

# Church Leadership

1 Timothy 3:1-16

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Last Sunday, Bo courageously expounded on 1 Timothy 2 which describes the roles of men and women in the church. This morning, we're going to look at Chapter 3 which builds on Paul's instructions for order in the church specifically addressing leadership.

Before you think this message isn't for you because you are not a church leader, think again. All of us are called to be leaders in some capacity. Parents are called to lead their children. And all followers of Christ have a great commission to make disciples which means we are all called to be leaders. All of us should be saying and doing things that lead people to Christ. So, the principles here really apply to all Christians.

Let's first look at the qualifications for a bishop or, as some translations say, an overseer...

## 1 Timothy 3:1

*This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.*

Paul has just written that women are not to hold positions of doctrinal authority over congregations, but he did not want to leave the impression that just any man is qualified.

- No man is qualified to be a spiritual leader in the church just because of his gender.

The office Paul described is that of bishop.

- Our religious culture has given us a particular idea of what a bishop is; but the Greek word translated "bishop" literally means "over-watcher" or overseer.

In Acts 20:17, we learn there were several overseers in the city-wide church at Ephesus.

- These were men who led the many house-churches that met throughout the city.

A bishop is someone with some leadership role in the church.

- Such a person may also sometimes be called an elder or a pastor, which are terms also used in Acts 20.

The roles of elder and pastor represent slightly different aspects of the same office.

- We should also note that there is no guidance on structure or how the offices of bishop, deacon or any other leadership role relates to each other.
- In the New Testament design, there seems to be flexibility on structure and an emphasis rather on the character of leaders.

It says here that those wanting to be in church leadership *desire a good work*: The idea is that being a church leader is a good, noble, honorable work.

- Paul's instruction to Timothy is to look for good, noble, honorable people for leadership.

Leadership is important because it is serious business to represent God's Son in such a great task as building His kingdom and in caring for the salvation of souls whom the Lord purchased with His own blood.

Another aspect of desiring a good work as a leader in the church: it shouldn't be about titles, honor and glory; it's about work.

- Jesus said in Mark 9:35: *If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.*

There are lazy ministers who should not be in leadership... being a leader is a good work, but it is work!

Paul is about to describe the qualifications for bishops...

- I'll be referring to bishops as "spiritual leaders" because it is a broader term that better describes the intent of the original Greek word.
- Leaders are not to be chosen at random, or just because they volunteer even if they have characteristics of "natural leaders."

Instead, they should be chosen primarily on how they match the qualifications listed here.

It may surprise you to note that the criteria for leadership has nothing to do with giftedness.

- As we'll see, there is no leadership gift in this list.
- There is a leadership calling, but not a gift.
- God will instantly create skills and gifts in those He calls, because His gifts are given by the Holy Spirit as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:11).

Going to seminary doesn't make one qualified for spiritual leadership.

- Being a good talker doesn't make one qualified either.
- What one gives in money or volunteer time does not qualify people for spiritual leadership.
- And, as I mentioned, neither does natural or spiritual gifts in and of themselves qualify a person for spiritual leadership.

What qualifies someone for spiritual leadership is godly character as described here.

These leadership qualifications are not so rigid that perfection is demanded in all areas; they are both goals to reach for and general criteria for selection. When looking for church leaders, one should consider this list and ask:

- Does the person in question desire all these qualifications with their whole heart?
- Does that desire show itself in their life?
- Are there others available who better fulfill the requirements of this list?

Also, these character traits are valuable for every person, and not only those who aspire to leadership.

- They are clear indicators of godly character and spiritual maturity.

Alright, let's take a look at the list of qualifications...

### **1 Timothy 3:2-7**

*A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

Spiritual leaders must be *Blameless*: This word literally means, "Nothing to take hold upon." There must be nothing in his life that others can take hold of to attack the church.

- The word is a metaphor of an expert boxer, who defends his body so that it is impossible for his opponent to land one hit.
- Being *blameless* is a broad term for someone who lives a righteous life such that no one can legitimately accuse them of grievous sin.

Spiritual leaders must be the *Husband of one wife*: The idea here is of "a one-woman man." I quite frankly don't know how any man could seriously manage having more than one wife. But this is here because some men certainly try.

This verse is also not saying that a leader has to be married (if so, then both Jesus and Paul could not qualify).

- Likewise, this is not saying that a leader could never remarry if his wife had passed away or was Biblically divorced.
- The idea is that his love and heart is given to one woman who is his lawful and wedded wife. That means the spiritual leader is not a playboy, an adulterer, a flirt, and does not show romantic or sexual interest in other women, including images of women in pornography.
- And now days, we could add having a relationship with ChatGPT.
- Sam Altman, the CEO of OpenAI recently announced they were going to allow erotic content in their subscription chats starting in December.
- Is anyone surprised? Technology is a double-edged sword: it is both a useful tool for productivity and yet another way of corruption and bondage for people

Spiritual leaders must be *Temperate*: The idea here is someone who is not given to extremes.

- They are reliable and trustworthy, and not prone to wide swings of vision, mood, or action.

Spiritual leaders must be *Soberminded*: This describes the person who is able to think rationally. They are not constantly making light of things but know how to deal with serious issues in a serious way.

Spiritual leaders must be *Hospitable*: They are willing and able to open up their home to both friends and strangers.

Spiritual leaders must be *Able to teach*: This means they are skilled enough in the Bible to help others better apply it, either in public or one-on-one.

Spiritual leaders must not be *given to wine*: This means they should not be addicted to alcohol. While this verse does not prohibit godly leadership from drinking alcoholic beverages, it clearly discourages it and rejects those who drink so much that they get drunk.

Spiritual leaders must not be *violent*: This means that leaders cannot be given to violence either publicly nor privately; it is someone who can let God fight their cause.

Spiritual leaders must not be *greedy for money*: People who are spiritual overseers should not be in leadership to get wealthy.

Spiritual leaders must be *Gentle*: This is the kind of person who takes Jesus as their example, not the latest action hero.

Spiritual leaders must not be *quarrelsome*: That is, they should not be the kind of person who is always arguing over something.

Spiritual leaders must not be *covetous*: This is a more encompassing thought than merely greedy for money.

- The covetous person is never satisfied with anything, always demanding something more or different.
- A person who is constantly dissatisfied is not fit for leadership among God's people.

Spiritual leaders must *rule [their] own house well*: The godly leader demonstrates his leadership ability first in his own home; Paul recognized that it is in the home where our Christianity is first demonstrated.

- It is true that a child may rebel from even a good home... but is the rebellion because of the parents or in spite of their job as parents?
- This is the question that unfortunately must be asked.

Spiritual leaders must not be *a novice*: The word translated "novice" here literally means "newly planted." When someone first comes to Jesus, it isn't good to put them into leadership until they have been allowed to grow long enough to put down some deep roots.

- The leader should be well past the novice stage in their spiritual development.

Spiritual leaders must have *A good testimony*: Their godly characteristics must be evident to all, especially unbelievers.

- The potential leader has to be a good Christian outside the walls of the church.

The next segment in 1 Timothy 3 addresses the qualifications of Deacons who are the practical servants of the church.

An example of the appointment of deacons is in Acts 6:1-6, where the apostles saw the need to distribute the daily assistance to the widows among the church yet did not have the time to provide the aid themselves.

- They chose men to act essentially as deacons in that church.

The qualifications of Deacons are much the same as those for "bishops" because both roles involve practical service and leadership.

- It is a mistake to see one office as more prestigious than the other, though bishops generally have more responsibility before God.
- Each is more a matter of calling than status.

### **1 Timothy 3:8-12 – Qualifications for deacons.**

*Likewise, deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.*

Deacons must be *Reverent*: Showing proper respect towards both God and people.

Deacons must not be *double-tongued*: That is, they must be someone who always speaks the truth with no intent to deceive.

Deacons, again like the bishops, they should *not be given to much wine* and not be *greedy*.

Deacons must be skilled in *Holding the mystery of the faith*: That is, someone who can stick to proper doctrine out of sincere conviction.

Deacons must *First be proved*: A man demonstrates his fitness for office in the church by his conduct.

- Deacons and bishops are more recognized than appointed.
- And, like the Bishops, Deacons must be *blameless*.

It says here, *Likewise, their wives*: It is not clear if Paul referred here to female deacons (such as Phoebe, in Romans 16:1), or the wives of male deacons.

- Since the original wording will permit either possibility, we should take it both ways.

It is certainly appropriate to evaluate the suitability of a man to be a deacon by considering his wife and children because a man's leadership in the home can be revealed, in part, by their conduct.

- Is his wife reverent, not one of the slanderers, temperate, and faithful in all things?
- If not, then this might disqualify a man from holding a leadership office in the church.

### **1 Timothy 3:13 – A promise for deacons.**

*For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

God remembers the faithful service of those who serve the church, even in tasks which some would consider menial. There is little doubt that we will see more deacons with a great reward than bishops or pastors in heaven.

All the work of servant-leaders in God's family should be oriented towards building up God's people in the faith of Christ Jesus.

One of the great things about pursuing leadership in the church is that it makes us bolder in the faith which we all should be as we mature.

### **Timothy 3:14-15 – Paul's reason for writing Timothy.**

*These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

Paul would have rather spoken of these things to Timothy personally, but knowing he might not be able to come as soon as he wished, Paul made certain they heard what he was burdened to share with them by putting it in a letter.

Paul's purpose for writing was to give Timothy, as a leader, practical information on how to run things in the Ephesian church.

Paul refers to the church as *the house of God*... The church must be, very consciously, the place where God is...

Matthew 18:20 – *where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*

The Church is also God's house because...

- He is the Architect & Builder.
- He provides for it.
- He is honored here, and He rules here.

The Greek word translated "church" is ek-klay-see'-ah.

- It was a non-religious word for a group of people called together for a purpose. The living God has called His people together for His purpose.

Paul referred to the church as *the pillar and ground of truth*: The pillar and ground, or foundation, of the church is truth.

- It isn't that the church is the source for the truth, but that the church holds up the truth so the world can see it.
- Unfortunately, many churches today don't value the truth as they should and thus have weak pillars on shaky ground.
- This is apostasy, or falling away from the faith, and it is a sign of the end of the Church Age which Paul will address in Chapter 4.

### **1 Timothy 3:16 – I understand that this was an early hymn to express the foundation of Christian truth.**

- The original melody was lost in history, so I'll not sing it, but just read the lyrics...

*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.*

The Greek word translated "mystery" is musterion. In the New Testament, it refers to the things of God that were once hidden but were later revealed by Him.

- A mystery is that which can only be known through the revelation of God.
- Paul used the word "mystery" 21 times in his epistles: In each case, the "mystery" was a declaration of new spiritual truth.

In this case, the mystery is godliness...

- The Greek word translated "godliness" means "a proper response to the things of God, which produces obedience and righteous living."
- As Jesus walked the earth, He was the embodiment of pure godliness, which led Him to lay down His life for us unworthy sinners.
- His life was dedicated to the glory of the Father.

Christians pursue godliness when we follow the example of Jesus in dedicating every decision we make to His glory.

Godliness is not a suggestion; it is a command:

1 Peter 1:15-16 – *as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*

The mystery of godliness recorded here is a summation of Jesus' ministry.

- And the godliness of God's Son should now be reflected in us as His followers.

Christianity is not a system of rules and actions that must be performed to appease a deity.

- At the heart of Christianity is the mystery of godliness—the fact that God took on human flesh to live among the people He created
- As a Son, Jesus remained completely obedient to His Father in heaven and then offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice in our place
- God then raised Him from the dead, thereby conquering death for all who trust in Him.

Because Jesus took our place, sinful humans may be declared righteous before God and be “born again”.

- The new birth is spiritual and results in a change of heart that produces true godliness.
- How a life is transformed is the mystery of godliness and is understood only through the revelation of God in Christ.

This mystery of godliness should be *without controversy* among believers.

- It is unfortunate when those who claim to be Christians debate or deny the fundamental truths of this hymn:

*God was manifested in the flesh:* This is the essence of the incarnation; that God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, added humanity to His deity — and was thus manifested in the flesh.

He was *Justified in the Spirit:* We can say that Jesus was justified by the Spirit not in the sense that He was once sinful and made righteous, but in the sense that He was declared to be, by the Holy Spirit, what He always was — completely righteous before the Father.

He was *Seen by angels:* The ministry of Jesus, both on earth and through the Church, is of great interest to angels:

1 Peter 1:12 describes the *gospel* as something *which angels desire to look into*.

There is no plan of salvation for fallen angels. Jesus did not die for angels, but He did for humans. This must be a real source of fascination for the angels; that God would so bless us sinful humans with the opportunity for eternal life.

Jesus was *Preached among the Gentiles, & believed on in the world:* Paul himself did his best to fulfill these statements. He was busy preaching Jesus among the Gentiles and helping the world to believe.

And Jesus was *Received up in glory:* This reminds us of His ascension, His finished work on our behalf, and His present intercession for us at the right hand of the Father.

Jesus is the perfect example of the previous qualifications for Christian leaders.

- We trust that Jesus will transform our life according to the same character, as we put our focus on Him.
- Having religion is not what builds character in people; but having a relationship with Jesus is what really does.

Well, I hope our look at Christian leadership characteristics this morning has been a blessing to you.

**Does anyone have any observations or comments about this passage they'd like to share?**

**My take away:** we should all aspire to have these godly characteristics of spiritual leaders, because we are all representatives of the Savior and have a mandate to lead others to better know Him.