

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/10/95 PM  
1 Timothy 3:1-7 "God's Design for Church Leadership"

In two weeks, we will be having our Annual Business meeting, and one of the key components will be the election of church officers. God has deigned the way churches are to operate. His plan involves leadership.

How should a church select its leaders? Should we follow the pattern communities use in obtaining school board members? Give the people several choices, let the candidates campaign, and then let the people pick the person they like best. Does God want churches to follow the popularity approach in identifying church leaders? Sadly, that's the way it often goes in churches. As Warren Wiersbe has observed (RBC, 7), "Too often the important thing is personality, not spirituality."

But what is God's design? Who does God want to lead in His Church? Who qualifies to be a church leader according to God's standard? God has not left us in the dark in this area. He has given us in written form His design for church leadership. We are going to devote two messages to discovering God's plan. Our text will be 1 Timothy 3.

Week #1: God's Design for the Overseer

Week #2: God's Design for the Deacon

It's also true that the standard God holds for leaders applies to the rest of His people as well. In a Radio Bible Class pamphlet, Who Qualifies to be a Church Leader?, this observation is made (6), "The qualifications for church leaders are, for the most part, characteristics of a person who is taking his faith in Christ seriously, growing in his knowledge of God, and maturing in his Christian life. Therefore, this study should help us examine our lives to see if we are becoming Christlike in word and action."

So whether you are currently a leader, aspiring to be a leader, or will never hold an official leadership position, this study is for you. For one, you need to know what God's standard for church leadership is. And as mentioned, this will help us grow to be more Christlike, Who is our Leader par excellence.

**Proposition: This evening, we want to ask and seek to answer three questions about the overseer from 1 Timothy 3:1-7.**

I. What is an Overseer?

A. The terms bishop (overseer), pastor, and elder are synonymous.

1. "Overseer" refers to his duty.
2. "Pastor" refers to his function.
3. "Elder" refers to his position.

B. Elders are responsible for the care of God's church.

1. This involves leading (administration, oversight).
2. This involves feeding.
3. This involves weeding (protecting the purity of the church).

II. Who can be an Overseer?

A. There are Personal requirements (2-6).

1. Desire (1)
2. Character

- Blameless (2)
- 3. Conduct
  - Husband of one wife (2)
  - Temperate (2)
  - Sober-minded (2)
  - Good behavior (2)
  - Given to hospitality (2)
  - Not given to wine (3)
  - Not violent (3)
  - Not greedy (3)
  - Patient (3)
  - Not a brawler (3)
  - Not covetous (3)
- 4. Competence
  - a. In teaching (2)
  - b. In leading (4-5)
  - c. In experience (6)--tried, tested, and proven faithful in other

areas

- B. There are Inter-personal requirements (7).
  - 1. He must have a good reputation in his homelife (4-5).
  - 2. He must have a good reputation with the unsaved (7).

### III. Why be an Overseer?

- A. It is a good work (1).
- B. There is a need.

#### I. What is an Overseer?

V 1 begins, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desires a good work." What is a bishop? To answer the question, we first need to ask, why did Paul write this letter?

Paul tells us why he wrote this instruction to Timothy in 3:15, "So that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church." Timothy wasn't he pastor per se. He was the one Paul had sent to Ephesus to establish the church, to teach the church how to function. That's why in this letter, Paul addresses such basic issues as worship, doctrine, care of widows, the role of women in the church, and the church's relationship with the world. But a church will flounder without leadership, so Paul addresses that critical issue in chapter 3. He gives attention to two types of church leaders: "bishops" (1-7) and "deacons" (8-13).

What is a "bishop" (the term used in the KJV). If we survey the New Testament, we'll discover two factors about the bishop.

#### **A. The terms bishop (overseer), pastor, and elder are synonymous.**

"Bishop" simply means "overseer" (coming from the Greek term "episkopos"). "Elder" is the translation of the Greek word "presbutes" which means literally "an old man." Elders and bishops are two names for the same office. They were mature people who were given the task of leading in the church.

Notice 1 Tim 4:14. The term "presbytery" comes from the word translated "elder" and refers here to the group of men that ordained Timothy for ministry. When you compare the list of 1 Timothy 3 (for bishop) with Titus 1 (the qualifications for "elders"), you will see that the same office is in view.

It is likely that there was a plurality of elders overseeing the work of each local church. Notice 1 Tim 5:17, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor..."

How do the three terms relate?

1. "Overseer" refers to his duty.
2. "Pastor" refers to his function.
3. "Elder" refers to his position.

We see all three terms used in Acts 20. Paul called for the "elders" of the Ephesian church (17). He exhorted them in v 28, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you OVERSEERS, to FEED (the term "pastor" comes from the Latin term "pascere" which means to "feed") the church of God..."

### **B. Elders are responsible for the care of God's church.**

What does that mean? How are elders/overseers to care for the church?

1. *This involves leading (administration, oversight).*

See: 1 Tim 5:17 (also 5:7); Titus 1:7

2. *This involves feeding.*

See: 1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28

3. *This involves weeding (protecting the purity of the church).*

See: 1 Tim 5:19-20

## II. Who can be an Overseer?

Paul lists some 16 qualifications which a person must meet if he is to be overseer. The first thing we must notice, and must emphasize, is how different God's standard is from the one often used in our day. "The biblical standards of church leadership are personal character qualities, not college or seminary degrees, business administrative skills, or personal charisma (RBC, 6)."

God's Word upholds requirements in two areas.

### **A. There are Personal requirements (2-6).**

If a man is to be considered as a church leader, he must have the following:

1. *Desire (1)*

V 1 is clear, "If a man DESIRE the office of a bishop." That doesn't mean if a man desires it, he's in. It does mean if he doesn't desire it, he's not qualified.

Note: A personal observation. The times I have seen people who had to be arm-twisted into "taking a leadership position" proved costly. "Oh, it will be good for so-and-so if he takes the position." That may be true, but if he doesn't "desire" it, he will probably do more harm than good to the fellowship and to himself.

The present tense of "desire" indicates this is no whimsical decision, but a continuous desire and aspiration (he won't chuck his responsibilities when the arrows start flying).

Here's where the matter of "call" enters. All believers are "called to minister" in a general sense (2 Cor 3:6), but there is a special sense in which God "calls" certain individuals and sets them apart for His service (see: 2 Tim 1:9). There are several ingredients of such a "call," and one of them is "desire"--a burning, burden from God to serve in the ministry of His Word.

But it takes more than desire to be qualified to serve in God's Church. It takes...

### 2. *Character*

V 2 informs, "A bishop then must BE." Verses 2-6 contain one unit of thought, with one finite verb which literally translated says, "It is necessary." The first necessity is what?

#### •Blameless (2)

"A bishop then must be blameless." Above reproach. It's an all-inclusive quality that has to do with all areas of life. Does God require perfection? No, the issue is not perfection, but direction (MacArthur)--in what direction is the man's life going? Towards Christ or away from Christ? Is his life free of "pet sins," or are there loopholes in his character?

The point is this. When selecting a church leader, the Bible says we must start with character. Does the candidate have any areas in his character that are shady, that would be a blot on the reputation of Christ and His Church?

### 3. *Conduct*

A whole series of conduct checkpoints fill the list.

#### •Husband of one wife (2)

What does that mean? There are several interpretations. The Roman Catholic view says the man is married to the Church. Another view says that marriage is required, that is, a single man is disqualified from being an elder. A third says the phrase means one wife in a lifetime (so if a man's wife dies, he cannot remarry).

The phrase literally means a "one woman man." Remember, Paul was writing in a day when prostitution was practiced in the name of religion. Many had a flippant attitude towards the marriage relationship. Paul insisted that this would not be accepted in the Church, and if a change was to occur, it had to start with the leaders.

To be a candidate for a church leader, then, a man must be devoted to his wife. An adulterer is disqualified. So is a man who flirts with other women.

#### •Temperate (2)

It means "clear-headed, not intoxicated, free from the control of external factors." In our culture, I am convinced this calls for abstinence from alcoholic beverages, but it applies to other controlling substances or pursuits.

#### •Sober-minded (2)

Literally translated, "to save the mind." He must have a serious attitude towards life. It doesn't mean he doesn't have a sense of humor, but that he grasps what's really important in the light of eternity. His values are in order (a man who constantly misses church, and is never at home to minister to his family because he chooses to work overtime to make extra money to buy conveniences is a man who is not "sober").

#### •Good behavior (2)

Literally, "orderly." He must be organized. The word also carries the sense of "modest" (1 Tim 2:9).

- Given to hospitality (2)

You can't be a hermit and be a church leader. As one professor used to say (Dr. Hoch), "If you can't stand the smell of sheep, don't be a shepherd."

The word literally means "love of strangers." This was important in the early church when there were no decent motels, and traveling Christians needed a place to stay.

Listen. A man who is not friendly and who avoids people is not qualified to be a leader in a church, no matter how much Bible knowledge he possesses.

- Not given to wine (3)

Literally, "one who sits long at his wine." Of course, in that day, much of the water was bad, and the alcoholic content of wine was low, so Paul could tell Timothy, "Use a little wine for your stomach's sake (5:23)." But we live in a much different setting. Alcohol has destroyed millions of lives and homes. A wise church leader will set the example and refrain from what is hazardous to the people of God.

- Not violent (3)

Not a "giver of blows." Not a fighter.

- Not greedy (3)

He's not in the ministry for what he can get out of it.

- Patient (3)

The idea is "gentle." As Wiersbe suggests, He "must listen to people and be able to take criticism without reacting (220-1)."

- Not a brawler (3)

He must be a peacemaker, not a troublemaker. Again Wiersbe hits the target, "Short tempers do not make for long ministries."

- Not covetous (3)

Not a lover of money.

These marks have to do with conduct. To be qualified to lead in a church, a man must possess character that is above reproach and conduct that is worth following. There's a fourth personal requirement.

#### 4. *Competence*

There are lots of "nice" people in churches. They stay out of trouble, are nice neighbors, work hard on the job, but they're not necessarily qualified to be leaders in the church. Why not? As someone has said, "The test of whether one is truly a leader is to see if anyone is following them." A qualified leader is competent in three areas.

- a. In teaching (2)

He is "apt to teach" (2). That is, he is skillful in teaching. He knows the Word, and knows how to communicate the Word to others. And when he teaches, people grow (not necessarily "entertained").

- b. In leading (4-5)

Vv 4-5 stress, "One that rules well his own house..." The word "rule" means "to stand before, to manage." How can you tell if a man is competent to lead? Look at his home. Is he leading his wife and children towards godliness? A man who has a dominant wife is not qualified to lead in the church. In fact, the fact that his wife is dominant reveals that he is negligent as a leader.

- c. In experience (6)--tried, tested, and proven faithful in other areas

V 6 is interesting. "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." Not a novice, or stated positively, a man who has been tried, tested, and proven faithful in other areas.

Why are we so prone to put celebrities in leadership positions after they are converted? It actually does more harm than good to move a man into leadership prematurely--harm for the man and the church.

**B. There are Inter-personal requirements (7).**

Notice two.

*1. He must have a good reputation in his home-life (4-5).*

We already touched on this, but we can't stress it enough. I am challenged by how much attention God gives to family qualifications in this section. A man can be a gifted speaker, a brilliant organizer, a get-it-done guy at work, and more, but if his family life is a flop, guess what? He is not qualified to be a leader.

As stated in the booklet Who Qualifies to be a Church Leader?, "Would you hire an autor mechanic who drives a sputtering, smoking pile of rusting junk? Or would you ask a dental hygienist with decayed teeth to instruct you on how to keep your teeth in good condition? (17)" Obviously not. The point is clear.

Note: It's better to have a few qualified men in church leadership positions, than to elect a non-qualified person just to fill a slot. God will raise up the people He wants. We'll always regret it if we promote a non-qualified person.

*2. He must have a good reputation with the unsaved (7).*

V 7 "Moreover, he must have a good report of them who are outside (i.e. the unsaved)." A man's reputation is critical. Why? His life is the only Bible some will ever read.

It's not that unsaved people won't criticize us (Jesus said sometimes they'll kill us). The point is we must not give them grounds to criticize us. A man can't lead in the church if a cloud of suspicion hovers over him in the community.

Now you're thinking, "Wow! God's qualifications are high, aren't they?" Yes, which leads to a final question.

**III. Why be an Overseer?**

For two reasons.

**A. It is a good work (1).**

Notice v 1 again, "He desires a GOOD work." It's good to be an overseer. For that matter, it's good to be in any leadership position in the church. There are eternal dividends and rewards for those who serve well.

If God wants you to serve in His Church, don't shrink back. Don't run from Him. If there are some areas in your life that are disqualifying you from service, confess them to God. Experience His forgiveness. Allow the Spirit to begin transforming you. It's a good work.

**B. There is a need.**

The church constantly needs leaders.