

Lesson Three

APPOINT RESPONSIBLE LEADERS

I Timothy 3:1-13

CHOOSE RESPONSIBLE ELDERS

SECTION ONE I Timothy 3:1-7

3 The saying is sure: If any one aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task. **2** Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, **3** no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money. **4** He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; **5** for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church? **6** He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil; **7** moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

This discussion of leadership rightly falls between the preceding chapter emphasizing proper worship and the following one dealing with false doctrine as both of these matters depend upon the functions of a sound leadership. To properly lead, leaders must be qualified for their tasks. Notice

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that these twenty negative and positive qualifications (by adding the list in Titus 1:5-9) *should* exist in every mature Christian man. None are unreachable by any Christian possessing a desire to grow. Paul is NOT commanding that a super-Christian be chosen, but a mature one who will be able to handle this task efficiently. How frustrating to be entrusted with a job too big for our abilities. It might even destroy us (v. 6).

In an attempt to catalogue these qualifications, we might classify them under: (1) Moral (blameless, no striker, etc.); (2) Ability (able to teach, rule household, etc.); (3) Maturity or Wisdom (married, believing children, etc.). Or consider that these deal with qualities relating to: (1) Self; (2) Social (dealing with others); (3) Spiritual (dealing with God).

V. 1 This "faithful saying" is the second of five (see under 1:15) and probably applies to what follows rather than what precedes although some few do place with 2:15. What follows seems to be more of a "faithful saying" than 2:15 although Paul sometimes refers to a preceding statement with this formula.

aspires — This word describes the eager desire of a hungry man for food. In 6:10, it is used as "craving" after money and in Heb. 11:16 for the "longing" or "desire" for heaven. If a man has to be begged to take this work, he has disqualified himself already. If he "longs" to serve God as an elder, he will soon qualify himself. Paul rightly begins with this foundation-qualification as the building stone for all the others.

bishop — In N.T. times, bishop was another name for elder (*presbuteros*) or pastor (*poimen*). In Acts 20:17, Paul sends for the "elders" and instructs them to "feed" (literally, "pastor") the church (v. 28), over which God has made them "bishops" or "guardians" (v. 28). All three terms are used in I Pet. 5:1-5 in reference to these men. Titus 1:5, 7 also uses elder and bishop interchangeably.

Bishop, overseer, guardian (same Greek word translated three ways) suggests that these men have *authority* over the church (5:17; I Thess. 5:12). His authority sometimes involves decision-making and at other times discipline.

Elder or presbyter (literally, "old man") suggests his *wisdom* and maturity which comes from a lifetime of experience. He is a man who knows God, God's Word, and God's world. No minimum age is given in the N.T. for an elder, but this word was not applied to anyone under thirty; remember Jesus waited until He was thirty to begin His public ministry. We realize that some men mature more quickly than others and that maturity, not just chronological age, is what is needed.

Pastor or shepherd (never applied to the evangelist or preacher in the N.T.) suggests his *loving concern* for God's flock as he drives away wolves who devour (Acts 20:29) and lovingly feeds his charges (I Pet. 5:2).

Some men by God's grace are better equipped to be decision makers or

rulers; others shine as wise counselors and givers of judicious advice; still others excell in the art of calling and shepherding. Each elder will possess all three of these qualities to some degree but will find that he is best suited in one or two. Thus, a well-functioning eldership complements each member as each uses his gift for God's glory.

V. 2 above reproach — A man is "blameless" (KJV) when no charge of wrongdoing can be brought against him. It does not mean perfection, for every Christian is to be blameless (Phil. 2:15). Elizabeth (Lk. 1:6) is an example of a blameless life. Perhaps the remainder of the qualifications illustrate what Paul means by this word.

married only once (literally, "one woman man") — Six interpretations have been suggested. (1) Forbids polygamy, many wives. (2) Forbids concubinage, as Solomon practiced. (3) Forbids digamy, remarriage after the death of the first wife; (4) Forbids remarriage after divorce. (5) Forbids a single man who might lack maturity in judgment and be subject to moral temptation. (6) Forbids an immoral attitude. If married, he is faithful to his wife; if not married, he is the kind who would be faithful if married. Understanding what Paul means by the parallel phrase in I Tim. 5:9 (lit., "one man woman") may cast light on this verse. All will agree that Paul is insisting the bishop be a sexually pure man. An excellent discussion of the pros and cons of the above positions is given by Carl Ketcherside, p. 289, *Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus*, DeWelt. May I suggest two cautions: let us not elevate this one qualification above the other nineteen, neither let us be divisive with our preferred interpretation.

temperate — Originally meant an abstaining from wine, but by Paul's day was used metaphorically to include a sober, vigilant (KJV), wide-awake attitude. A shepherd must be an alert watchman.

sensible (Lit., "sound or controlled mind") — Balanced, prudent, discreet judgment which has complete control over sensual desires.

dignified — This is the word *kosmos* (see notes on 2:9) referring to the outward control resulting from a disciplined, orderly inner spirit. His control will show in dress, attitude, and action.

hospitable — The economic status of the poor saints, the political persecution by Rome, the religious antagonism of the Jews, and the immoral quality of the inns made it imperative that Christians open their homes to each other. In that day, one literally risked his life extending Christian hospitality.

apt teacher — One who is willing and able to teach. This may be one to one, in small groups, or before the whole assembly. Some will have more ability in this than others (5:17). It would include stopping those who disrupt (Tit. 1:9).

V. 3 no drunkard (Lit., "one who lingers or sits long at wine") — The

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primary idea is the brawling or rowdiness that characterizes this type of person.

not violent, but gentle — A man can destroy with his fists (lit., “no hitter”) what he seeks to build with his words (II, 2:24).

not quarrelsome — Neither must he fight with his words. A contentious man divides the flock he is to guide. Even when correcting trouble-makers, he must manifest a gentle spirit (II, 2:24, 25).

no lover of money — Covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5) and the root of all evil (6:10).

V. 4 **rule household** — The church is God’s family and elders should guide it as a loving father does his family. Observe an elder in his own home for he will rule the church with the same methods and attitude.

children — Paul assumes the elder will have children as is the case of most older men who are married. Does this suggest a meaning for verse 2? His children will reflect his influence in their lives (Tit. 1:6).

V. 6 **not recent convert** — This word, often translated novice, means “new plant.” A new believer does not have the knowledge of the word nor the depth of Christian experience to guide the church or to oppose those who attack it. His office may promote a destructive pride in his young spirit (Prov. 16:18). Does this mean the devil will punish him or that he will fall in the same way as did the devil? Probably the latter. When is one not a novice? In Acts 14:23, Paul appoints elders from men who had become believers only a short time before (between six months and two years), but they came from a Jewish background. Some mature more quickly; others have grown up in a Christian environment; but all will feel more comfortable and competent if a suitable growing period is given to the new believer.

V. 7 **outside** — Often a man’s pagan co-workers know him better than his fellow Christians. If they cannot respect him, he cannot be a witness to them and the church is mocked by them for appointing such hypocritical leaders.

DISCUSSION STARTERS:

1. Consider the three Bible terms for elders and the implications of each.
2. Must an elder have all the qualifications to be chosen? To what degree? Who is to decide?
3. Suggest how each of the qualifications helps the elder in his task.
4. Compare the qualifications for elders to those for deacons and see where and why they differ.
5. Should we encourage our young men to “long for” and prepare for the eldership with the same enthusiasm we do for the “ministry”? How can we do it?

CHOOSE DEVOTED DEACONS

SECTION TWO I Timothy 3:8-13

8 Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for gain; 9 they must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then if they prove themselves blameless let them serve as deacons. 11 The women likewise must be serious, no slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be the husband of one wife, and let them manage their children and their households well; 13 for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Deacon means minister or servant (Mt. 22:13; Jn. 2:5, 9). Three times in the N.T. it refers to a special class of servants whom we call deacons (Phil. 1:1; I 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-7). Every Christian is a servant, but it is wise to have special men who can perform certain functions that not everyone would have the ability or spiritual character to perform well. When the apostles wanted to free themselves from "serving tables" that they might give themselves to the "ministry of the word," they had the people choose qualified men to serve (Acts 6:1-7). They suggested three general areas: (1) Moral, "honest report"; (2) Spiritual, "full of the Holy Spirit"; (3) Functional Ability, "wisdom." Notice that the people chose, and the apostles ordained, installed, or appointed them. Elders now function in that apostolic overseeing-teaching-pastoring ministry of the Word and present-day deacons follow their guidance. Too often deacons are lumped together with the eldership in a church board and actually function as bishops. Let's let the elders lead and the deacons serve!

V. 8 **likewise** — Paul emphasizes that deacons must also meet certain requirements to function effectively.

serious — This word translated "honorable" in Phil. 4:8 suggests dignity, seriousness, augustness, worthiness of respect. Flippancy and uncouthness do not befit any Christian, much less one of our leaders.

doubletongued — If one of the deacon's functions was to go from house to house administering funds to needy widows, he would be tempted to carry gossip or to talk one way to one person and another way to the next. He must guard his tongue (cf. James 3).

wine — Drink has always been a problem to man. Perhaps the deacon in his ministrations would be offered a cookie and a drink. He soon

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would be filled with spirits and not the Spirit. The only sure way to keep oneself from criticism by others and from the addiction of drink is complete abstinence.

greedy — Money was probably handled by these men and the temptation to pocket some of it was ever present. Even one of the Lord's apostles fell captive to its seductive lure (Jn. 12:6). Mishandling money, or the charge of such evildoing, has destroyed many Christian leaders and organizations. Let us be wary!

V. 9 **hold the mystery of the faith** — Elders were "apt teachers." Deacons did not teach, but lived their faith. Mystery means something formerly hidden, but now revealed. In this case, the N.T. (Eph. 3:4-16). If one is filled with God's Word, he can withstand temptation to steal or do anything that would defile his conscience.

V. 10 **tested** — A formal questioning is not indicated here, but the idea of examining their lives by general observation before appointing them to office. The "also" reflects back to the elders who were "tested" as one considered their lives in the light of the qualifications. Certainly Paul is not suggesting a probationary or trial period for deacons before final approval. Note that Paul does not suggest that we appoint just anyone to this office "so they can grow." The growth is there *before* the appointment. A novice is no more fitted for this function than he is for that of the eldership.

V. 11 **women** — Is Paul suggesting a third office of deaconess, or are these the wives of the deacons? I prefer the latter idea for the following reasons. (1) Deaconess, as an office, is not referred to elsewhere as would be expected in passages such as Phil. 1:1 (Rom. 16:1 probably means "servant" in the general sense.) (2) Paul calls them women, not deaconesses, as one would expect since he referred to elders and deacons in this context. (3) The sandwiching of these qualifications amidst those of the deacon suggests these are deacons' wives. (4) The function of the deacon would necessitate his wife's help (calling on widows, etc., Acts 6), whereas that of bishop would not. (5) An office of deaconess would be contrary to Paul's insistence that woman not rule over man (2:11-14) unless one makes this function completely one of service with no decision-making responsibilities.

Paul insists these wives have the same basic character of their husbands possessing dignity, control of tongue, temperance (same word as 3:2), and faithfulness to the Lord.

V. 13 **gain good standing** — Does this suggest a "promotion" to elder? I think not. Anyway, we should not think of one function as higher or lower. Some men serve honorably as deacons for a lifetime. Some men never serve as deacons, but begin leadership-function as elders. The "good standing" refers to the high esteem God's people have for

godly deacons. Perhaps it includes the high esteem God has for all who serve Him well, even "servants." Some N.T. deacons were so bold in the faith that they became well-known evangelists (Stephen and Phillip, Acts 6:5, 8; 8:29).

DISCUSSION STARTERS:

1. In what sense are all Christians servants? How, then, do deacons differ?
2. How accurate is it to call the preacher "minister"? (Cf. Col. 4:7; I Tim. 4:6).
3. How do elders and deacons differ in authority and function? In what *practical* way can this be done in the average congregation?
4. Should we examine a man's family as we consider him for leadership?
5. Are women who serve special functions such as preparing communion, helping with baptisms, etc. deaconesses in a general sense? Do they meet certain qualifications? Do they hold an office?