

1 Timothy 3

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1 Tim 3/ Matt 13⁴⁴⁻⁴⁷

What really counts in your life today? Where is the bottom line for you? What are the values you really hold dear? The Gospel continually calls us to re-evaluate our value system – to work out what's really important in life.

In our reading from Matthew's Gospel today we find Jesus reflecting on just this question. However He begins with the answer. He says the Kingdom of Heaven is the one thing worth really giving everything for. So intent is He on ramming this message home that He repeats it in three ways in order to show not so much what it is **but what it means to hold a value**. He says firstly the Kingdom is like a treasure one accidentally stumbles across which can only be gained by selling everything one had to buy what it's wrapped in. **So you can only have the treasure if you buy what it's wrapped in. God is like this. We can't have God on our own terms. We can't just take the treasure. God comes on His own terms, with the field.**

And then he says the Kingdom is like a wonderful perfectly formed pearl. One with no discernable flaws; one which will undoubtedly fetch an enormous price in any good market and which is so attractive that we simply must have. And so everything is sacrificed for this wonderful beauty. Again God is like this. **There is enormous beauty in the life given over to God but that beauty comes at a price. This means we have to let go of what we formally believed was beautiful in order gain the most beautiful thing of all. Holding a value means letting go of former values.**

And finally, Says Jesus, the Kingdom is like fishing in open waters with a net. You put out the net and you never know what you're going to catch. The fact is sometimes the net will catch bad things; things that cannot be eaten and which must be discarded. So there will need to be some sorting done. We cannot escape catching some of the bad stuff in the ocean but it's worth it to be able to catch the good stuff. Taking on a new value will involve some significant risk. We will have to endure some bad experiences – some let downs. But it will be worth it to grab hold of the good things.

Jesus is concerned that we realign our value system when we become a people of faith. Indeed this seems to be perhaps the major shift in perspective for those who make Jesus Lord. It seems that without God or when we're far from God we begin to value the wrong things in life. And when we value the wrong things we so often end up directing our life down wrong paths; paths that lead to wasted energy and wasted time, paths that may lead to quite destructive patterns

of existence. So when we become Christians God leads us to re-evaluate what's important in our life.

One minor piece of re-evaluation I had to embark on when I became an adult Christian concerned the game of Rugby. I enjoyed playing Rugby but as I played on into my university years I found that the whole social scene conflicted more and more with my sense of where God wanted me. I found that team mates resented my non-involvement with the social side of the game and that I spent more and more time in the halls of the casualty department after or even during games. For all that I loved playing Rugby. Eventually in my third year of university I was forced to have another look at the whole thing and after prayer concluded that I needed to give up the sport so that I could use my weekends for other things and so that I could keep my body in better shape. I did this with much regret. To take on this new value I had to accept the wrapping which came with it – the busy-ness of weekends; I had to let go of a value I had held dear for many years and I had to accept some bad things – namely the times when my weekends were boring – in order to accept the new value I was taking on.

I missed it badly over the next few years and yet God filled those weekends with amazing experiences which enabled me to grow as a Christian much more quickly than I would have otherwise done. I still enjoy Rugby from the sidelines. I've played quite a bit of touch Rugby and yet I know that re-evaluating that part of my life completely changed the whole direction I later took in life.

So when we come to Jesus the Holy Spirit begins this work in us. He begins to raise questions about what we value, sometimes just through our own experiences but often through mixing with others who see things differently and who have different values. This is the value of a Christian community which contains a variety of opinions and views. We need to be open to this. If we put up a fortress mentality to the values of godly people around us we effectively tell God 'I refuse to learn anything new; I refuse to change God!' And change is imperative for Christians. We need to change and be open to change because God is always calling us forward into new things and into new days.

So what do God's values look like? What can we expect from God? What might God be saying to us about our values? Today we gain more than a hint about this in the 3rd chapter of 1st Timothy because here we have Paul's record of the values, the core values of leadership. Given the influence leadership has over the whole Church it should be clear that these aren't just things God wants leader's to be interested in. No, these are values God wants all people of faith to aspire to. So what do you think God might be interested in when it comes to leadership? [Firm hand, clear minded, intelligent, clever, attractive, charismatic, good looking, influential, powerful, good debater, tough, gifted etc.]

These are, perhaps, instinctively, what we'd think would be good in a leader and to a certain extent some of these things are reflected in the list that Paul makes for Timothy. But in other respects this list couldn't be more different from the one we've made. It seems that God's value

system in relation to leadership revolves around quite a different focus. So let's have a look into God's heart in relation to leadership in the Christian community for a moment.

²Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, ³not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way—⁵for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil. (1 Tim 3)

What strikes you about this? Where is the emphasis being placed here on leadership. If you're anything like me the thing that sticks out a mile is the emphasis on being a leader first... **in the family – valuing ones family!** A leader must be... married only once, manage the household well, keep their children humble and respectful in every way for, **if someone does not know how to manage their own household how can they take care of God's?**

Further down we have the same emphasis repeated for deacons. ¹²**Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well;** What's going on here? Is marriage and fidelity really so important to the task of leadership?

Many today would argue and do argue for a separation of one's family dynamics from the more professional responsibilities of work after all why should how I choose to live privately have to be taken into account in my work environment? Indeed it is illegal to discriminate in the work place on this basis. One simply cannot fire a person because their home life is a mess. And yet for Paul this appears to be one of the most important qualifications for leadership. Why should this be? What is it about the Christian walk that is so sensitive to faithfulness in marriage? Why is faithful marriage so important?

Let me give three basic answers at this point. **1. Faithful marriage provides a foundation for a stable and peaceful society.** God looks for and longs for a stable and peaceful society. War is always an anathema even when some fight to maintain justice. Only in peace can people truly grow as they are meant to. Faithful marriage provides the bedrock for such a society and therefore for the peaceful existence of the Church.

2. Faithful marriage provides the best environment for children to grow into healthy and well adjusted adults. Countless studies have shown that a faithful honouring marriage provides the very best environment for children to grow into productive and joy filled adults. This doesn't mean there won't be problems but it does provide the best place for such problems to be tackled.

3. Marriage provides humans with the closest equivalent to a divine relationship that we can have. Marriage is compared often in the Bible to God's relationship with us and, indeed, to how God is in Himself. If we want to know how God truly feels about us then consider how a husband and wife feel towards each other on the day they are married or, even better perhaps, on their 50th wedding anniversary. God loves us and commits Himself to us in a manner very much like marriage and while God respects our freedom He will remain faithful to that commitment.

So a leader in the Church needs to have a deep reverence for marriage and, if they are married, to work very hard at maintaining and treasuring that relationship. God, it would seem, is vitally interested in how we do at relationships and particularly at marriage.

Now please, if you've been through a marriage breakup don't feel as if you've failed the Christian exam. We are not condemned for our suffering or for mistakes. God is still the God of second chances. We are not deserted by God because of our mistakes or because we've been on the receiving end of someone who didn't want to stick around.

Paul goes on to mention several other important qualities.

'Above reproach...' A leader needs to be able to have done nothing in the recent past for which he or she might be called to account publicly. Our accounts must be short with others and with God. You know it always surprises me that people with a high public profile are shocked when they get caught short and especially so if they've been in the press a lot. There's an old saying that you can fool some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time but you can't fool all of the people all of the time. God is concerned that we don't act in a way that requires us to try and fool each other. One who is above reproach is someone who has nothing to hide. Bill Hybels is fond of saying 'Our integrity depends on what we allow ourselves to do **when no one else is looking.**' God is concerned that we value his reputation by looking after what we allow ourselves to do when we think no one else can see.

A second quality may be summarised as **self-mastery**. Someone who is '**temperate, sensible and respectable**' has a sober and disciplined approach to life which is lived out or expressed as a deep and abiding respect for those around them. In other words, this a person with whom you could feel safe and from whom you felt honour.

A third is hospitality. The 'hospitable' leader is, literally in the Greek, Φίλοξενία 'one who loves strangers.' Hospitality isn't so much about what we offer as it is about our heart for the alien and the stranger.

Finally we get to something that smacks of a professional quality – the ability to teach. It seems that leaders must at least be able to teach and that there should be some clear ability shown in this area if one wants to lead at a higher level. Or at least let us put it this way. The more able one is to teach the more responsibility one may be given in the church. I firmly believe that we are all able to teach to one degree or another therefore we should all be able to lead in some area of the church's life.

A leader needs to be free of addiction to alcohol – or, indeed, addiction full stop. An addictive personality is one that has not been able to grapple with certain demons and without this grappling there will always be a pathway for the devil. This would include, I should think, the last qualification in this sentence – being a lover of money. Money and wealth can also be highly addictive and so we need to develop a much more balanced and detached approach to wealth. How many arguments and bitter disputes are caused by money in the church? We need to find a way to hold on to wealth lightly and to cultivate, instead, a generous heart.

The leader is also to cultivate a gentle spirit which is not quarrelsome. Our aim is to become like Christ of whom the Bible states, ‘would not break a bent reed or snuff out a flickering candle.’ In other words, His spirit was a gentle and kind one with whom the wounded and crushed could feel safe.

A leader at this level must also have had some years in the faith. We can all be good starters. What counts is whether we can be stayers. In my experience fruit in the church is always a result of people who have been prepared to put the work in over several seasons.

Finally Paul states categorically that a leader should also be well thought of by those outside the church. I find this a fascinating since the reason he gives for this is so that ‘he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.’ It is clear then that, firstly, a leader in the church leads for more than the church. Rather a leader here is also being watched by all those who are out there and that our influence can extend well beyond the walls of the church. If we are disgraced then we ruin that witness and we discredit the Gospel which is, of course, the ‘devil’s snare.’ So we have a double care in watching our lives. We need to have in mind our influence over those around us whom we lead in the Church **and** we need also to be mindful of those around us in society whom we do not lead but who are clearly keeping an eye on us to see if our lives measure up to our creed.

In summary, God does not call professionals to lead His Church. Rather he calls people who are well founded in their ability to love their spouses and families first and whose lives are stable and above reproach. And this is because God is looking for more than mere ability in both leaders and the lead today. So much of what constitutes a Christian community revolves around relationship. Are our relationships of the kind that reflect the love of God in every aspect; in their faithfulness, their endurance, their forbearance, their mercy, their grace? Are they the kind of relationships in which people feel safe and able to be themselves? Are they the kind of relationships in which people can find trust and security. Are we that sort of friend, husband, wife, workmate? Make no mistake about it, our witness as Christians and as a church begins with the quality of our relationships. **Relationships are the mirror through which the world sees God in us.**