

A Study on 1 Timothy

Week 6 | 3:1-13

Overview | Godly Leadership in the Church

One of the main areas of emphasis in this letter is on the importance of sound doctrine which leads to godliness in the lives of the members of the church. To further highlight this, Paul emphasizes the importance of having godly leaders leading the way in this.

Paul has mentioned that two leaders in the church, Alexander and Hymenaeus, had been dismissed from the church because they had “shipwrecked” their faith by following after false doctrine and practice. This underscores the necessity for godly leadership to be established in the church.

In this section of the letter, Paul outlines the qualifications for elders and deacons as a way of giving the church a standard by which they could judge someone’s readiness to be a leader. This section has a very simple outline:

1. Qualifications for elders (3:1-7)
2. Qualifications for deacons (3:8-13)

As we look at the lists of qualifications for the elders and deacons it’s important to remember that these lists are not exhaustive and comprehensive as to the character and role of the elder and deacon. We must consider the context and the controversies of the Ephesian church in light of this particular list.

The Terms for the Office of Elder | Overseer (bishop), elder, pastor

Throughout the New Testament there are different words used to describe the office of elder (Acts 20:17-38; 1 Peter 5:1-2; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Timothy 3:1; 5:17).

- *Episkopos* - overseer (bishop)
- *Presbyteros* – elder
- *Poimen* – pastor

These three terms are used interchangeably to describe different aspects of the same office of leadership. (*The Episcopal and Presbyterian denominations derive their names from these terms.*)

The Term for the office of Deacon | Server, deacon

The term for deacon comes from the Greek word “*diakonos*”. At its most basic level it means “to wait at table” (see Acts 6:1-6). It also carries with it the more general sense of service within the church community.

Qualifications for Elders | 3:1-7

“The elders jointly have the government and spiritual oversight of the Church, including teaching.” (*Book of Church Order*, 7-2)

The first thing to note is that the office of elder is to be respected and esteemed within the church. Paul calls it a “noble task” (3:1) and that those who rule well should be “considered worthy of double honor” (5:17). It is good and right for godly men to strive (aspire) to become elders. This is not done through campaigning or trying to force oneself into the office but rather through both an outward (recognized by the church) and inward (personal desire) call to the office.

Since leadership in the church is vital to the health of the church Paul outlined qualities of the elder to help ensure the leaders chosen in Ephesus would help redirect the church toward godliness.

- Above reproach – This is an overarching description of having a strong moral character that does not lead to scandal or rebuke. It is explained in detail with the attributes that follow in the text. This characteristic is in sharp contrast to the behavior of the ungodly leaders who had led the church into error and sinful practice.
- Husband of one wife – It literally means “a one-woman man.”
 - It does not mean an elder has to be married (Paul and Timothy would be disqualified).
 - It does mean that an elder, if married, must be faithful to his spouse. This was in contrast to the toleration of gross sexual sin within the Greek and Roman culture that also had influence on the church.
 - This teaching was also in direct opposition to the false teaching in the church that marriage should be forbidden (4:3).
- Sober-minded – This describes one who is alert and able to see clearly. This is one who is not overcome by passion, sinful desires, or emotion that would cloud his ability to make good decisions.
- Self-controlled – This describes the ability to have control over impulses that if they went unchecked would lead to ungodly thoughts and behaviors.
- Respectable – Whereas self-control often is an inward quality, being respectable is the outward component that stems from it. Appearance, behavior, and general demeanor are upholding moral standards.
- Hospitable – This is a quality of generosity with time and resources. The elder is to be one who opens his home to others as a means of showing love and kindness to them.
- Able to teach – This is more than just the ability to teach but rather the ability to teach the Scriptures with aptitude and theological soundness .
- Not a drunkard – This is an aspect of self-control where one is not controlled by any substance which would have an effect on one’s ability to make good choices and live by example.
- Not violent but gentle – An elder is not to lead out of aggression, intimidation, and use of power but rather through the kindness and gentleness of one who is under the true authority of Christ.
- Not quarrelsome – It describes one who is argumentative by nature and is prone to empty and foolish debates. This describes many who had been leading the church in Ephesus and was one of the reasons the church was in its state of demise.
- Not a lover of money – Wealth is not a good indicator of one’s ability to lead. It comes down to the heart issue of how one views his wealth (or lack of it). Money is not the issue but rather the love of money that leads to greed and idolatry. (See 1 Timothy 6:9-10; 17-19).
- Manage his house well – The word “manage” has two basic meanings: to supervise and to nurture. If one is married, the way he supervises and nurtures his family is an indicator of how he will lead the church. There must congruency between the two.
- Not a recent convert – The testing ground of years walking through the struggles of life faithfully should not be overlooked. A plant with shallow roots might grow quickly but might not withstand the pressures of the elements. So too an elder must have deep roots that help sustain him through the rigors and trials of ministry.
- Thought well of by outsiders – One must have a consistency with how they live out their faith, both within the church and outside of it.

All of these qualities directly or indirectly addressed different aspects of the corruption that had taken place within the church due to the false teachers and ungodly behavior of the members. Paul wanted to

make sure that the next group of leaders modeled these aspects so that the church would be led in godliness and so that the outside world would see a true witness of the gospel lived out among the members of the church.

Qualifications for Deacons | 3:8-13

“The office of deacon is not one of rule, but rather of service both to the physical and spiritual needs of the people.” (*Book of Church Order*, 7-2)

Many of the qualifications for deacons mirror those of the elders. One of the main differences is that deacons are not required to be able to teach, although they must still adhere to sound doctrine. Also of note, is that we are told more about what deacons should be rather than what they should do.

- Dignified – This is similar to being “above reproach” and carries with the connotations of being noble and worthy of esteem.
- Not double-tongued – This is one who would be untrustworthy with confidential matters. It also speaks to the tendency to say one thing and do another. To not demonstrate this would mean the deacon is trustworthy.
- Not addicted to much wine – This is similar to the restriction of being a drunkard for elders. A deacon is to be one who is not to be mastered by any substance.
- Not greedy for dishonest gain – Much like the elders who should not be lovers of money, deacons must not be greedy. This is especially important for deacons who often have primary responsibility over the collection of the money of the church.
- Hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience – This refers to holding to sound doctrine. The “mystery” is not something unknown but rather it is the good news of the gospel that had been hidden but has now been revealed (see Romans 16:25-26).
- They must be tested and proven blameless – This has to do with the deacon’s proof of character through a life that has been faithful in service and godliness which has been on display for the church.
- Their wives must be dignified, not slanderers, sober-minded, faithful...*
- Married to one women – Similar to the qualification of the elder.
- Manage his household well – Similar to the qualification of the elder.

It’s likely that because of the nature of the bad leadership in the church in Ephesus the members of the church were skeptical of them. Paul concludes this section by reinforcing the positive aspects to those who take on a leadership role in the church and do it with integrity. “For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (3:13).

* There is debate as to whether or not verse 11 refers to wives of deacons or to women serving as deaconesses. The Greek word “*gynaikas*” which can mean “women” (2:9-12) or “wives” (3:12) is used in this verse. Because it can mean either, it has led to various interpretations of the meaning of the text.

- In defense of translating it as “wives” of deacons:
 - This section is focused on qualifications for deacons.
 - The verses before and after refer to deacons.
 - Paul used the generic word for “women” or “wives” when he could have used the more specific word for “deaconess” if he intended to talk about women in that office.
 - “*Gynaikas*” is translated as “wife” in verses 2 and 12 of this chapter.
 - It makes sense that wives of deacons would need to have character and integrity as they most likely would have assisted their husbands with some of the ministry.

- It would seem odd to have such a short list of qualifications for these women if indeed they were to be in a formal office of church leadership.
- There is not a clearer area in Scripture to appeal to in order to interpret this if in fact it was meant to lead to women as deacons.
- In defense of translating it as “women” in reference to the office of deaconess:
 - Verse 11 starts out the same way as verse 8 with the word “likewise” seemingly starting a new section, describing a new office.
 - These women are to be dignified which is the same word to describe the deacons and a similar idea to elders needing to be above reproach.
 - The literal translation of this verse does not have the word “their” in it. So it would be more accurately translated as “wives, likewise” or “women, likewise”... If Paul meant it to read as “deacons’ wives” he could have used the possessive pronoun.
 - It may seem odd that Paul would mention qualities for deacons’ wives but not elders’ wives.
- In defense of translating it as “women” in reference to women assisting the deacons in their work:
 - It’s possible that Paul is talking about women serving alongside deacons especially as a way to minister to the women of the church. This would make sense particularly related to the care of widows that Paul talks about in chapter 5.
 - If this is the case, Paul desires to show that women who hope to serve the church in this way must meet these standards of Christian character.
 - There are several examples of women in the church in the NT that are commended for their godliness and their service to the church (Phoebe – Romans 16; Lydia – Acts 16; Dorcas – Acts 9).
 - “It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need. These assistants to the deacons are not officers of the church and, as such, are not subjects for ordination.” (*Book of Church Order*, 9-7)
- It is my opinion that options one and three make the most sense based on the context, the language, and the greater support from the rest of Scripture.

So What? |

Resource List

Teaching 1 Timothy by Angus Macleay (Primary Source for class)
1 Timothy by Philip Graham Ryken
Let’s Study 1 Timothy by W. John Cook
Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles by William D. Mounce
1-2 Timothy & Titus by Philip H. Towner
Commentary on 1 Timothy by John Calvin
ESV Study Bible