

COMMISSIONING OF PHIL DE MARTIMPREY

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One of the most important moments of a wedding ceremony takes place when I ask the father of the bride, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" In that moment, he publicly relinquishes authority over his daughter and entrusts her to the authority of her husband. If a father cherishes his daughter he will not do this lightly. He will have verified long before the wedding day that the young man is worthy and capable. He must; the well being of his daughter is at stake.

Similarly, Jesus is concerned that those who are in authority over His Bride, the Church, be worthy and capable. That is why He has given clear qualifications for those who would serve as Elders of the Church.

QUALIFIED MEN (1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7)

¹ Timothy 3:1-7 (ESV)

¹ The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Titus 1:5-9 contains additional qualifications for Elders. In total there are 17 qualities that are to characterize an Elder.

Born-again believer.

Above reproach. This does not mean sinless rather, it means a man is not subject to any major accusation or criticism particularly in the matters that follow.

A "one wife husband", if married. This does not mean a man must be married, but if he is, he must be faithful to the one woman God has given him.

Temperate. The term is *sober* in contrast to being drunk. It came to mean clear-headed, mentally alert, well balanced and able to make sound judgments.

Sensible. Sound minded and self-controlled. He must be a man who thinks before he speaks or acts.

Respectable. Honorable and dignified in the conduct of his life. His life-style must reflect Biblical wisdom in matters such as dress, speech, appearance of his home, and the manner in which he does business.

Hospitable. A willingness to use his home and resources to minister generously and compassionately to others.

Not addicted to wine. Not addicted to alcohol or drugs.

Non-violent. Does not hit with his fists in outbursts of temper nor browbeat with angry, condemning words.

Not quarrelsome. Not argumentative and contrary. Instead, he must be peaceable and persuadeable - willing to yield to the wisdom of others.

Free from money, greed. Not setting his heart on making money as the most important goal in his life.

Managing home and children. A leader of his home. His leadership will be evident in the respect his children show him.

Not a novice. A proven veteran in the faith.

Good reputation with unsaved. Recognized by non-Christians in the community as a man of high moral character and proper conduct. He lives in such a way as to bring neither the charge of hypocrisy on himself, nor disgrace on the testimony of Christ.

Fair-minded. Honest, fair and impartial in dealing with people.

Self-controlled. Disciplined in the sense that he keeps his physical desires in check.

Holding fast the faithful Word. A man of the Word. He does not need to be a gifted public speaker, but he knows Bible doctrine and can use it both to exhort believers and to refute detractors.

Must an Elder be a sinless superman?

No. But he must be a man who genuinely loves the Lord Jesus and is committed to walking in the Spirit and to obeying God's Word. All of us should aspire to these qualities.

The bottom line is that character is what counts, not business savvy or educational level or wealth. Loving, caring leadership does not come from policies and procedures, but from loving, caring leaders. If we do well in selecting qualified men we will also be blessed with servant leaders. A truly godly leader knows his role is to serve.

This was the Apostle Peter's admonition to the Elders he addressed in 1 Peter 5:1-3.

SERVANT LEADERS (1 PETER 5:1-3)

1 Peter 5:1-3 (ESV)

¹ So I exhort the Elders among you, as a fellow Elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

Peter is describing servant leadership. Who doesn't want to be lead by servant leaders? Servant leadership comes from godly character.

One of the things I greatly appreciate about the Elders I've had the privilege of serving with over the last 25 years is that they are servant leaders. They are definitely not afraid to get their hands dirty. Perhaps you've already noticed, but its not uncommon to see an Elder running a vacuum cleaner after a church event or taking out the trash or

doing whatever needs to be done. I've moved plenty of furniture with my fellow Elders helping families out in our church. This is on top of all the time they give to meeting together to pray and counsel together on the affairs of the church.

But someone may ask, "Why do we need Elders at all?"

There are many reasons, but one of the most critical is for protection. Consider the Apostle Paul's farewell message to the Elders of the church of Ephesus.

PROTECTING THE FLOCK (ACTS 20:28-31)

Acts 20:28-31 (ESV)

²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert...

We need Elders for protection.

We need our Elders to hold the line on biblical doctrine. We are engaged in spiritual battle. The core issue is truth. The inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture is under constant attack. Our Elders must see to it that the Scriptures are taught and defended. We are under constant pressure to compromise on truths such as creationism, homosexuality and now transgenderism. We are always fighting the forces seeking to silence the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our Elders must protect the flock and guard against doctrinal drift and moral compromise. Pray for our Elders for if they ever grow indifferent to these issues, Grace Church will be lost. There is no neutral ground. There is no respite in this war.

We need Elders for protection.

The Church is the Bride of Christ. Because you are so precious to Jesus, He has ordained that we be lead and protected by a team of Shepherd Elders. Shepherd Elders must be qualified. They must lead as servant leaders. And they must protect and care for the flock.

But as in any organization whether a business, church family or family, those under the care of the leadership have responsibilities too.

First, God calls us to respect and esteem our Shepherd Elders.

RESPECT AND ESTEEM OUR ELDERS (1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-13)

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (ESV)

¹² We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

Interestingly, the Greek word here translated "respect" is also many times translated "know". In this case, the knowledge is not head knowledge about what Elders are supposed to do, but it is experiential knowledge that has come from interacting with the Elders. It is first hand experience of being cared for and guided by the Elders. That

personal experience should lead to respect and to esteem these men in love for the burden of leadership and hard work they do for our sakes.

I have shared that I am in ministry because of the counsel of the Elders of Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles. Their love and guidance literally changed the course of our lives. I pray more of you will seek out the wisdom and guidance of our Elders here at Grace. You will experience first hand their love for you, their humility and their wisdom. You will come to respect and esteem them in a much deeper way when you experience their loving leadership first hand.

In addition to respecting and esteeming the Elders, God wants us to submit to their leadership.

SUBMIT TO THE ELDERS' LEADERSHIP (1 PETER 5:5)

1 Peter 5:5 (ESV)

⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

I know for many of us the phrase "be subject" is negative because many of us have had negative experiences with those in authority. Unfortunately, many in positions of authority mistake authority for the power to make others do what they want them to do. Rather than serving they use those under their authority for their own benefit.

But that being the case, authority is not the problem; it is the character of those in authority. When authority is guided by the Word and Spirit of God it is a great blessing in our homes, churches, businesses and communities. Our part, in the church, is to submit ourselves to the Elders' leadership.

That doesn't mean the Elders rule the church as dictators. The balance is expressed well in our church constitution:

The church is not a democracy or a government where the majority rules. Jesus Christ Himself is the Head and Ruler of the church. However, the Lord Jesus leads and directs through both the body and the elders. Since the Lord Jesus dwells in each member of the body of Christ, and so leads and directs through the body as to needs, desires, and responsibilities for each local body, it is important and necessary for the elders to seek input, information and guidance from the body, especially on practical matters of church life. As a result of these biblical facts, in major decisions of church life, the congregation will vote to show a unified movement toward the direction in question and to show a sense of God's leading. The elders will not move forward with major decisions until, or unless, the majority of the body is unified on the matter. The following illustrates some major areas of concern: making major financial decisions, adding or removing paid staff members, adding to or removing elders from the Board of Elders and carrying out church discipline.

This healthy interplay between Elders and church family is what we have been seeking in the Youth Pastor search process. This interplay is why we ask you to complete an

evaluation on a potential Elder at both the beginning and end of the candidating process.

So I am hopeful that being subject to the Elders is not a burdensome duty here at Grace.

In closing, I don't know if you understand that with regard to Shepherd Eldership we are blazing new trails. I did not come from a church lead by Shepherd Elders. I have served in churches with Elders, but they were essentially managers. The first ten years here at Grace that is what our Elders were. Every one of them a good man, but we were not setup nor clear on what it meant to be Shepherd Elders. Even after making changes in 2000, I would say that it has not been until the last 2-3 years that we have really begun to function as *Shepherd* Elders. And to a man I can tell you we know we have much more to learn and we have much maturing to do.

But I am very encouraged and grateful to God for the progress we have made. And I am doubly encouraged when I see men of Phil's caliber desiring to serve as a Shepherd Elder of Grace Community Church.