



**Sunday School Lesson for January 15, 2006
Released on January 11, 2006**

"God Calls Church Leaders"

**Printed Text: 1 Timothy 3:1-15
Background Scripture: 1 Timothy 3
Devotional Reading: Mark 9:33-37**

1 Timothy 3:1-15

1. This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

2. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

3. Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

4. One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

5. (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

6. Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

7. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

8. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

9. Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

10. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.

11. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

12. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

13. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

14. These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly:

15. But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Today's Aim

Facts: to examine Paul's instruction to Timothy regarding the qualifications for church leaders.

Principle: to teach that godly character is essential for church leadership.

Application: to encourage students to affirm leaders who possess scriptural qualifications and to pursue the same virtues in their lives.

Introduction

"Let me tell you a story about a church elder I once knew." After hearing that statement, is there any one of us who *doesn't* have a sad story that involved a church leader who besmirched the integrity of his office? On the one hand, such stories can serve as valuable case studies to help future leaders not make the same mistakes. But on the other hand, such stories can cause us to have a jaded outlook toward all church leaders.

Having a kingdom perspective makes the difference in one's attitude toward positions of leadership and toward the people in those positions. If one perceives power, control, and "calling the shots" to be the main issues of church leadership positions, then skepticism and cynicism will result. Such attitudes inhibit a willing and joyful support of church leadership.

Negative attitudes can be turned around by those who serve in leadership positions. The turnaround occurs when service comes from a love of Christ, of the church, and an opportunity for service. When that happens, the members of the church respond with a like attitude. Self or kingdom: that choice is what makes the difference in the spirit and life of a church.

Lesson Background

The apostle Paul was concerned about the care of the churches. The first-century churches needed wise oversight because of a diversity of ethnic, cultural, and

economic backgrounds. The needs were complex (compare Acts 6:1; 1 Corinthians 11:20-22; James 2:2-4). What was required was church leadership that would give proper direction, make wise decisions, and be a role model that inspired confidence and compliance on the part of its members.

So Paul set forth characteristics that were to be found in the lives of those who assume leadership responsibility in the church. Generally speaking, these characteristics should be found in every Christian's life. Those who have become mature in the ways that Paul speaks about are the ones to be considered as leaders. As such, they become examples for the entire body of believers (1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7, 8).

The term *qualifications* is most frequently associated with the listing that Paul provides in today's text. (See, for example, the title of the visual on page 172 and headings in the daily Bible readings on page 174.) This terminology can lend itself to a legalistic approach to the selection process if it means a harsh, severe demand for perfection. Perhaps a better term would be *qualities*. This does not imply a casual or indifferent approach to Paul's instructions. Nor does it compromise the traits desired for biblical leadership. Rather, the term *qualities* speaks of a type of a man whose life is exemplary and commands respect; he is one who has demonstrated ability and a Christian spirit.

Qualities of a Bishop (v. 2-7)

1. What is the meaning of the word "bishop"?

The title "bishop" is used five times in the New Testament. The title originated from a Greek word meaning "overseer." Jesus is the supreme bishop (cf. 1 Pet. 2:25), and other churches serve under Him.

It is important for the churches to understand exactly what a bishop is. In some church traditions, "bishop" has become a special term for a leader of pastors. In this case the bishop does not lead a church but leads the leaders of multiple churches.

The New Testament gives evidence that a bishop is not the leader of many others, but only of one church. A bishop is essentially a pastor of a local church.

2. How do we know that the office of bishop is the same as the office of elder?

The New Testament uses three distinct Greek words to denote *the office* that Paul is talking about. These three words come across in English as *bishop* (or overseer), *pastor* (or shepherd), and *elder*. These three are used interchangeably in the New Testament. It is a mistake to make them mean different things (compare Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Peter 5:1, 2).

We must realize that the office of elder is the highest office that God ordained in the local church. It is a single honor and privilege to serve God in this capacity. There is great responsibility in this high office. The pastor is responsible for taking care of the local church and leading his/her church in the direction God has pointed. God will

hold each elder accountable for his/her shepherding of the flock (cf. Eze. 34:1-10). If your church has a pastor, then appreciate him/her and be thankful to God for his/her leadership.

3. What are some possible interpretations of the phrase "husband of one wife"? (v.2)

Paul said that a bishop should be the husband of one wife. Some interpretations feel that this is a requirement that a bishop be married, though this is not necessarily the intent here. Others debate whether this disqualifies a divorced person from serving, or whether the issue is instead faithfulness in a current marriage. Paul's words are not specific enough to give a definite answer.

Definitely, a bishop should love his wife and treat her well. A man that dishonors or abuses his wife is definitely not fit for Christian service.

4. What does "given to wine" mean specifically? (v. 3)

Drunkenness was an issue in the Roman Empire as it is today. There is a difference between the cultural use of wine in Bible days and supporting the alcohol industry today. Often, an alcoholic (someone given to wine) is often a striker or brawler as a result of intoxication (cf. Pro. 20:1). Paul's use of striker and brawler in this verse suggests both physical and verbal fighting. A bishop should be peaceable, not eager to fight. A godly pastor would want to give the best example and not be an excuse for sin the life of a weaker brother.

5. What does "not greedy of filthy lucre" mean? (v. 3)

Greed is a major temptation for a bishop, since a bishop lives off the donations of the congregation. Many church leaders seek to enrich themselves instead of enriching the Kingdom of God. These leaders are more focused on taking care of their house while neglecting God's house. Greedy leaders who covet the wealth of others will destroy a church.

There is a movement in some parts of the church in which leaders claim that wealth is a sign of God's blessing. Such aberrant teaching is not what God is teaching.

6. How is the family a fitting proving ground for a bishop in the church? (v. 4-5)

Paul's logic is clear in recommending that bishops be perfectly good family men. A family is a good proving ground for leading a church. A father cannot lead his family by force, for children can always resist force. In the same way, a bishop cannot lead a church by force, for people cannot be compelled to behave or believe. The church is very much like a family. A man who can lovingly lead his wife and children to lives of godliness has skills that can help a local church grow in the same way.

The children of a good and kind leader will usually follow their father's leadership. Of course, there are examples of children being rebellious in spite of good parents, but these examples do not change the wisdom of Paul's guidelines. A church that is looking for a godly leader would be wise to look at family relationships.

7. How much experience should a Christian have before being considered for a leadership position in a church? (v. 6)

There is nothing wrong with a person desiring to become a leader in a church, as long as the person does it out of love for Christ. Too often, many Christians want to get in leadership positions too soon after getting saved. Many of them have not either been tested or failed tests in their lives. The biggest danger for any Christian is pride, and it's even more dangerous for a Christian leader. Spiritually immature Christians that are prideful will fail in leadership (cf. Pro. 16:18), leaders of this type can not only hurt themselves, but their church and community as well.

It is best for a bishop to have been a believer for some time and not be a brand-new follower of Jesus Christ. In other words, a bishop needs to have an excellent understanding of Scripture, and the bishop must know why he/she believes it. Those who are to become future leaders in a church need to have a proven track record with the Lord of faithfulness and perseverance.

On the other hand, Paul was not limiting church leadership to the elderly. Timothy himself was a young man (cf. 4:12). A church that is selecting a leader should see that a man has been a faithful believer for a long enough time and thus be assured that his faith is real and enduring.

Qualities of a Deacon (v. 8-13)

8. How does the deacon's work differ from the work of the bishop in the church? (v. 8-9)

The origin of the office of deacon is not certain. Only Paul used the term.

Some see a parallel between the office of deacon, which means "servant," and the seven faithful men chosen in Acts 6 to take charge of the church's ministry to widows. The responsibilities of these seven men probably included many other areas of service. Their purpose was to administer the areas of the church's work that were interfering with the leaders' ability to pray and teach the Word of God.

Bishops oversee the teaching and shepherding of the flock, corresponding to Acts 6:4, where it is said that they give themselves to "prayer, and to the ministry of the word." Deacons are servants who administer the church's service to others, corresponding to the seven chosen to serve food to the widows (cf. Acts 6:3), although there is no reason to limit the service of deacons strictly to serving food. Each church should decide for itself what areas of responsibility should be given to deacons.

9. What does the term "double-tongued" (v. 8) mean?

The qualifications of a deacon beginning in 1 Timothy 3:8 are shorter than, but similar in many ways to the ones of a bishop. A qualification for a deacon not mentioned for a bishop is that he not be double-tongued. The idea is for the deacon to not be a hypocrite, someone who says one thing and does another. Although not explicitly stated in our text, it is implied in verse 2 that the bishop should be held to

that standard as well as any church leader. Paul emphasizes this point for the deacons because the service that they render is very public. Their service is as much a serious matter as is the service by the elders.

In moving among people as they serve, deacons can fall into the trap of saying different things to different people to keep everyone happy. Hence the warning against being *double-tongued*. Deacons, as all Christians, need to be truthful consistently. This honors God.

10. Why is sound doctrine important for a deacon even if he does not teach the Word of God? (v. 9)

Paul beautifully described the dual responsibilities of a deacon to the firm in the faith and blameless in practice. Even if deacons do not actively teach the Word (though some might do so), it is still necessary that they hold to the mystery of the faith. There is so much in the New Testament faith that is not obvious to unspiritual men. Deacons cannot waver on the spiritual and revealed truths of the faith. This requirement is practical. If those administering the church's resources hold false doctrines or have doubts about the faith, they will influence the ones they minister to.

Deacons must be pure in conscience. Though they cannot be perfectly true, there must not be obvious moral blemishes, which will hurt the gospel. Deacons must live lives that are consistent with the Word of God.

In many churches that have a significant number of members, each member is assigned a deacon that he or she goes to. Members usually go to the deacon if they have problems in life that they need answers to. Deacons must be well grounded in the Word of God in order to give the members godly advice.

Qualities of the Church (v. 14-15)

11. How is the church the "pillar and ground of the truth" (v. 15)?

Paul referred to the church as "the house of God," "the church of the living God," and "the pillar and ground of the truth." The people are now God's house, as the temple building once was. The church is also the people of the living God, the God who is alive and active, not dead or unconcerned. Finally, the church is the "pillar and ground of the truth." It upholds and reveals to the world the truth of who God is and what He wants. In a way, the church is like the Bible to the world, revealing God by word and deed.

Many churches are excellent examples of the Bible to the world. Other churches have suffered scandals that not only hurt those particular churches, but their witness to the lost as well. The devil is hard at work at trying to make the Gospel ineffective to lost souls. It is imperative that all churches be the true representation of Jesus Christ to the world so that lost souls can be won over. All local churches in the world make up the Body of Christ. If one local church is out of the Will of God, then it will affect the witness of other churches. How many times has a local church scandal made state, national, and even international headlines? This is why we need to have

godly leaders in each local congregation. Each church needs to keep its leaders in prayer on a daily basis, and churches that are in need of godly leaders need to pray that godly leaders be placed there.

Conclusion

A biblical eldership does not have to rule by mandate. Better is to lead by example in Bible study, prayer, generosity, and godliness. This type of leadership inspires trust and a willingness to follow. The biblical concept of leadership is not that of a business corporation where orders are given. Church leaders are out in front leading the flock, not driving it. On a tour of the Holy Land, we observed this to be true of the Bedouin shepherds. At the start of the day they would lead their flocks to pasture. That's the way the psalmist, the shepherd David, described it. "He leadeth me beside the still waters.... he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness" (Psalm 23:2, 3).

Such leadership is all the more urgent given the doctrinal and moral laxity of our age. Young Timothy labored in a very secular culture, and so do we. At no time in history is today's passage any more relevant than now. A prayerful commitment to a restoration of the biblical practice of church government is a priority. God always honors a people committed to doing His will.

Prayer

Gracious Father, thank You for caring for Your church that was purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, Your Son. We praise You for Your wisdom in Your plan for governing it. Forgive us when we have failed to follow Your instructions. Help us in our resolve to do Your will that You may be glorified in the church. We ask it in Jesus name, amen.

Thought to Remember

Embrace God's plan for church leadership.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

In next week's lesson, we find Paul warning Timothy against apostates and instructing him on how to conduct himself and his ministry to the church. Read 1 Timothy 4:1-16.

Lesson Summarized by

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