

SESSION 4: GETTING OUR LEADERSHIP REQUIREMENTS RIGHT
I TIMOTHY 3: 1-16

Overseers and Deacons

¹Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer,^[a] he desires a noble task. ²Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

⁸Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

¹¹In the same way, their wives^[b] are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

¹²A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. ¹³Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

¹⁴Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, ¹⁵if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. ¹⁶Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:

He^[c] appeared in a body,^[d]
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory.

Footnotes:

- a. [1 Timothy 3:1](#) Traditionally bishop; also in verse 2
 - b. [1 Timothy 3:11](#) Or way, deaconesses
 - c. [1 Timothy 3:16](#) Some manuscripts God
 - d. [1 Timothy 3:16](#) Or in the flesh
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OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

1. God intends the church to have pastors. Church history has been filled with the extremes of ‘clericalism’ which focuses on the priority and privileges of clergy over laity, and ‘anti-clericalism’ which underscores excesses of the clergy to justify the rule of the laity in the church. Churches and denominations have been established along this line of divide.

From biblical practice, it is safe to assume that some kind of pastoral oversight is God’s will for his people. On their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas ‘*appointed elders...in each church*’ (Acts 14:23). Christ himself gave some to his church ‘*to be pastors and teachers*’ (Eph.4:11). The Holy Spirit assigns ‘*overseers*’ to God’s flock (Acts 20:28). Paul left Titus in Crete to ‘*appoint elders in every town*’ (Tit.1:5), and here, Timothy was to appoint leaders that conform to the list of criteria.

2. In NT times, *episkopos* (overseer, bishop) and *presbyteros* (presbyter, elder) were two titles for the same office. *Presbyteros* was Jewish in origin as every synagogue had its elders. *Episkopos* was Greek in origin and was used of municipal officials, supervisors of cities, etc. It could be seen that *episkopos* was borrowed from Greek institutions and denotes the functions of rule and superintending, while *presbyteros* was borrowed from Jewish institutions and points to the dignity of the office.

3. Deacons are differentiated, but it is unclear what their roles are that were different from the elders. Traditionally, in secular society, the *diakonos* was the one who gave lowly service, especially the waiter at the table (Jn.2:5,9). In Greek eyes, serving is not very dignified. But, Jesus reversed this perception. He asked, ‘*Who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves*’ (Lk.22:27).

Seven deacons were appointed in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:2), entrusted with practical administration like the distribution of food, funds and clothing to the needy. However, their spiritual qualifications were also high, for they ‘*must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience*’ (v9), suggesting that they were also assisting elders in the teaching ministry.

John Collins in his work, *Diakonia* (1990) conducted an exhaustive survey of the *diakon* word group in both Christian and non Christian ancient sources, and concluded that the *diakonos* was essentially a ‘go-between’, both in word (a messenger) and in deed (an authorized agent). It is not a menial, humble service but rather the role of a representative.

Paul, in this chapter, outlines the criteria for choosing **overseers, deacons** and also the **nature of the church** that necessitates the roles and functions of these leaders.

The Overseers

4. *'Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task'* (v1). Almost all English translations and most commentators attribute this reliable proverb (*trustworthy saying*) to 3:1 rather than to 2:15: *'women will be saved through childbearing...'*

'set his heart on...' means literally to 'stretch oneself, reach out one's hand' for; so *'to aspire to'* (REB, NRSV). Paul sees the leadership role in the church as a *'noble task'*. He considers the care and nurture of the people of God to be a privilege. The task of caring for God's flock is not a burden or an inconvenience. It seems that ministry leadership has 3 essentials: the call of God; the inner aspiration and conviction of the individual; and the conscientious screening of the candidate against the requirements listed in this passage.

The first general requirement is that *'the overseer must be above reproach'*. Obviously, it does not mean faultless or no one can meet this criterion. It is a reference to public reputation, which Gordon Fee describes as *'irreproachable observable conduct'*. Understanding that this depends on who you ask, it seems to provide warrant for requiring references or testimonials to ascertain a candidate's reputation in the context of the source. What follows in our text is a kind of questionnaire that evaluates 10 areas of the candidate's life.

5. Fidelity in Marriage

'the husband of one wife' or *'married only once'* (NRSV) is a subject of long and anxious contemporary debate. Is Paul excluding

- Those who have never been married? Apparently, he assumes that pastors would normally be married, as were the other apostles (I Cor.9:5). But, he is not intending to mean that those who are single or childless (v5) should not lead. Both Jesus and Paul indicated that there are those who are called to be single (Mt.19:10-11; I Cor.7:7).
- Those who are polygamists? Although technically forbidden by Roman law, polygamy was widely practised, and tolerated in Jewish culture. 2nd C apologist Justin Martyr in his *Dialog with Trypho* wrote of *'imprudent and blind'* Jewish teachers *'who even till this time permit each man to have four or five wives.'* But, there is no evidence Christians ever practiced polygamy.
- Those who have divorced and remarried? Divorce and remarriage were frequent in Graeco-Roman society and Jews were not exempt. Jesus seems to have allowed divorce to the innocent party when the other has been guilty of serious sexual sin (Mt.5:31-32; 19:9). Paul also seems to have allowed a newly converted person whose spouse remained unconverted and was unwilling to continue the marriage to divorce (I Cor.7:12). If this were not extended to leaders, then would we have erected a double standard? Perhaps, but it could also be argued that leaders are called to a higher moral standard as they are to lead by example as well as words.
- Those who are widowed and remarried? OT priests were not permitted to marry widows (Lv.21:14; Eze.44:22). Several early church fathers interpreted Paul's prohibition in this way. Most vocal was Tertullian who

urged his wife, if he were to die first, 'to refrain from marrying and have done with sex forever.' Tertullian applied this to widowed men too: 'For men who have been married twice are not allowed to preside in the Church.' His extreme views stipulated that to have two wives successively is no better than to have two wives simultaneously. However, the NT specifically permits the remarriage of widows and widowers. To forbid pastors to marry after the demise of their first wife would be similar to false teachers who did not allow marriage altogether (4:3).

- Those who are guilty of married unfaithfulness. He is making a positive and general requirement that church leaders should be 'faithful to his one wife' (NEB). This seems to fit the context best. Leaders must have an unblemished reputation in the area of sex and marriage.

6. **Self Mastery**

'*temperate*' means sober, *not* sombre. The leader has to be clear headed.

'*self controlled*' means sensible, disciplined.

'*respectable*' means outward expression of inward self-control.

"How shall I be able to rule over others if I have not full power and command over myself?" – Francois Rabelais, 16th C French satirist.

7. **Hospitality**

'*hospitable*' is making space for others, in our hearts and home. Only when we have mastered ourselves can self giving be possible. *Hospitality* literally means 'love for strangers' and is urged on all Christians in the NT (Rom.12:13; I Pet.4:9; 3 Jn.5), but especially on Christian leaders (v2; Tit.1:8). In days when there were no hotels and roadside inns were scarce, dirty and unsavory, itinerant preachers needed hospitality extended to them (Phm.22; 3Jn.5-8). We never know when we are entertaining angels.

8. **Teaching Ability**

This 'professional' qualification stands out in a list of moral requirements. Since the Word of God is primary in ministry, it follows that pastors are teachers. The church has no liberty to ordain any whom God has not called and gifted.

9. **Alcohol Consumption**

It is worth noting that '*not given to drunkenness*' follows '*able to teach*'.

Drinking and teaching do not go well together, as people look up to God's leaders for words of direction, healing and instruction.

Priests in the OT were forbidden to drink on duty. While drunk, Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu were presumptuous in offering 'unauthorized fire before the Lord' (Lv.10:1ff). Kings and rulers were not to drink lest they forget the country's laws and 'deprive the oppressed of their rights' (Pr.31:4ff; 20:1; 23:19ff, 29 ff). Magistrates who were 'heroes at drinking wine' would pervert justice, acquitting the guilty and punishing the innocent (Isa.5:22-23). Prophets, when 'befuddled with wine' would not be able to teach (Isa.28:7ff).

Paul did not require leaders to be teetotalers, since Jesus himself changed water into wine, and made wine the emblem of his blood. While there are many dangers to excessive drinking, Paul requires moderation as an example of self mastery.

10. **Temper and Temperament**

'not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome' (v3).

In contrast to false teachers who were characterized by conceit, quarrelsomeness and strife (6:3ff), Christian leaders are to be gentle above all. The word means graciousness with an element of yieldingness. 'Sweet reasonableness' or 'the meekness and gentleness of Christ' by which Paul appealed to the Corinthians (2 Cor.10:1 cf Mt.11:29). Since gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit, it should characterize all Christians, but especially leaders.

A gentle leader is not violent, a bully 'with the tongue or hand', nor quarrelsome. Since aggression is a defensive behavior that masks an inadequacy or pain, a leader's gentle spirit would enable him to minister healing and mediate restoration.

11. **Attitude to Money**

Paul considers the love of money 'the root of all kinds of evil' (6:10). It makes sense then that he wants to ensure a ministry leader is *'not a lover of money'* (v3), in contrast with false teachers who were (6:5; 2Tim.3:2). In the ancient world as today, there are quacks who pose as itinerant teachers making a good living. In OT, there were judges who took bribes, priests who taught for a price, and prophets who told fortunes for cash (Mi.3:11). In NT, Peter urged pastors 'not to be greedy for money but eager to serve' (I Pet.5:2).

Samuel at the end of his life challenged Israel, "*Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken?... Whom have I cheated?...From whose hand have I accepted a bribe...?*" *'You have not cheated or oppressed us,' the people replied*" (I Sam.12:1ff). In a similar vein, Paul challenged the Ephesian elders, "*I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions*" (Acts 20:32 ff).

12. **Domestic Discipline**

'He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)' (v4-5).

Paul compares the pastor's family with God's church. The pastor is called to lead two families – his own and God's. If he cannot lead his own family, he will fail in leading God's family. Eli is a warning to us, for both his sons were immoral and greedy, but Eli 'failed to restrain them' (I Sam.3:13).

To *'manage'* is to lead, the word combines both the concepts of 'rule' and 'care'. There is a ring of authority to the task of the pastor. Church leadership seems to be a high calling as pastors are 'to be faithful to his one wife' (v2 NEB), his children 'submissive and respectful in every way' (v4 NRSV) and be Christian believers (Tit.1:6).

13. **Spiritual Maturity**

'He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil' (v6).

The word for *recent convert* is 'neophyte', referring to one who is newly implanted in Christ. Paul says the main danger in appointing a new convert to leadership is pride. *Conceited* is a colorful word meaning 'becloud' or 'smoke'. It describes people who live in a self-centered fantasy 'la-la' land. They will *fall under the same judgment as the devil*; pride will be judged, whether it is displayed by the devil or church elders. Humility is the expression of spiritual maturity that must mark Christian leaders.

14. **Outside Reputation**

'He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap' (v7).

Paul is referring to the 'non Christian public' (NEB) when he talked about *outsiders*. He reminds us that the world is watching us, so we need to win their respect with our behavior. What is essential here is that Paul thinks that Christian leadership is a public office requiring public esteem. Otherwise the ministry will *fall into disgrace and...the devil's trap*.

The devil is maliciously eager to discredit the gospel. So he targets Christian leaders, a most effective strategy for all time.

The Deacons

15. Since *diakonos* was a waiter at table, and *diakonein* refers to social service, it stands to reason that 'deacons' are thought to have specialized in practical administration and ministry. However, that *'they must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience'* (v9) indicates they must have a firm grasp of the faith, suggesting they are expected to teach it, which was the chief task of the overseers. So, instead of restricting deacons to social and administrative responsibilities, it may be better to think of them as assistants to overseers in the ministry.

16. Since the qualifications for deacons are similar to elders, they need not be detailed again, except to highlight 4 areas:

- **Self Mastery:** 4 words in v8 underscore this requirement – '*men worthy of respect*' ('men' is not in the Greek sentence); '*sincere*', literally 'not double tongued' or 'not indulging in double-talk' (REB); '*not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain*', translated 'with no squalid greed for money' (JB).

In the 4 areas of their **behavior, speech, use of alcohol, and attitude to money**, deacons are to have control over themselves.

- **Orthodox Convictions:** *'They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience'* (v9). *'Deep truths'* translates to *'mystery'* (v16), which is the corpus of revealed truths of the faith. Deacons are to hold fast to the truth *'with a clear conscience'*, that is, with sincere and strong conviction.
- **Approved:** *'They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons'* (v10). They are to *'undergo a scrutiny'* (NEB), suggesting a period of probation in which the candidates' character, beliefs and gifts can be assessed. Only when cleared can they serve.
- **Exemplary Home:** *'In the same way, their wives are to be women of respect...'* (v11). Literally, it reads, *'Women likewise...'*, meaning it could refer to deacons' wives or deaconesses. If it refers to deaconesses, then *'their wives'* would be awkward since elders' wives are not mentioned (NIV added the unwarranted *'their'*). We already know from Phoebe that there were women deacons at that time (Rom.16:1). Other commentators are of the opinion that reference to deacons' wives makes for a more natural reading, and explaining the correspondence between elders' wives (v2) and deacons' wives (v12). In either case, women are to be *worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything'* (v11).

Turning unquestionably to deacons again, Paul says *'a deacon must be the husband of one wife and must manage his children and his household well'* in the same way an elder does (v2,4-5).

Deacons *'who have served well'* (v13) will gain two things:

- **excellent standing**, denoting a step, grade or rank, maybe hinting a promotion to be elders? More likely, it refers to spiritual standing, gaining honor in God's esteem or even a *'step'* in the soul's journey heavenward (Arndt & Gingrich's Greek-English Lexicon of the NT).
- **Great assurance in their faith in Jesus Christ** : *assurance* being freedom of speech or boldness before God or others. Faithful service will increase their Christian confidence.

17. Core Christian qualities all leaders are to demonstrate in the two listings can be grouped into 5 areas: i) **Self Control and Maturity**: especially with drink, money, temper and tongue. ii) **Family**: faithful to wife and ability to discipline children. iii) **Relationships**: hospitable and gentle. iv) **Outsiders**: highly esteemed. v) **Faith**: strong in grasp of faith and gifted in teaching it.

Because Christian leadership involves such self giving, Paul lauds it *'a noble task'*. Both the words for elders (*episkopos*) and deacons (*diakonos*) are applied to Jesus in the NT. He is called *'the Shepherd and Overseer (episkopos) of our souls'* (I Pet.2:25) and Jesus said he came *to serve (diakonein)* (Mk.10:45). Ministry leaders follow in their Lord's footsteps.

The Church

18. The strict spiritual and moral standards required of Christian leaders are required because of the nature of the church which the elders and deacons lead. *'I am writing you these instructions so that...you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in **God's household**, which is **the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth**' (v15).*
- **God's household:** The church is both God's house (I Cor.3:16; I Pet.2:5) and God's household (Heb.3:5-6; I Pet.4:17). Since it has been used 3 times in this chapter (v4,5,12) to refer to a household or family, it will be consistent to see the church as the family of God, into which we enter by the new birth of the Spirit, making all believers our brothers and sisters. In God's family, we have equal dignity, regardless of age, gender, race or culture (Gal.3:26ff). We are called to love, forbear and support one another in reciprocity of Christian fellowship.
 - **The church of the living God:** In the OT, Yahweh is identified as 'the living God' in contrast to the lifeless idols of the heathen. Joshua asserted that *'the living God is among you'* (Jos.3:10), reflecting God's promise to Israel, *'I will dwell among you and be your God, and you shall be my people'* (Ex.25:8; 29:45-46). This consciousness of God's presence was very real among His people. The Christian church is the 'temple of the living God' (2 Cor.6:16) in which God dwells by His Spirit (Eph.2:22). When the church comes together to worship as the *ekklesia* (assembly), every aspect of our common life is enriched by the knowledge of His presence (Mt.18:20). Our witness in the world becomes bolder and more urgent, and pre-believers will acknowledge that 'God is really among you' (I Cor.14:25).
 - **The pillar and foundation of the truth:** The foundation or buttress supports and stabilizes a building. In the same way, the church is responsible to hold the truth steady against the storms of heresy and unbelief. The pillar or column holds the roof firm and is hoisted high so it can be seen from far. Similarly, the church is to hold the truth high so it can be seen and acknowledged by the world. These are the twin duties of the church to the truth: as foundation so false doctrines cannot destabilize and destroy the church; as pillar holding the truth in high visibility so it is not hidden from the world.
19. The truth the church must uphold and defend concerns Jesus Christ. Paul sees the truth as *'the mystery of godliness'* since we know it only because God has revealed it. The truth also focuses on Christ, making truth the mystery of Christ (Co. 1:26-27; 2:2-3; 4:3). Paul explicates this mystery in rehearsing an early hymn or creed: *'He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory'* (v16).

We can understand this verse in either of 3 ways:

- It can be read chronologically. Each statement is an event or stage in Christ's life from His first coming to His second, from His appearance in the flesh to his welcome in glory. '*Appeared in a body*' would refer to the incarnation. '*Vindicated by the Spirit*' by his mighty works of miracles and supremely by the resurrection. '*Seen by angels*' who were present watching the unfolding drama of salvation. '*Preached among the nations*' as the church obeys the Great Commission in its global missionary enterprise. '*Believed on in the world*' as the Gospel succeeds. '*Taken up in glory*' would refer to Christ's Second Coming, or to the ascension which foreshadows His final epiphany in power and great glory.
- A second more popular reading is to divide the hymn in two stanzas, each containing a triplet. The first alludes to the historical incarnate Jesus on earth (*appeared, was vindicated, and seen*). The second refers to the exalted Lord (*preached, believed on, and glorified*).
- The third rendition has the hymn divided into 3 couplets, in which there is a deliberate antithesis: between flesh and spirit, between angels and nations, between world and glory. The first couplet speaks of the revelation of Christ in the human and divine aspects of his earthly ministry (*appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit*). The second couplet identifies the witnesses of Christ beyond Palestine to all inhabitants of heaven and earth, to angels and humans, to the nations as well as Jews (*was seen by angels, was preached among the nations*). The third couplet shows how Christ was received with recognition and acclaim on earth and in heaven (*was believed on in the world, was taken into glory*).

The surest way to effective leadership in the church is to understand the essential identity, goal and nature of the church.

APPLICATION

1. The 3 criteria for leadership - aspiration, aptitude and attitude - are even more pronounced in Christian/church leadership. All three have to be delicately balanced for engaging, motivating and inspiring leadership. What are some examples of failure in any dimension resulting in the breakdown of leadership completely?
2. If church leadership is a *noble task*, then why are the material sacrifices so high? How does this contrast with Paul's teaching on a pastor/teacher's remuneration (5:17-18)? Where do we begin to redress this anomaly?

David Livingstone, the celebrated missionary to Africa who laid aside his medical career in Scotland, was noted for his lonely labor in great hardship in the field. 'He was attacked and maimed by a lion, his home was destroyed during the Boer war, he body was often racked by fever and dysentery, and his wife died on the field' (*The Christian Hall of Fame*, Baker, 1971). A lady once remarked to Livingstone how much he had sacrificed for the Gospel. Livingstone, angered by this comment responded, "Sacrifice? The only sacrifice is to live outside the will of God!"

3. There is an 'inside-outside' consideration of a church leader's reputation. S/he is to *be above reproach* and to *have nothing against them* from the church, and at the same time *have a good reputation with outsiders*. How does a Christian/church leader maintain good relationships with the community and 'contend for righteousness in an age of lawlessness' at the same time?
4. How much responsibility can a Christian/church leader bear for his/her family? Would it be necessary for the church to protect the pastor's family by ensuring the pastor has adequate time for his/her family so as not to alienate his/her spouse and especially children? How can we ensure that a pastor's children turn out to be paragons of Christian virtue? Do we not know of great Christian leaders' children turning away from the faith?
5. Is truth the foundation for the church or is the church the foundation for truth? Paul described the church as '*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets* (ie their teaching), *with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone*' (Eph.2:20). By this, he was referring to the church's life and health. The church depends on it and cannot exist without it. But when Paul taught that the church is the foundation of the truth (v15), he was talking about the mission of the church. The church is called to serve the truth, to hold it fast and make it known. The church and truth are interdependent. The church depends on truth for its existence; the truth depends on the church for its defence and proclamation.
6. If the church is all about Jesus Christ, and the leaders' calling and accountability are from and to Christ, and the need of the world is for Jesus Christ, what does that say about a Christian/church leader's priority, the church's mission and relations with the community, and how we should take care of our leaders?