



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual*

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## **“Growing Leaders by Example” 1 Timothy 3, and 5:1-6:2**

Today, we sit again at the feet of Paul as he writes to his apprentice, Timothy, who is—despite his youth—in charge of the house churches Paul started in Ephesus. There is a large section of scripture to read this morning, so find First Timothy in your Bibles, toward the back of the New Testament. I’m going to read all of chapters 3 and 5. Paul is giving advice to this young leader, and while Timothy is a specific and special individual, Paul had followed the same strategy throughout his mission trips—find the Jews in the town, speak as a guest in their synagogue, persuade them that Jesus is Lord, Savior and Messiah, and gather this group together in someone’s house. As the group worships and studies and grows, then appoint elders for that little church, and move on. So in this letter to Timothy we can hear Paul’s advice to most of his leaders, scattered across the Roman world. Here at APC, we are broadening our supply of leaders. The Elders are becoming more focused on spiritual growth, so they can lead in that direction more effectively. We have shrunk that number of Elders, in part to make room for another whole group of “nuts and bolts” leaders, Ministry Team Leaders. So I’ll bet there’s a lot in Paul’s letter that is written for us here, too. Listen with me for God’s Word TO US TODAY, as I read these words aloud. *[text]*

Let’s dive in. We’re in a time with Paul and Timothy when the Christian movement is just beginning to spread beyond Jerusalem and Judea. It’s kind of like “frontier days” here—with a new center of gravity coming to “the wild west”. This explains some of the concerns Paul talks over with Tim.

Ch. 2 had covered “good order” in the State, then “good order” in the household. Now in chapter 3, Paul takes up “good order” in the church. This is a natural flow, especially since “the church” Paul has created was based on ‘house churches’. From household, to household of God.

Paul focuses on leadership. The “overseer, bishop, elder” is to lead the church like the head of the household leads a household.

Some of the standards of conduct seem obvious and odd to mention. But in these “frontier days” in the church, the early converts were coming from a culture in which bullying, financial improprieties, drunkenness, etc. were common. In addition to what we might consider obvious qualities (like, ability to teach, correct in doctrine), the standard of hospitality might seem odd; but hospitality was important not only in welcoming new people, but also providing for traveling Christian brothers and sisters of the church, and giving them a place to stay.

Paul also shows concern over how we are regarded by others—for example, the reputation of the church elder in the community outside the church is important for the young church. In a similar way, the behavior of an elder’s wife/spouse, and children also contributes to the impression made on outsiders. (Again, in line with Paul’s progression of thought between ‘house’ and ‘household of God’.)

One way to provide for more mature leaders is to ‘avoid recent converts’. Leadership can be a snare for some people; someone with a lot of insecurity covered over by pride is a risk for the church. Such people, especially younger ones, badly want people’s approval; they are not yet well-grounded in God. And this can be trouble.

Paul concludes with some lines that might have come from a hymn; perhaps someone today will write a praise song with this in mind. These lines probably served as an early creed, building on the earliest, “Jesus is Lord” slogan of Romans 13 and other places.

I want to jump to chapter 5, and then we’ll take a look at all of this, together. In chapter 5, Paul’s instructions have shifted to “second person”—to Timothy, personally. He is a young man appointed to lead men and women often older than he, in a culture that gave age an automatic respect for the wisdom everyone assume an older person had acquired. How would young Tim measure up to this challenge? Paul counsels, “Give respect to get respect.”

There seems to have been a problem concerning widows, and which women should be enrolled on the “widows list”. Old Israel had highlighted care for “widows and orphans” in the Law and the Prophets. The church—New Israel—is to do the same. “Real” widows are worthy of honor, but if they don’t have family, they have no one to honor them. Honoring them includes financial support. Those widows with living children are to be cared for by those children (Perhaps Paul has in mind the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment, about honoring father and mother.)

The apparent larger number of widows here would have come about because it was the custom to join a younger woman to an older man [who could afford to support her by then]. And also, wives of soldiers and sailors who often perished in battle would be left as widows. Husbands were expected to provide for their wives after the husbands died; children then were to take up the responsibility. Real widows had to be over 60 (‘retirement age’) and married only once, lest they be provided for twice over, which would be an abuse of the additional support of the church, which had its limits (then, and now).

(Verse 6) Widows who live only for pleasure are spiritually dead, Paul says. Wow—strong language! You can imagine how this might have happened. These younger widows with no family connection but still a lot of energy would be an awkward appendage to a family; they would have no role. It would be natural for them to seek out others like themselves for comfort and to pass the time. But with all this talk of widows and care, one of the strong impressions we get from these passages—building on what we’ve already seen in chapters 2 and 3—is that the Church is a Family, the household of God.

Paul then returns to his concern with leadership for that household of God. Tim has been given the responsibility to ordain and install elders in office—but not quickly, without testing, Paul writes. Tim is to rebuke sin, in elders or others, without partiality. Tim must keep himself pure, to be sure, lest he be disqualified. But if he fails to rebuke sin, he participates in sin; if he overlooks disqualifications in officers, he is guilty of negligence and sin.

Treat the members of the Church Family with family respect and chastity, Paul says. (Verse 2 of chapter 5 suggests the possibility of sexual temptation of church leaders with younger women; I guess this verse has not been in the Bibles of some church leaders over the years, or they conveniently overlooked it.)

So the two big themes in chapter 3 and 5 are “Church as the family/household of God”, and “character in leadership”. When it comes to church leaders, “character” trumps “skill”.

And since there are no perfect people in the church—you DO know that, right, because you can only become a member by admitting you are a sinner and you need a Savior from your own sin—then Tim needs to pick people who have the capacity to grow in faith and love and skill. They have to have, and be able to further develop, good character.

I have tried to exhibit good character in my leadership. Just as Paul ministered in Ephesus and showed Timothy what ministry looks like, before he moved on, I've tried to model good leadership for others.

This week, I phoned up one of the kids from the youth group I led back in Kansas City. He's been in full-time Christian ministry near Kansas City for some years. Earlier this week, his voice kept playing in my head, from the last time I talked with him, perhaps four months ago. His voice then sounded pretty desperate. So when I called him up this time, I was listening really hard.

I'm really glad I did. My friend told me he had crashed and burned out. His marriage was burnt; his kids were burnt; his ministry was burnt; his church was burnt. But—thanks be to God—he found a counselor who specialized in rebuilding burned-out pastors. And my friend and his wife found a great therapist near them, who has been very helpful. And, on the phone he was able to tell me that he had been revitalized—he, his marriage, his relationship with his children, his ministry, and his church. I was cheering, on my end!

As my friend told his story, he mentioned two other kids from the youth group, years ago, who were also in full-time ministry, and this was news to me. So that makes about 7 full-time ministers or chaplains from that youth ministry. As Paul poured himself into Timothy, and Tim poured himself in raising up leaders at Ephesus, so at my best I poured myself into the leaders; the leaders poured themselves into the kids; the kids poured themselves into younger kids. And God takes pleasure, growing leaders through our examples, through relationships. And I want to do the same, here.

It's not complicated to grow a leader by example. There are four steps, which you talk through at each point: I do, you watch (talk about it); I do, you assist (talk about it); you do, I assist (talk about it); you do, I watch (and talk about that). You can do that. I did, even when I didn't know what I was doing, as when we went to the high school to meet new kids, and I was training my staff to do something I'd never done before. Boy, was I nervous. But I just kept at it, and kept at it, and God did great things through my willingness to offer myself to God, and lead by example.

Jesus did it in the upper room when he washed the feet of his disciples. It was a symbol for his whole ministry. (John 13:15.)

For whom are you modeling good leadership? Older men should be raising up younger men into leadership. Older women should be raising up younger women into leadership. The recent emphasis on “mentoring” in the business world is right on point. Pouring yourself into another, for their development, is one huge way to show an example of the gospel of Jesus Christ looks like.

For whom are you modeling Christian faith and life and leadership? How long will you put it off? How good a model are you? What will you do to improve, so that you also will have the humble gratitude and satisfaction of “spiritual children and grandchildren”, when you meet God face to face?

As Paul wrote to this dear friends at Philippi, <sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about these things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on August 19, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]