

## Qualifications for Spiritual Leaders

**Lesson Text:** 1 Timothy 3:1-13

**Background Scripture:** 1 Timothy 3:1-13

**Devotional Reading:** 1 Peter 5:1-5

### 1 Timothy 3:1-13

*Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. <sup>5</sup> (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. <sup>7</sup> He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.*

*<sup>8</sup> In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup> They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup> They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. <sup>11</sup> In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. <sup>12</sup> A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. <sup>13</sup> Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.*

### LESSON AIMS

- Facts: to show some of the qualifications needed to be a spiritual leader in the church.
- Principle: to realize that spiritual leadership means godly leadership.
- Application: to accept that spiritual leadership in the church is a serious responsibility.

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Leadership Industry

Billions of dollars are spent every year in the quest for good leadership. People buy books, attend seminars, pay for consultations, and earn degrees—all to make themselves better leaders. Meanwhile, businesses, schools, governments, nonprofit agencies, and churches spend countless hours and dollars to find or train effective leaders. At election time, candidates spend fortunes promoting their leadership skills while voters complain about the lack of true leaders.

We are surrounded by a leadership industry. What is gained by all this effort? Most would say that good leadership is still not common. We have been disappointed too many times by our leaders. We have probably been especially disappointed by our own leadership failures.

Where can we turn for a better perspective? Does Scripture tell us the secret to leadership? As we observed last week, the church is God's assembly and household, appointed to uphold and defend His truth in a contrary world. He has therefore set standards for its leaders that go beyond the usual human skills of leadership. They must exhibit His own character to represent Him accurately to the world.

**LESSON BACKGROUND Time:** A.D. 62

**Place:** unknown

The books of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, were written by Paul to give his associates in ministry direction in strengthening the church. Timothy was working with the church of Ephesus where a form of false teaching had damaged the church (compare 1 Timothy 1:3; 4:1–3; and 6:20, 21). That teaching threatened the core of the gospel: that all people are sinners, all equally in need of God's grace through Jesus Christ. Sound leadership was imperative in such a

circumstance. So in 1 Timothy 3, Paul instructed Timothy on the kind of leaders the church needed.

We might expect that Paul would advise Timothy on the actions that leaders should take: how they can evaluate the past, assess the present, and make sound plans for the future. But Paul focuses first not on what leaders *do*, but on *who* they *are*. Paul gives not an action plan for leaders, but a portrait of character.

In this light, today's passage provides lists of qualities that church leaders need to possess. Such lists were common in Paul's time. They were not intended to be complete, point-by-point checklists. Rather, they suggested a full picture of the needed qualities. (Some students prefer the stronger word *qualifications*, the implication being that failure to meet any one item of the list disqualifies a candidate from the leadership position in question.)

We can compare the items on these lists to brush strokes in a fine oil painting. If we examine each brush stroke, we can precisely identify its length and color. But to understand it fully, we need to see how it fits into the context of the picture as a whole. So it is with Paul's list of leadership qualities. We should identify each term carefully. But to understand them as Paul intended, we need to see how each quality fits with the others.

### **QUALIFICATIONS FOR BISHOPS (1 Timothy 3:1-7)**

In his discussion of the offices of bishop and deacon, Paul wrote nothing about how these offices were instituted, how many officials there should be, or the precise nature of their work. He focused, rather, on qualifications for those who occupy them. And because they are honorable positions, the demands are high. Attention is drawn first to the office of "bishop." The Greek term refers to an overseer. It emphasizes authority.

The term *bishop* may be confusing. Today, the title *bishop* has come to refer to a person who has authority over many congregations in a church hierarchy. But the term that Paul uses applies to leaders in all kinds of settings in his day. In the church, it is used interchangeably with the term translated "elders" in Titus 1:5 (compare 1:7). We see the terms brought together in Acts 20:17, 28 and 1 Peter 5:1-4: those who are elders—those with spiritual maturity—provide oversight for the church, like a shepherd caring for a flock.

Beginning with the solemn declaration "*Here Is a trustworthy saying*" (1 Tim. 3:1; cf. 1:15), Paul assured Timothy that one who sets his heart on this office "*desires a noble task*." The word for "noble" or "good" includes the meaning "honorable." Since the office is the highest in the congregation, it carries dignity, and the qualifications are high.

#### ***1) What does the term "bishop" mean? What else is this office called in the New Testament? (1 Timothy 3:1)***

What Paul emphasizes is not organizational models or leadership duties, but the leaders' character. Those who lead the church toward maturity in Christ need to be people who are themselves growing toward that maturity. Their lives need to reflect the character of Christ himself. Thus the description of the ideal church leader begins with characteristics of genuine godliness.

A bishop, or elder, first must be "above reproach" or blameless. It is appropriate that this is mentioned first. While he cannot be perfect, there should be no occasion for people to find fault with him. His overall demeanor should be exemplary.

Second, he must be "*the husband of but one wife*" (literally, "a one wife man"). Many have tried to determine whether this phrase indicates a specific marital situation. For example, does it refer to a man who is married only once and is still married to his first wife? Such attempts do not succeed in explaining the phrase in its original context, however. In this setting, it probably indicates a character trait: a man who is faithful in marriage, who is chaste in relationships with the opposite sex. Such discipline is not only obedient to God's will, it also reflects God's own faithfulness to His people.

To be *temperate, self-controlled, respectable* continues the portrait of mature godliness. Individually, the terms indicate someone who is restrained and controlled, someone who leads an orderly life.

To be *hospitable* indicates a person who is generous in caring for and encouraging others (compare Titus 1:8; 1 Peter 4:9). Hospitality is vital in the first-century church (compare 3 John 8; contrast 2 John 10). But hospitality also reflects God's own actions: He grants us a home in the world and welcomes us into His family.

## **2) *What personal spiritual traits should an elder exhibit? (vs. 2-5)***

An elder must also be *able to teach*. He should be spiritually endowed with the gift of teaching God's people. Teaching is an important element in pastoral ministry (cf. Eph. 4:11) that too often is overlooked. The Christian faith is based on historical facts, and this basis can be passed from one generation to the next only by teaching (2 Tim. 2:2).

To be *able to teach* indicates that teaching is always a key function of the church leader. But in the context of this letter, the emphasis is probably less on the ability to give an interesting lesson and more on sound understanding of the gospel. For the church to stand unified against false teaching, it needs leaders who understand thoroughly and accurately the saving message. The leader needs to know what genuine spiritual maturity is in order to be able to lead others to that maturity.

### **(Continuing with verse 3)**

*Not given to drunkenness* (1 Timothy 3:3) obviously indicates shunning intoxication (compare Proverbs 20:1). The Christian is not to be controlled by alcohol or other substances, but by God's Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

*No violent* indicates the person who refuses aggressive conflict, whether physical or verbal. Those who have been reconciled to God by the death of Jesus live by God's peace. That quality is underlined with the terms *gentle and not quarrelsome*.

*Not a lover of money and not covetous* speak to a leader's attitude toward possessions (Matthew 6:19–21; 1 Timothy 6:6–10).

## **3) *Why is the ability to teach important for a church leader (v. 2)?***

It is interesting that Paul points to the home, not some other sphere like business or the military, as the testing ground for leadership qualities. An elder must also have an orderly household. He must assume full leadership over his family, making sure his children show proper respect and obedience.

Paul reasoned that if a man cannot manage his own household, he cannot oversee the church. He argued from the smaller to the larger institution. The home, though extremely important, is not as sizable a sphere of government. An even greater challenge lies in ruling God's church. One whose home is chaotic is likely to have a chaotic church as well.

Some cautions to laypeople, however, are in order. They are not to expect more of a pastor's children than they expect of their own. Even the best trained children will lapse. So if their own children are imperfect, they should expect imperfections in pastor's children as well. Another caution is not to expect so much from a pastor that he has no time for his family. Overwork is one great cause of family disorder.

## **4) *What relationship should an elder have with his household? (vs. 4,5)***

Paul also urged that an elder not be a novice, or neophyte. He is not to be a recent convert to the faith. This does not rule out young men exercising a local church ministry, but they should be believers long enough to have gained some spiritual maturity. This is why these overseers are so often called elders.

The new convert's greatest danger is pride. Having responsibility and gaining recognition too soon can breed an undue sense of importance. In the original language, Paul pictured pride as a rising smoke, befogging or beclouding the spiritual senses. The person so affected lives in a fantasy world of self-centeredness and cannot judge issues clearly.

The proud neophyte falls under the same judgment reserved for the devil. Satan was condemned because he yielded to pride, and the novice is prone to fall under God's condemnation as well. Pride usurps the credit that God alone deserves, and He will not let this go unpunished. Ministers need to keep a constant guard against this subtle but damaging folly.

## **5) *Why is it inappropriate for a new convert to be a pastor? (v. 6)***

An elder also "*must have a good reputation with outsiders.*" His good reputation must extend outside the Christian assembly to the non-Christian public. At first glance, this seems to contradict Jesus' prophecy that the world would

despise His followers and speak well of false prophets (cf. John 15:18-16:3).

Paul was speaking of a different matter, however. The world may, indeed, despise Christian leaders and even persecute them. But unbelievers should have no just criticisms to bring against them. Their reputation should be blameless before all (cf. Rom. 12:17-21). To be ambassadors of the gospel to the world, they must be respected by the world (see 2 Corinthians 8:21).

The overseer who fails to live up to these standard lays himself open to the world's reproach and "*the devil's trap*" (1 Tim. 3:7). Here the devil is seen laying a trap for the Christian leader. It may be a temptation to lie, steal, lose his temper, be greedy, or be sexually immoral. If he falls into the trap, his reputation is gone - and with it the reputation of the church he leads. It is therefore imperative that the gospel minister seek to maintain an impeccable reputation with outsiders.

#### **6) *What results when a church official has a poor reputation in the community? (v. 7)***

#### **QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEACONS (1 Timothy 3:8-13)**

Paul introduced deacons without explanation, giving the impression that the office was well-known to Timothy and the Ephesian church. "Likewise" alerts us to the fact that their qualifications are similar to those of elders.

The term translated "deacons" means "servant," or "helper." The present passage is the only one that deals with deacons at length as a group. They are mentioned along with overseers in Philippians 1:1, and other passages mention the spiritual gift of "ministry," or "helps" (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28). Many believe deacons are the same as the officials appointed in Acts 6 to deal with the temporal needs of widows. But whatever their duties, they must meet the same spiritual standards as overseers.

#### **7) *What is the origin of the office of deacon?***

As with the discussion in verses 1–7 above, Paul's focus on the deacons is not so much on what they *do*, but the kind of people they *are*. Like the elders, deacons must reflect the transforming power of the gospel. They are to be distinguished by their serious behavior, their honesty, their self-control, and their reliance on God's provision.

Deacons must, first, be "*sincere*" (1 Tim. 3:8) - that is, dignified, serious-minded people who call forth respect. The KJV adds that they must not be "double-tongued," starting dissension by saying one thing to one person and the opposite to another. They must *not be indulging in much wine or pursuing dishonest gain*. "Dishonest gain" refers to profit gained by shady means. All these personal requirements indicate their need for self-control; they are not to be dominated by base passions.

In addition, deacons must "*hold the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience*" (1 Tim. 3:9). The mystery is God's newly revealed truth in the gospel of Christ.

Deacons are to adhere to this truth, being sound in their doctrine. They must also enhance the glory of the gospel by maintaining a "clear conscience."

The idea here is of a conscience kept tender toward the will of God, with the result that one follows His will in personal conduct (cf. 1 Tim. 1:5). Paul earlier urged Timothy himself to maintain a good conscience (v. 19) and warned that those who threw it aside had made a shipwreck of their faith. Deacons, therefore, were to keep their faith intact by exercising it in the context of a consistently lived life.

#### **8) *What are the personal requirements for the office of deacon? (vs. 8,9)***

Deacons need character that has been demonstrated over time, with observable actions. Just as newly converted persons should not be eligible to become overseers, so they should not be considered for the office of deacon. "Let these ... first be tested" implies a passage of time during which the congregation may observe them and become convinced of their capability. Only after proving themselves faithful in lesser tasks should these men be chosen to be deacons.

Like the elders, deacons must reflect the transforming power of the gospel. They are to be distinguished by their serious behavior, their honesty, their self-control, and their reliance on God's provision.

### ***9) How must an individual prove his capability for the office of deacon? (v. 10)***

Paul next enumerated qualifications for "their wives." If, indeed, this verse refers to deacons' wives, they ought to complement their husbands' ministry through their own godly character. However, since "their" is not in the original text and "wives" can also be translated "women," some see this group as a separate class of "deaconesses." Since these women are not actually called deaconesses, they were probably not a formal group. They may have included deacons' wives in addition to other women who fulfilled ministries similar to those of deacons.

Whoever they were, they too were to have high qualifications. Their demeanor was to be serious, not frivolous; their speech restrained, not malicious; and their habits of life trustworthy, not hypocritical.

Meanwhile, deacons, like elders, are expected to have a stable family life. They are to be faithful husbands of one wife and conscientious fathers who keep their children under control (1 Tim. 3:12).

### ***10) What did Paul mean by "their wives" and what qualifications are specified? (v. 11)***

Paul enumerated two related rewards for those who have served well in the office of deacon. First, they "gain an excellent standing," or respect. They obtain a high standing in the eyes of both God and the church as they exhibit progress in their spiritual journey.

They also gain for themselves great boldness, or confidence, in their faith in Jesus Christ. Here Paul was referring to openness, assurance, and freedom of speaking.

The faithful deacon will increase in confidence before God and man and will stand unashamed at the judgment seat of Christ. Though the office of deacon is secondary to that of overseer, the standards are high and the rewards commensurate with them.

### ***11) What rewards for faithfulness are promised to deacons? (v. 13)***

#### **PRACTICAL POINTS**

- 1 To desire an office in Christ's church is a good thing; it shows a desire to serve (1 Tim. 3:1).
- 2 A leader in the church should be known as a positive influence in the lives of others (v. 2).
- 3 To be worthy to govern the church, an elder must first govern all aspects of his own life well (vs. 3-5).
- 4 Pride is a constant enemy, especially of the inexperienced Christian (v. 6).
- 5 The devil rejoices to entrap a church leader in public reproach and scandal (v. 7).
- 6 All officials of the church must be held to the same high standards of conduct (vs. 8-13).

#### **CONCLUSION**

##### **Becoming Christlike**

If we are surrounded by interest in leadership, we are also surrounded by frustration with leadership. People are inclined to find fault with those who lead. Sadly, the church is infamous for criticizing her leaders. If the church is not doing well, we do not want our share of the responsibility, so we pin the blame on others.

Today's passage forbids us from doing that. The qualities for the church's leaders belong in the lives of all Christians (see Ephesians 5:3,4,18, etc.). If the church is not yet what it should be, the solution is not to blame leaders. It is to become better Christ-followers.

**PRAYER** Lord, make us, Your church, conformed to Jesus' image. We pray in His name, amen.

**THOUGHT TO REMEMBER** Reflect the Lord's character.