being “above reproach”?

- And if the answer is yes then you can check that off the list!
 - Once again, it's not about saying he has been 100 percent perfect. That line of thinking – is dangerous, and is what causes us to take pause.
 - And forget about holding any standard.
- So, there you have it – and there is my epiphany. And what does any of this have to do with 2 Peter?
- A lot, because Peter is giving us a description of those who will slip into the church, obtain leadership positions.
- And because we have no standard, they will be allowed to assume those positions – and begin teaching heresy right under our noses.
 - Which ultimately leads to them leading people astray – and ultimately away from God!
- By the way – let me say one more thing as it relates to this topic: The standard God set has zero to do with you!
 - Meaning, whether someone meets God's Standard is not contingent upon an examination of your life.
 - You might not be living in a way that allows you to be Elder, but that makes zero difference when evaluating someone else's life.
 - God's Standard is God's Standard!
 - And even though you may not feel you are living up to that standard, that doesn't disqualify you from having an opinion on the matter!
 - If someone said: I'm sorry, you're not qualified to read God's requirements and have an opinion on whether a man's life meets God's expectation – That would be ridiculous!
 - If that's the way it is, well then we might as well forget it!
 - It's okay – for you to have an opinion.
 - As I said, even though you may not feel you are personally living up to Paul's list of requirements it's okay – because you are not the one in question.
 - It would be like me saying, I cannot vote in the Presidential Election because I am not living up to the standard of being President.
 - Of course, I can – because I am not the one being considered for that office.
- Guys, it's not that hard to understand – we just make it hard. God's Standard is not Perfection.
 - It's about a thorough examination of the individual's life.
 - And it's okay to say – I just don't feel now is the time for this man to fulfill this role – nothing wrong with that.
- So once again, as we tie all this together, Church Leaders must be considered and chosen carefully – they must be prayed about.
 - And if I do that, and if we do that, we won't end up in a situation where a Pastor abuses a child, takes a 24-month sabbatical from ministry and then returns – with

the Elders' approval, because the Elders feel he has been rehabilitated.

- Now, using what we have learned today, and applying it to the situation of this Pastor, would you say that from the world's standpoint this man would be qualified to be an Elder in a church?
 - No – he wouldn't.
 - Does it mean God is done with him? Does it mean we should hate him? Cast him out, never speak to him again?
 - No – it simply means, he cannot enter back into Church Leadership!
 - He can however attend church.
 - He can even serve from behind the scenes. But not in front as the leader!
 - And why – because to the world around him, he is not above reproach or blameless!
 - And that is as simple as I can put it. And with that I digress!
 - Amen – Amen!!