

## The Leaders in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy

Or

### The Good, The Bad, and The Preacher

#### INTRODUCTION

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. That title is from a 1966 Italian "Spaghetti Western". It is considered one of the top 100 movies made. Quentin Tarantino put it in first place above all others. It also has one of the most iconic musical scores. But I am a preacher and not a movie critic. Because of the influence of that movie, when I saw in 1 Timothy good leaders, bad leaders, and preachers (one also an apostle), I thought my title humorous yet appropriate - The Good, The Bad, and the Preacher.

If I asked, "What is 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy about?" One answer is, "1<sup>st</sup> Timothy is a letter to a preacher about his responsibilities in the local church". Part, and a major part, of Paul's address to Timothy deals with leaders and with "leaders":

- Spiritual leaders (many different kinds).
- Political leaders (ch.2).

As I am not a movie critic, neither am I a politician. So, let's narrow our investigation to Paul's comments concerning spiritual leaders, whether, good, bad, "ugly", or preachers.

#### BODY:

It is inescapable that every organization, family, business, and even church has leaders. It is impossible for a group of people to exist without leaders - whether forced, naturally attracted to, stepping up to fill the need, or filling the dangerous void.

Because some form of leadership is inevitable, according to 1 Timothy (and Titus), a preacher's responsibility is to:

- Be the right kind (4:16)
- Defeat the wrong kind (4:1-6)
- Encourage the right kind (3:15)
- Rebuke the right kind when they are wrong (5:20).

Since every church has leaders, whether they have elders or not, we as a church need to constantly ask - What kind of leaders does God want us to have?

There are many ways to categorize types of leaders, as illustrated above. For the rest of the sermon let's use a different method of categorizing leaders:

1. Activators - Leaders who activate others through their own actions.
2. Agitators - "Leaders" who lead through selfishness and enjoy troublemaking.
3. Actors - "Leaders" who have the title, but not the life or work.
  - a. They can be guilty of not living the qualities that got them accepted as overseers.

- b. They can be guilty of not leading spiritually and instead using a business model of being chairmen of the board.
  - c. They can be guilty of following the crowd and only pretending to lead.
4. AWOL - "Leaders" who are "Absence Without Leave" when leaders are needed.

## 1. ACTIVATORS

Activators are leaders who activate others through their own actions. They must be examples and teachers, because without being examples, their teaching rings hollow and hypocritical.

### PAUL

Paul was an activator. Not only was he an apostle, Paul was a "herald" (2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11). A "herald" is another translation for "preacher".

- "A herald, a messenger vested with public authority, who conveyed the official messages of kings, magistrates, princes, military commanders, or who gave a public summons or demand, and performed various other duties." (Thayer)
- As a preacher, Paul publicly conveyed the message of King Jesus.

Let's notice some of the ways Paul was endeavoring to activate Timothy:

- 1:2 – Focusing on Relationships
  - Calling Timothy his son brings about a closeness which allows Paul to be more effective in activating Timothy to the cause.
- 1:3 – Emphasizing Necessity
  - "Urge" means, "*parakaléo* (*pará*, "from close-beside" and *kaléo*, "to call") – properly, "make a call" from being "close-up and personal."
- 1:18 – Recalling Our Purpose:
  - Paul reminds Timothy of his being chosen for this work by God.
- 4:7 – Encouraging Right Behavior
  - This includes both negative and positive. Timothy was to avoid pointless and silly myths while being trained in godliness.
- 4:12-16 – Be Specific in Activities
  - Being overly broad can lack direction.
- 5:20-21 – Prepare for Hard Work
  - Going in with a level head of what is ahead is helpful for preparation.

### TIMOTHY

Being an Activator includes Timothy. Let's notice several activities of Timothy:

- "Remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people" (1:4)
- "I have written so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household" (3:15)

- “If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus” (4:6)
- “Command and teach these things” (4:11)
- “Command this also, so that they will be above reproach” (5:7)
- “Don’t accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses” (5:19)
- “Don’t be too quick to appoint anyone as an elder” (5:22)
- “Teach and encourage these things” (6:2b)
- “Instruct those who are rich” (6:17)
- Etc.

If he is not a good spiritual leader, then how will he recognize good spiritual leaders? Timothy’s responsibility is to get others to become activators as elders and deacons. Have you asked why the qualifications for elders are written to two preachers, Timothy and Titus? This is their job. We see the three-fold work of a preacher in Acts 14:21-23.

- Evangelize the lost.
- Disciple the saved.
- Appoint elders.

## OVERSEERS

Good, mature, men who become elders are to be active themselves and activate others (1 Timothy 3:5). Through managing the household of God, they get people involved.

- Manage/proístēmi (from 4253 /pró, "before" and 2476 /hístēmi, "to stand") – properly, "pre-standing," referring to a pre-set (well-established) character which provides the needed model to direct others, i.e. to positively impact them by example. (HELPS Word-Studies)
- Manage/proístēmi ("diligent to take the lead") underlines the effectiveness of influencing people by having a respected reputation, i.e. one built on a solid "track-record." This happens by setting the example of excellence by living in faith (cf. Ro 12:3,8). (HELPS Word-Studies)

When studying the qualities of elders in 1 Timothy 3, it is easy to remove that list out of the book’s context. The result is checkbox elders and a surface understanding of the qualities.

1. To "aspire" and "desire" the overseership is a noble thing (3:1). Elders are teachers. But there is a group of men in 1 Timothy that "want" to be teachers that Paul condemns (1:7). So why? What’s the motivation for both? What are the differences?

2. Overseers are to be, "able to teach" (3:2). "Teach what?" is an obvious question. We have a contrast in 1:3-4a,6, 10b-11 of what is bad to teach. There is also a wrong emphasis in what is taught, even if what is taught is right (1:7-8).

That means, WHAT is taught is included but insufficient (1:4b-5). WHEN teaching, WHY? WHY are we teaching? WHAT is the goal of teaching? (1:5)

Let's notice how the teaching and living, of both preachers and elders (including everyone), is channeled by the gospel:

- 1:4 - "God's plan, which operates by faith"
- 1:5 - "the goal of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith"
- 1:10b-11 - "sound teaching that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God"

The church needs good people who are active and get others activated.

## 2. AGITATORS

Agitators are "leaders" who lead in selfishness and enjoy troublemaking. Paul opens and closes discussing these types of men. Now let us add a caveat here. There are times to be controversial, such as when the truth itself is. Jesus is an example. Here in 1 Timothy, the "Bad" are agitators, enjoying controversy on topics that are not part of God's plan.

1. 1:3-7 (CSB) 3) As I urged you when I went to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach false doctrine 4) or to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies. These promote empty speculations rather than God's plan, which operates by faith. ... 6) Some have departed from these and turned aside to fruitless discussion. 7) They want to be teachers of the law, although they don't understand what they are saying or what they are insisting on.
2. 6:3-5 (CSB) 3) If anyone teaches false doctrine and does not agree with the sound teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the teaching that promotes godliness, 4) he is conceited and understands nothing, but has an unhealthy interest in disputes and arguments over words. From these come envy, quarreling, slander, evil suspicions, 5) and constant disagreement among people whose minds are depraved and deprived of the truth, who imagine that godliness is a way to material gain.

Considering 1 Timothy includes bad "leaders", or "wannabe leaders", or as I am calling them, "Agitators", let's look at two illustrations:

1. "Unofficial Leaders" - When the preacher was trying to appoint elders (5:22; Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23), a group of men organized a private meeting to stop it. They were winning people onto their side against what the preacher had been teaching. In that meeting one of the men stated, "I don't care if it is scriptural or not, there's no way you can convince me that 2 men can run the congregation better than 12." That church had leaders, but not God's kind of leaders. Thankfully, that blatant statement against the Bible forced the

congregation to follow God's plan because they saw the direction of the "unofficial leaders".

2. "Covert Leaders" - In another congregation, someone commented, "We don't have leaders"; and "We don't have qualified leaders in the older generation". I would suggest the man who stated such was a leader, but the wrong kind. How was he a leader? He was constantly, and mostly secretly, trying to convince people to agree with his positions on things. Going around claiming there were no "leaders" would help him keep his influence.

There will probably always be agitators in churches. They are "leaders", but they are not God's leaders.

### 3. ACTORS

"Leaders" are men who have the title of preacher or elder or deacon, but not the life or work.

In another sermon we will discuss in more detail 1 Timothy 3:1. In the meantime, let's briefly consider how Paul phrases his words:

"This saying is a trustworthy: "If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work" (CSB). The KJV says, "good work".

Currently, we need to consider a very important word in the next sentence – "therefore" (3:2). The sentence continues, "An overseer, therefore, must be above reproach...."

Now let's put them together in a way we don't often consider: "If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble. Therefore he must be above reproach/blameless."

Why "therefore"? What does being "above reproach" have to do with an overseer being a "noble work"?

1. An elder's blamelessness must beforehand match the nobleness of the task.
2. An elder's blamelessness must afterwards match the nobleness of the task.

After being accepted, they can be guilty of not living the qualities that got them accepted as overseers (5:19-25):

1 Timothy 5:19-25 (CSB) 19) Don't accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses. 20) Publicly rebuke those who sin, so that the rest will be afraid. 21) I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels to observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing out of favoritism. 22) Don't be too quick to appoint anyone as an elder, and don't share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure. 23) Don't continue drinking only water, but use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. 24) Some people's sins are obvious, preceding them to judgment, but the sins of others surface later. 25) Likewise, good works are obvious, and those that are not [obvious] cannot remain hidden.

A sinning elder does not necessitate his stepping down if he shows himself the kind of man who can accept open rebuke and change. Once again he has demonstrated blamelessness.

Before getting to judgmental of elders, remember everyone who is a Christian is called to be blameless.

Having said that, we need our elders to constantly reevaluate themselves. There are no life-time appointments in the church.

Having said that, any Christian can be an “Actor”, by using the word “Christian” as a title and not a description.

### AWOL

“Leaders” who are “Absence Without Leave”, are leaders who absent themselves when needed. Throughout 1 Timothy, Paul includes “trustworthy” or “faithful” sayings (1:15; 3:1; 4:9). The one I want to focus on now is in 3:1 - “This saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work” (CSB).

- Why would Paul have to write about this trustworthy statement?
- Why would this become a trustworthy statement?

An elder’s blamelessness must cancel out the noise of naysayers. How many good men turn down the opportunity to be blessed by God through serving because of people too willing to tear down their character? If we don’t want godly men to go AWOL, we need to encourage and not tear down. If we want good men to step up, we need to be good to men who step up.

Where did this saying come from? Don’t know. However, apparently it was common in first century. Why did this saying exist? Now that is an interesting experiment into the psyche of us believers. I will suggest three possibilities:

1. Far too often men need to be convinced, however not coerced, to take upon themselves this work. So maybe that is why it became known as a noble work - to encourage. Should we desire noble and honorable and good works?
2. Far too often, and once is too often, men without the character desire the office for egotistical or tyrannical reasons. Because it is a noble work, only men whose character matches it should be entrusted to be shepherds. Do we match in our character the character of being noble and honorable and good?
3. Far too often, congregations are suspicious of men who desire such servant leadership. Because it is a noble work, “therefore” the congregation needs to see the interested men for what they are – noble men for a noble task.

Elders too easily get blamed for everything wrong, and don’t get credit when it is due. Because they are men of character, they are not after glory. However, if there is a hint within this reasoning by Paul that a man’s character must match the dignity of the work because of suspicious minds, then shame on believers for discouraging noble workers.

Ever hear of a man who doesn't want to go through the embarrassment of others unjustly picking his life apart? Here is where we could apply the word "Agitator" towards those who are willing to publicly and privately tear apart another man's character when their own character is not blameless and above reproach. This shows some people are not qualified to decide who is qualified to be elders!

If we go back to men needing convincing that this is a noble work and therefore should take it on, maybe congregations need to treat such men with dignity so that the wrongful men won't seek it out. After all, it is a noble work, men should seek after it should not be discouraged as being wrongfully ambitious.

How can men become convinced this is a noble work for themselves? How does one begin to desire this noble work (1 Timothy 3:1)?

1. Looking forward as a young man, he can decide that this is a way he can serve God and others. Are we encouraging young men to desire being overseers?
2. Looking backwards as an older man, he can see how God has blessed him with the qualities described and out of gratitude, duty, or loyalty, he serves God and others. Are we encouraging older men to see their blessings from God as tools for service?
3. Looking currently as an older man, he sees the wisdom of God and need in the congregation. Are we encouraging men around us to step up?

All three of these show the desire to love God with our hearts, souls, and minds; and our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). Love is the basis for the desire.

Men who need to be elders are not the only men who can be AWOL. Any Christian can be absent without leave when they do not step up and use their talents from God for God, when needed.

Which of the four types of leaders are we?

1. Activator?
2. Agitator?
3. Actor?
4. AWOL?

The movie *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* has a deeper meaning within the title. I knew who "The Good" was, Clint Eastwood. Which of the other two main characters was "The Ugly"? Since we are flawed humans, we might be thinking, "I would rather be called 'The Bad' than 'The Ugly'!"

The word "Ugly" doesn't describe looks though. Tuco is considered the Ugly because he is the most morally conflicted character between the three. He is "ugly" on the inside because he is in between good and evil. He commits horrible actions in the movie, like

rape and murder; while simultaneously he has sympathetic qualities, such as loving his family.

When we consider the “Bad” men in 1 Timothy, whether Agitators, Actors, or AWOL, we must face the fact that spiritually they “ugly”. They are a mix of good and bad.

### 1 TAKE AWAY POINT

Every church has leaders, whether they have elders or not. All of us are leaders in some sense. What kind of leader are we? Are we God’s kind of leader?

1. Activator – Are we involved and getting others involved?
2. Agitator – Are we always complaining, being negative, interested in controversy?
3. Actor – Are we not living the life of Christ, but comfortable in wearing the name?
4. AWOL – Are we like the 1 talent man, hiding our talent from being used for God’s glory?

### CALL TO ACTION:

Use our blessings from God, for God, by serving others. We need more men and women to become Activators within their God-approved realms. We need more men and women to be active and to get others active.

How can we get others active?

1. Encourage them when they try - This doesn’t mean we don’t help them grow by showing how they can improve their service. From personal experience, I will never forget after I gave my first Wednesday night invitation, one man sitting me down to explain to me everything I did wrong.
2. Ask them to come along with us when we are active - There is no better discipleship training than taking someone along with you so they can see your example and get involved with less trepidation.
3. Build them up for future service by preparing them now - Just because someone is not ready yet does not mean they won’t be in the future. But are they even thinking about it? We can help by planting the seed and watering it from time to time.
4. Giving them an Opportunity – One reason I am a preacher today is because when I was around 16, I was encouraged by Wilson Adams to drive to another congregation over an hour away once a month and preach at a small congregation in Rich Creek VA/Peterstown WV. Again, I was 16 years old! Can you imagine the patience those godly Christians had listening to me preach? They became lifelong friends.

WHERE’S THE GOSPEL?



The way I want to apply the gospel in this lesson is by using 1 Timothy 1:12-16. How would you describe Paul prior to his conversion? According to his own words, he would be both bad and ugly.

But God chose him to be an apostle and a preacher.

I know of a man who is an elder. In his past he was a drug addict and spent time in prison. The way too many are today, such a past would disqualify men such as him.

1. "He's not blameless" – If he is not blameless although his sins have been wiped away by the blood, then none of us are blameless. If he is not blameless then our sins and our past are more powerful than the blood of Jesus.
2. "He doesn't have a good reputation with those on the outside" – I would sadly suggest to you that people on the "outside" are often far more forgiving and not as judgmental as people on the "inside". If such a man cannot have a good reputation because of his past, then his sinful past is more powerful than his forgiven present.

Consider this question – On Judgment Day, do we want to be judged the way we judge one another today?

This is the power of the gospel as seen in Paul's life.

"Enron, WorldCom, Martha Stewart, Xerox, Catholic priests, Tyco, Arthur Andersen, Qwest Communications. This is a partial list of candidates for this year's Absence of Ethics award. Without question, the bottom-line issue is moral leadership. What do Americans make of this mess?

\* Confidence in the nation's leaders has plummeted - regardless of their industry or sector of service.

\* Although the business ethics and leadership problems have dominated the news for weeks, half of the adult public admits to not being familiar with the substance of the problems.

\* Most adults believe that the recent business debacles are a moral problem, not a competence problem.

\* Americans say the problems would most likely have been avoided if families had done a better job of introducing morals and values to their children. Superior laws, tighter enforcement and better moral education in schools were not deemed to be as useful as family training." (George Barna)

Leaders are essential in all of life. Even churches are supposed to have leaders (Heb.13:17). In every realm, leaders without morals, cause more harm than good. Consider the qualifications God ordained overseers must (1 Tim.3:2) have. None deal with being a good business leader. Not a single one intimates moneymaking skills. Missing also are educational requirements. No, that is not God's design. He is interested in moral leadership. That is why every single qualification is an example of being above reproach, whether in person, in family, or in teaching (1 Tim.3; Tit.1).

Good leaders are essential, without them chaos ensues. That is why congregations with elders usually progress spiritually more so than those without. One way or the other, there will be leadership. Before chaos consumes a congregation, recognizing the need for leadership, people step up and fill the vacuum. Who are these men? Men not qualified to lead at worse! Or at best, at least one who is, but God requires a plurality, which implies only one is not qualified to handle God's assignment. These "leaders" might have pure motives; they might simply be interested in controlling others. These "leaders" might have leadership forced upon them; others might gleefully seize the opportunity. In either case, the leadership will not be what God desires. They are not qualified according to God. The infamous "men's business meeting" is nothing more than men unqualified to be elders, through a lack of desire to serve or a lack of being blameless in some category. Excepted of course are those too young to become qualified. Sadly even these are sometimes forced to lead if they are preachers.

Leaders are essential, so let us thank God for ours – and let us thank them. Some people will choose this congregation over another because we have elders. But we need more. We need more men willing to become what God says we need. We need men willing to grow spiritually. We need men willing to manage (their) own household well (1 Tim.3:4,5). We need men willing to learn God's word so they may teach others. Let us pray together that men among us will grow into this leadership position. Let us petition our God to move men here who are willing to serve Him and us in this capacity.

What a wonderful commentary when we see men become everything God desires them to be. Leaders are essential. God says so.

Questions:

What can we do as a congregation to encourage our leaders?

What can we do as a congregation to encourage others to become leaders?

Prayer: Thank God for our leaders, and the moral example they show forth.

Within the scope of Timothy's responsibilities is a specific topic - leadership. What kind of leaders will prevail?

- It begins with Timothy's life and work as a spiritual leader.
- It continues in teaching what good leaders are to be – overseers.
- It involves warning against bad leaders.

- Bad men who want to be leaders (ch.1,4,6).
- Good men who need to be leading (ch.3,5).
- A preacher whose responsibility is to:
  - Be the right kind of leader (4:16)
  - Help defeat the wrong kind (4:1-6)
  - Encourage the right kind (3:15)
  - Rebuke the right kind when they are wrong (5:20).

