

Leaders in Christ's Church - 1 Timothy 3:1-7

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Introduction

Scripture clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is the head of the church (Eph 1:22; 4:15; Col 1:18). The New Testament describes a team-based approach to ministry, grounded in calling, spiritual gifts, and abilities (Eph 4:11; Rom 12:3-8). The scriptures do not mandate a rigid structure of church government. After 100 A.D., the church adopted a more centralized episcopal model, and following Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 A.D., a secular hierarchical system emerged. The Protestant Reformation transformed church leadership by dismantling the centralized papal hierarchy, replacing it with local control, and shifting authority from tradition to scripture. It established the "priesthood of all believers," allowing for married pastors, increased lay leadership, and a focus on bible teaching over sacramentalism.

In Acts 20:17-21, the Apostle Paul, nearing the end of his ministry, offers a final word of exhortation to the church in Ephesus. He begins in verse 17 by addressing the *presbuteros* (elders) of the church, and a few verses later, refers to these same men in verse 28 as *episkopos* (overseers). Additionally, in verse 28, Paul commands these men to care (*poimaino*, cf. *poimen*/shepherd, 1 Peter 5:1-2) or pastor the church of God. By describing the same group first as *presbuteros*, then as *episkopos*, and identifying their role as shepherding, Paul appears to consider these terms as interchangeable for church leaders (cf. Titus 1:5,7—*presbuteros* and *episkopos* used interchangeably). In 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul addresses the office of overseer (*episkopos*) and then, with a clear transition in verse 8, discusses qualifications for deacons or servants. Note: Romans 16:1-2 refers to Phoebe as a deaconess. In summary, "elder" highlights the need for maturity in a leader, "overseer" emphasizes the responsibility to guard and watch over the church, and "pastor" underscores the importance of biblical teaching and spiritual nourishment. A second office, that of deacon, seems to address the practical needs of the assembly (cf. Acts 6:1-6), but does not limit the person's gifts, as seen in Philip's ministry of preaching and evangelism (cf. Acts 6:5; 8:5-13; 26-40 Acts 13:2-4).

At Calvary Chapel Chelmsford/Manchester, leadership is viewed as functional rather than positional or titular. Our values emphasize a collaborative and collegiate approach, rooted in calling, gifting, abilities, and mutual respect as we seek God's will for His church. In keeping with 1 Timothy 2:12, the Lead pastor is a male. The Lead Pastor serves as spiritual director, primary doctrinal teacher, and supervisor of church staff. The Lead Pastor and his staff are responsible for the day-to-day operations of the church. The staff serve at the pleasure of the Lead Pastor and are not subject to direction by the board of directors or any other person within the church. Elders and small group leaders provide pastoral care, discipleship, outreach, and are an extension of the ministry of the Lead Pastor. The board of directors, unknown in the early church, functions to guard the corporate trust and the safety of the congregation. In accordance with secular governmental requirements, the board is responsible for finances, facilities, and may remove the Lead Pastor for cause (e.g., immorality, incompetence, nonperformance of duties). Our form of church government seeks to foster a team-based approach to ministry, promote a strong pastor model where he and his staff have freedom to lead, affirm the priesthood of all believers through the importance of elders, various/numerous small group servant (deacon and deaconess) leaders, and provide strong governance to protect the overall mission of the local assembly.

Note: The two Manchester campus pastors (English congregation and French Congregation) function in the same capacity as Chelmsford's lead pastor with the board of directors providing supervision, coaching, financial and facility oversight.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

Paul's focus in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 is on the inner transformation into Christlikeness observable in the life of the leader. Leadership is not based solely on natural talent or intellect; rather, the emphasis is on spiritual maturity and the visible evidence of God's work in an individual's life (Matthew 16:24; Acts 4:13; 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5; 4:6; 11:1; 2 Corinthians 4:7–18; Philippians 3:17).

A Noble Calling

This is a saying to be trusted: "Whoever aspires to the office of pastor desires an excellent work." v.1 (The N.T. in the Language of the People by Charles B. Williams).

The "call" to spiritual leadership is affirmed by the work of the Holy Spirit, who produces the desire ("the heart," NIV) to serve. This is a noble and honorable work, requiring men of integrity to carry out its responsibilities. It is important to distinguish between "aspiring" and "ambition." Ambition often seeks position and power, primarily focusing on outcomes. In contrast, aspiration centers on service and transformation, valuing the process and the people involved more than personal status.

The Function

To be an "overseer" or "bishop" (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7; 2 Peter 2:25) means to watch over and protect. The Greek term *episkopos* combines "epi" (over) and "skopos" (watcher), describing the role of spiritual vigilance. The New Testament uses three words interchangeably for the church's spiritual leader: overseer, elder (*presbuteros*), and pastor (*poimen*) (Acts 20:17–28; 1 Peter 5:1–5). These terms highlight the multifaceted responsibilities entrusted to church leadership: oversight, maturity, and shepherding care. This unified vision underscores the seriousness and honor of the calling, as well as the necessity for humility and devotion in serving the body of Christ.

Qualifications

Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. vv. 2-3

The inner life of a pastor must be reflected in outward spiritual maturity and integrity. If married, he is to be completely faithful to his wife, self-controlled, modest, and welcoming to strangers. He must avoid addiction to alcohol or other substances, refrain from violence, and exhibit gentleness rather than contentiousness. The overseer is not to be a lover of wealth. A critical qualification is the ability to teach the bible (*didaktikos*: 1 Tim 3:2; 4:3; 5:17; 2 Tim 2:24-25; 4:2; Titus 1:9). This involves more than a willingness or readiness to explain God's word; it means being inspired by the Holy Spirit, engaging in prayer and diligent study, and applying the teaching both personally and within the congregation.

Home Life

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household how will he care of God's church? vv. 4-5

If married, the pastor's family life should mirror his spiritual character. The church is fundamentally a family, and the home of a prospective leader is the proving ground for pastoral ministry. If there are children in the home, the behavior of his children serves as a barometer of his character and his ability to lead in the church setting (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:1-4; 2 Timothy 3:15-16). A leader's integrity and guidance within the home naturally flow into his effectiveness in shepherding God's people. Fostering a nurturing, disciplined, and loving environment at home lays the foundation for wise and compassionate oversight in the church.

In response to a question posed by a Pharisee, Jesus speaks about marriage, divorce, singlehood, and children (cf. Matthew 19). Jesus' response reveals four necessities for successful relationships.

- Authority v. 4: Jesus' appeal is to the scriptures as authoritative (Genesis 2:24; Mk 10:8-9; Matthew 19:6). God has an order for all human relationships (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:22-33; 6:1-4).
- Priority v. 5: Clinging only to one another (single's priority is to be devoted to the Lord, 1 Cor 7:32-35). It is "we" before "me" with the result being unity within the marriage.
- Intimacy vv. 5-6: The two becoming one flesh is physical and emotional knowledge of one another. Intimacy is the fire and marriage is the fireplace.
- Mercy 18:21-35: The context is about a servant and king. Jesus answers Peter's question about how many times forgiveness is necessary. People who are close to each other end up disappointing and hurting each other due to their own sinfulness. Offering forgiveness first brings healing. If divorced forgive your spouse. If an adult, forgive your parents.

Maturity and Reputation

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. v. 6

A pastor must be a seasoned and mature believer, someone who has faced both success and failure in his Christian walk. The greatest challenge often comes with success, which can lead to pride—a common spiritual danger (see Matthew 20:26; John 3:30; James 1:12; 3:1; Heb13:7).

Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. v. 7

The pastor must also have a good reputation with those outside the church. He must be able to navigate the complexities of a sinful world without compromising his witness for Christ. Spiritual leaders are engaged in a spiritual battle, with the enemy specifically targeting pastors and overseers. If a pastor is disqualified through moral failure, it can undo much good and even lead to the pastor's personal downfall (see 1 Corinthians 9:24-10:3; 1 Timothy 6:9).

So, What? Now, What?

The leadership of Calvary Chapel is committed to lead by example, embracing a collaborative and collegiate style of leadership. Ultimately, their aim is to see Christ exalted and Christ formed in every

believer (Galatians 4:19). **Read:** Hebrews 13:7–19. **Reflect:** Consider the role of spiritual leaders in your life. In what ways can you learn from them? Paul requests two things from the saints: obedience and prayer. Reflect on how these can benefit you. **Resolve:** Write a prayer asking God to help the spiritual leaders of the church remain faithful to their calling to care for people. Use available resources for guidance. Consider also writing a note of encouragement to a small group leader or another leader who has helped you grow spiritually over the past year.

Resources:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/seven-ways-to-pray-for-your-leaders>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/ordination.html>