



Sunday School Lesson for August 1, 2004.
Released on: July 27, 2004.

Study: I Timothy 3:1-13; 5:17-19. "Select Good Leaders"
Questions and answers are found below.

Devotional Reading: Acts 20:17-32
Background Scripture: I Timothy 3:1-13; 5:17-19

TIME: About A.D. 62
PLACE: unknown

I Timothy 3:1-7

- 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 behaviour, 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.

I Timothy 3:8-13

- 8 Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, 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.

I Timothy 5:17-19

17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

18 For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.

19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

LESSON AIMS

The aims of today's lesson are to:

Describe the two basic offices in the early church.

List some of the essential qualities that church officers are expected to possess.

Teach that church leaders must set the example for others in the church.

Urge students to honor church leaders and to seek to attain to the standards required of those leaders.

LESSON INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be a leader? Many people desire to be leaders, but they often forget that good leadership involves good character. Being a leader in the church is a great honor and can be a source of blessing, but the responsibilities and risks involved are sobering. For this reason the Apostle Paul was careful to outline to his protégé Timothy exactly what was required to qualify for the offices of elder and deacon.

Considering the great burden that was involved, he also dealt with the honor due to a faithful church leader.

Underlying all of the discussion of church leadership is the fact that the Christian leader operates on a different basis from that of a worldly leader. As Jesus told His disciples when they were quarreling over positions of prestige, "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:26-27).

LESSON BACKGROUND

A first-century man named Timothy received two important letters that bear his name. Timothy was Paul's son in the faith (I Timothy 1:2). Evidently Paul had no children of his own, but Timothy was like a son to him. Paul met Timothy, who was already a disciple, while on a missionary journey (Acts 16:1-5). Timothy became one of Paul's most trusted associates. Paul typically gave Timothy challenging assignments (I Corinthians 4:17; 16:10; Philippians 2:19, 22; I Thessalonians 3:2). This may explain the need for the letters of I Timothy and II Timothy.

These two letters plus Titus are grouped together in the Scriptures and are commonly referred to as the Pastoral Epistles. They live up to their designation! Paul not only gives advice on how a church is to be pastored (shepherded), he also does some pastoring himself with Timothy and Titus. One important area where these two

disciples required the apostle's counsel concerned the issue of church leaders. As the first-century church expanded, it began to require more structured leadership in local congregations.

One distinct New Testament office is that of "elder." This office is also known as an "overseer" or "bishop." (The Greek words *presbyteros* and *episkopos* that lie behind our English translations mean the same thing in Acts 20:17,28 and Titus 1:5,7). Over the centuries the word bishop has come to mean someone in authority over several churches, but that concept is not found in the New Testament.

Elders were also known as pastors or shepherds (Ephesians 4:11). Today, the term pastor is often used to designate a preaching minister, but in the New Testament it was a term used for the office of elder.

Another office was that of deacon. This is a Greek word that means "servant" in a general sense, but in certain contexts it refers to a specific office of the church. At some point in the expansion of first-century Christianity, local churches came to have both elders (or bishops or overseers) and deacons (see Philippians 1:1).

SELECT GOOD LEADERS

Leadership is one of the hot-button issues of our time. It is of crucial importance in the church as well. No one in the business world would dispute the significance a leader has on an organization. This lesson is about Paul's advice to Timothy on how to choose good leaders for the church.

Good church leaders set the pace for the church. In recent years we have seen many prominent church leaders fall into scandal, and this has affected the impact of the church on the world. We need good church leaders. A good church takes the direction of good church leaders.

QUALITIES OF ELDERS (I Timothy 3:1-7)

Desire (v. 1)

It is indeed an honorable thing to desire to be a Christian leader. There is such a thing as selfish ambition (Luke 22:24-27), but that is not the same as the humble desire and willingness to lead.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. What is meant by the term "bishop" (I Tim. 3:1)?

The term "bishop" is used only six times in the King James Version of the Bible, and all but one of these instances are in the Pastoral Epistles and refer to church leaders (in I Peter 2:25 the term is used in reference to Christ). The word is used to emphasize the exercise of oversight in the church. It is employed interchangeably in the New Testament with the word "elder" (I Tim. 5:19; I Peter 5:5), depending perhaps on whether the writer wished to accent the function of the office or the wisdom of the persons holding the office.

Blameless and Faithful (vv. 2a, 2b)

The general idea of being above reproach cannot, of course, be taken as an absolute—otherwise we would expect leaders to be perfect as God is perfect! It is more the idea that no one should look at a prospective elder and think, "Oh, no! Not him!"

Most students agree the phrase "...the husband of but one wife," means that an elder must be, or must have been, married. Is Paul making that an absolute requirement? If so, neither he nor Jesus could have been an elder. (And, of course, neither of them was an elder!) There is no doubt that some qualities of pastoral care are learned best in family life.

What of those who were once married but are no longer? Very few believe Paul means to exclude widowers. Literally, husband of but one wife is a "one-wife man" or even a "one-woman [kind of] man." (The word for wife in the Greek is simply the word for woman.) We can be certain that a bigamist, or man with a mistress, could not be considered. The issue the church struggles with today is whether or not a divorced man may be an elder. If we take this to mean "a one-woman [kind of] man," then the issue is the man's own personal faithfulness. Even if a man's wife has been unfaithful, he may still very well be a one-woman man. Many churches look at this issue on a case-by-case basis.

What is indisputable is that the quality of a person's marriage affects his ability to lead.

2. How is it possible for an elder to be "blameless" (vs. 2)?

The qualification, that a man be "blameless" (I Tim. 3:2), does not mean that he will never do anything wrong. The meaning here is that an elder should be one whose general pattern of life cannot be justly condemned by the community around him.

Disciplined and Hospitable (vv. 2c, 2d)

These virtues almost speak for themselves. Being temperate and self-controlled both point to the ability to control one's desires. (See also Titus 1:8.) Respectable includes the idea of living an honorable life.

Hospitable is literally to be a "lover of strangers." It refers to the willingness to give food or shelter to travelers or visitors. Traveling prophets and evangelists were in particular need of such hospitality. Paul himself was a recipient of this type of kindness. And, how often we ought to be reminded: "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Heb. 13:1-2).

3. Why was hospitality so important in the early church (vs. 2)?

Hospitality was essential for the church in the ancient world. Persecuted believers needed havens of encouragement and safety, traveling evangelists needed places to stay, and the poor needed support. The leaders of the church needed to set an example in this area, especially since churches often met in people's homes (Acts 2:46; Rom 16:5). An elder today should show the same willingness to meet the needs of God's people.

Communicator (v. 2e)

Being able to teach does not require an elder to be a distinguished orator or dynamic speaker. But he should be able to explain the gospel, at least in a private setting. Teaching is a spiritual gift listed in Romans 12:7 and Ephesians 4:11.

Since an elder is a leader of the church, he of course must be able to communicate the truths of the faith. Not every elder needs to have the gifts of a trained pastor (1 Tim. 5:17), but he must be well-grounded in the faith and able to communicate effectively.

Not Addicted (v. 3a)

Wine was common in the ancient world, and its dangers were well known then as now. Passages such as Proverbs 21:17; 23:20, 21, 29-32 are very plain on the dangers of alcohol. There are practical and spiritual reasons for modern Christians to practice total abstinence, but that subject is not addressed here. Paul's restriction logically may be extended to all unhealthy addictions to the various legal and illegal drugs that confront us in news reports every day.

Temperament (v. 3b)

There is a certain overlap between the ideas of being violent and quarrelsome, and the latter can lead to the former. We perhaps should not see these ideas as unconnected from the discussion of drunkenness earlier in this verse when we consider that those who abuse alcohol are frequently the ones who get into fights.

Someone who is a lover of money undoubtedly is in violation of the Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:17). We should be careful to remember that the acquisition of wealth is not a sin in and of itself. But both those who need money and those who already have plenty are in danger of developing a sinful attitude. See I Timothy 6:10.

Orderly Family (vv. 4, 5)

Once again there is a point of controversy here. Does this verse mean that the elder must have children, or is Paul simply discussing the typical or normal situation? There are men today who will not allow themselves to be considered for the office of elder because they take what Paul says quite literally.

It is certainly truly that lessons learned from managing one's own family can affect how well a man serves as an elder. If a church leader has not displayed leadership in his home, he will find it difficult to exercise leadership in the church. Many leadership and interpersonal skills learned in the home will work in the church.

4. Why is it especially important that an elder be an effective leader of his family (vv. 4,5)?

In a certain sense, the church is like a family, for believers are brethren in Christ and serve their heavenly Father. A person's earthly family, then, serves as an instructive training and proving ground for a prospective elder. The elder must preside over and manage his family in a manner that commands respect.

It is especially important that the elder's children be characterized by obedience. For the leader, this is best accomplished not by being a loud and unruly tyrant but by displaying a firm and dignified approach that will earn their respect (Eph. 6:4). Paul

then followed with a persuasive rhetorical question. Obviously, if a man cannot handle his own family he will be unable to handle the problems of the church, where the complexities and dangers that he deals with are even greater.

Spiritual Maturity (v. 6)

If we take the Greek word translated recent convert and pronounce it in English it comes out as our word neophyte. The danger of selecting a recent convert or neophyte to be elder is quite clear, and the Bible talks about the issue of pride (being conceited) in numerous places (e.g., Proverbs 11:2; 13:10; 16:18; Romans 12:16). Spiritually mature believers truly know what it means to bear the responsibility of being an elder. This knowledge will create the humility that a leader needs.

5. Why is it unwise to elevate an untested man to the eldership (vs. 6)?

An elder should not be a "novice," or a newly planted believer. The tendency of young people to overestimate their own capacities and to be caught up in self-glorification holds true in the spiritual realm as well. With spiritual maturity and the experience of life's dangers and personal failures comes a measure of humility.

If a young believer is prematurely elevated to a position of leadership, he is in danger of failing under condemnation, just as Satan did for his pride (Isa. 14:12-15). Satan, of course, loves to catch people in such snares (II Tim. 2:26). A prideful man glories in himself rather than in God. This is why the Lord hates a prideful spirit and warns of its destructiveness (Prov. 16:18).

Good Reputation (v. 7)

Leaders should be respected. This should be true not just among Christians, but also by the community as a whole. Can the church really have a good witness if its leaders are known scoundrels?

In a world that looks more to image than character, the church must hold true to God's Word in regard to leadership. Nowhere is this more important than in the selection of leadership for the local congregation. What a leader does "separate from the church" affects the work in leading the church of the Lord Jesus. Character qualities such as being disciplined, peaceable, and above reproach are necessary in a world that too often values the opposite. Case in point, what character qualities do we expect of role models?

6. Why is it necessary for an elder to have a good reputation (vs. 7)?

Elders need to be well thought of among the unsaved people living around them. God's reputation and the testimony of the church are at stake. If because of questionable actions a man has made himself an easy target for rumor and personal attacks, he cannot represent the church well. Satan likes nothing more than to put God's people in such situations and perhaps lead them into further sin.

QUALITIES OF DEACONS (I Timothy 3:8-13)

Respectable and Sincere (vv. 8a, 8b)

An important way for a deacon to become worthy of respect is by conducting himself with dignity and seriousness. Can you imagine what it would be like for a church to have deacons who took nothing seriously, who had a flippant or jokey attitude toward everything? A godly deacon is sincere; he is not someone who says one thing to one person and something completely different to another.

Not Addicted (v. 8c)

Just as elders, deacons must not be addicted to and refrain from all unhealthy addictions to the various legal and illegal drugs that confront us in news reports every day.

7. What is the basic meaning of the term "deacon," and what is the deacon's chief responsibility (vs. 8)?

The term "deacon" refers to one who serves. But here Paul uses this word to refer to a specific office of the church. The term occurs only here and in Philippians 1:1, although it is generally agreed that the basic scope of the office is laid out in Acts 6:1-5. While the elders take charge of the worship and spiritual instruction of the church, the deacons deal with the physical needs of the flock.

Having a Pure Conscience (v. 9)

The deep truths that were a great mystery to those who lived in Old Testament times have now been more fully revealed as the gospel of Christ (Romans 16:25, 26). What was once hidden is now made known (Colossians 1:26). Paul desperately wants all believers to know these truths (Ephesians 3:1-6). Deacons need to understand these great truths of the faith and believe them with a clear conscience.

8. What is meant by the phrase "mystery of the faith" (vs. 9)?

As it is used in Scripture, the term "mystery"...is not something mysterious and incomprehensible but a truth unknown but now divinely revealed to the believer. When Paul referred to a mystery, he was most often referring to the glory of Christ's incarnation or His dwelling among His people (I Tim. 3:16; Eph. 1:9-10; 3:2-6; 5:32; 6:19).

Tested (v. 10)

Some students think that the idea of being tested suggests that an apprenticeship for deacons is appropriate. Whatever means of testing is used, the end result must be that nothing can be said against potential deacons, as was required for potential elders (see vs. 2).

Family Conduct (vv. 11-3)

The conduct of their wives will reveal the quality of a potential deacon's home life. As with elders, a deacon is very unlikely to be able to take care of the church if his home life is chaotic (see vs. 4, and vv. 12,13).

Again, the ideas here mirror what Paul has already said in verse 4. After reminding Timothy that deacons are also to be good husbands and fathers, Paul commends deacons for their significant work. Does the mention of an excellent standing and great assurance speak to the deacon's being respected in the eyes of God, the eyes of the church, or the eyes of the community? It could be all three.

We should pause to note that there is nothing in these verses to indicate that the office of deacon is to be considered some kind of stepping-stone to the office of elder. Some might remain deacons for the rest of their lives. Each office has a purpose in the church. The two have different functions, but both are important.

CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITIES (I Timothy 5:17-19)

Show Appreciation to Leaders (vv. 17,18)

Godly leaders are so important! Churches must not neglect their obligations to them. Selecting leaders with high integrity and good character is vital for the success of a church. But an often overlooked ingredient in the successful church is the need for good followers. Good followers show respect for their leaders.

9. What is implied by the expression "double honour" (5:17)?

The double honour that is referred to could mean simply that effective elders should receive a special measure of praise and recognition. But in light of verse 18 and of Paul's previous discussion of supporting widows (vs. 3), we should probably also understand this to refer to financial support for elders who are in need and who devote a large amount of time to the ministry of the Word.

Believers need to recognize the commitment of time involved in teaching and preaching the Word of God effectively.

Show Fairness to Leaders (v. 19)

Leaders will always receive criticism. Sometimes they will even be the subject of slander. However, no accusation should be entertained unless two or three witnesses support it. This is consistent with Old Testament law (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15) and is consistent with what Paul told the church at Corinth (II Corinthians 13:1).

10. What is the standard for even considering a charge against an elder?

Because of his position, an elder is very likely to become the focus of attacks, whether from enemies of the gospel or from disgruntled or envious church members. The church should not even consider an accusation against an elder, much less convict him (Deut. 17:6), unless the credible evidence of two or three witnesses is available. The elder has great responsibilities. He should receive the protective support of those he seeks to serve.

CONCLUSION

The church is not immune to misconduct and incompetence from her own leaders, as we all well know. The church cannot win the world for Christ if her leaders bear the taint of wrong motives and spiritual immaturity. Today's lesson speaks not only to the church's current and future leaders, but also to those charged to support them-in other words, everyone!

Everyone agrees that leadership is complex. Some seem to exercise it intuitively. Others have to study, practice, make mistakes, and grow. While there is much the church can learn from the world on leadership techniques, the church must remember that its leaders operate by a different set of rules. There is no institution quite like the church. There is no authority quite like Christ. That is the reason we need Paul's advice. That's the reason we need the Holy Spirit's strength.

PRAYER

Gracious Father, thank you for the privilege of service in your church. Help us each to accept the responsibility that comes with the privilege. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

No church will grow beyond its leaders.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Next week we will see how we can promote a godly lifestyle. (1 Timothy 4:7-5:8).

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