

## “WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE THE GRADE”

## 1 Timothy 3:1-13

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During a presidential election campaign political pundits usually discuss whether either of the candidates looks “presidential.”

When people cast their vote it’s for an image that has been created and promoted in the media. It might be far cry from the reality. But the nation’s leader must “look good.” There’s an old saying that you can’t lead a cavalry charge if you look funny sitting on a horse.

Some say *‘Image is everything.’* If you want to lead, you must look like a leader!

·            What about Church leaders—elders, or overseers and pastors and deacons?

**How much does image count?**

People who care most about their image usually crave influence and power. Beware of those who lust after power.

Carl Gustav Jung wrote, *‘Where love rules, there is no will to power; and where power predominates, there love is lacking.’*

Henri Nouwen wrote: *‘What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems . . . easier to control people than to love people.’* (In the Name of Jesus, p.59)

·            One of the most serious tasks in the whole world is selecting qualified leaders for Christ’s church.

We’re in a series of studies on the Apostle Paul’s letter to Timothy the pastor in Ephesus. Today we’re at the place where Paul deals with the qualifications of church leaders.

*3:1 Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.*

*3:2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.*

*3:3 not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.*

*3:4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.*

*3:5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?)*

*3:6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.*

*3:7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.*

*3:8 Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.*

*3:9 They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.*

*3:10 They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.*

*3:11 In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.*

*3:12 A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.*

*3:13 Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.*

What does it take to make the grade as a spiritual leader in a church? Let us look at the standards listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 from **two perspectives**: identity and integrity.

## **I. A CHURCH LEADER'S IDENTITY.**

Paul identifies three sets of leaders in this part of his letter.

### **1. First: Overseers or Elders, including Pastors.**

3:1 *'Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble work.'*

This formula, *Here is a trustworthy saying*, means, "This is very important!"

No leadership is more important than church leadership. That's because there is no entity in the world more valuable to God than the church. It is the body of Christ, the flock of God.

The letter to the Hebrews exhorts Christians: *'Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.'* (Hebrews 13:17)

*'Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.'* (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

Being a leader in Christ's church is a serious responsibility.

### **2. Second: Deacons.**

3:8 *'Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.'*

· The role of deacon in the church can probably be traced to the a situation that occurred in the church in Jerusalem, as reported in Acts 6. The word means literally a *servant*.

When the needs of Grecian widows were inadvertently overlooked, the problem threatened to split the church.

The apostles said, *It is not pleasing/good for us to leave the word of God to serve (diakonein) tables. . . 'But we will keep to the prayer and to the ministry (diakonia) of the word.'* (Acts 6:2, 4)

So seven godly were selected to deal with such situations in the church. They were forerunners of New Testament deacons.

· The office of *deacon* is first mentioned in Philippians 1:1. Paul addressed the letter to 'all the saints in Christ *Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons (episkopoi and diakonoi)*.

**In early Christianity the deacon became the symbol of loving care for others.**

· Even though deacons did not have the same responsibilities as the elders, they had to meet the same qualifications to make the grade.

### **3. Third: "Deaconesses", or Women in Leadership:**

3:11 *Their wives ('women') likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things*

Who are these women? Do they have the office of deacon?

We get some light on this from Paul's letter to the Romans: *'I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon/servant of the church in Cenchreae.'* Romans 16:1

We can't be dogmatic about whether Paul is referring to an established office of *deacon*, or simply to Phoebe's service in the church.

In the same way, there is no agreement whether 1 Timothy 3:11 refers to the wives of deacons or to deaconesses.

- A strong argument in support of these women being *deacons* and not just the wives of deacons is that no special requirements are mentioned for the wives of overseers (1-7), so it makes sense to understand that this is a distinct category of women who had the role of deacon.

Anyway, the Apostle Paul addresses at least two, and most likely three categories of leaders in the church: overseers/elders, and deacons, both male and female.

- A healthy church has clearly identified leadership roles grounded in the Word of God.

## II. A CHURCH LEADER'S INTEGRITY

The spiritual and moral standards for leaders are high.

*All the members of the church at Ephesus were first generation Christians. None had been raised in Christian homes. They had been rescued from cesspools of pagan decadence by the power of the Gospel.*

Even the most godly Christians in Ephesus had backgrounds that would make a playboy blush today.

But Paul didn't lower the bar to make it easier for them to measure up to the standards of leadership.

In church leaders nothing is more important than character.

Back in 1983 I was part of a group driving to a conference in North Carolina—two carloads of us. I was in the second car. After a while everyone in our car started to get a headache. We stopped at a rest area and found none in the lead car had headaches. It turned out the problem was with the exhaust from Steve's car leading the way. He had one of those wretched GM diesel engines of the late 70's that everyone loved to hate. It was spewing diesel fumes in our pathway. His leadership was making the rest of us sick.

- Leaders with polluted lives will cause a lot of harm to those who follow them.

That's why the personal life of Christian leaders is so important.

Paul wrote: *'They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless'* (1 Timothy 3:9, 10)

He addressed this to deacons. But it applies just as much to elders and deaconesses.

When Paul moves from one group of church leaders to another in this chapter he uses the term *ósautós* (vv.8,11). It means, *likewise*, or *in the same way*.

- Proven godly character is the single most important qualification for church leadership.

*It is far better not to have enough leaders than to have some leaders who don't qualify.*

Warren Wiersbe writes about church leaders, *'It is not enough to sit in meetings and decide how to "run the church." They must base their decisions on the Word of God, and they must back up their decisions with godly lives.'* (*Be Faithful*, p.43)

- Now let's look at the specific marks of integrity required in those who make the grade to serve as church leaders.

### 1. Above reproach, of good reputation 1 Timothy 3:2, 7

This specific term (*anepilēptos*) occurs in the New Testament only in Paul's first letter to Timothy--three times, here in verse 2 and in 5:7; 6:14. It means *not open to blame; of irreproachable conduct*.

St. Augustine's prayed: *'To my God a heart of flame; to my fellows a heart of love; to myself a heart of steel.'*

In verse 7 Paul uses a different expression: *'He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into the devil's trap.'*

A church leader with a poor reputation in the community is an insult to the name of Christ.

### **2. Able to teach (verse 2)**

Paul is the only one to use this word *didaktikos* in the New Testament. He also uses it in 2 Timothy 2:24

Let me remind you what James said about teachers in his letter: *'Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.'* (James 3:1)

Church leaders are to have a grasp of Christian truth that gives them proficiency in handling the Word of God—and the integrity to back it up.

### **3. Dignified, Worthy of respect. (verses 8, 11)**

The word is *semnos*. In some versions (KJV) this is translated 'grave.' *It's a person of stature.*

Over the years I have served with oodles of search committees seeking associate pastors of the church. Never did we want someone who was 'grave.'

That seems to fit an undertaker better than a church leader.

The word Paul used means someone who deserves respect. Not a doofus who can't be serious.

This doesn't mean a church leader can't have a sense of humor. Thank God for people worthy of respect who can laugh and help others to laugh.

· People worthy of respect don't always look the part.

There's a story about David Lloyd George, a former prime minister of Britain. After he gave a speech a woman said to him, *'Before I saw you in person I thought you were a much taller man.'* He said, *'Madam, in Wales, where I come from, we measure a man from his neck up, not from the neck down.'*

### **4. Sober-minded (verses 2, 11)**

*nephalios*. Again this is one of those terms that we find only in Paul's pastoral letters, (here, in v.11, and in Titus 2:2).

It means being **free from excesses**. Not an unpredictable person who does the most inappropriate and outrageous things.

### **5. Self-controlled (verse 2)**

*sophrona*. Sensible, wise, balanced in judgment, **not given to quick, superficial decisions**.

### **6. Respectable (verse 2)**

*kosmios*. This is the same term Paul used in 2:9 of women adorning themselves appropriately.

We derive the word *cosmetics* from this Greek term. Women use cosmetics to put their faces in order.

Here it means **a well-ordered life**; not having a life that is out of control.

### **7. Hospitable (verse 2)**

*philoxenos*. The etymology of this word means love for strangers. Opening your life and your home to others.

We're not talking about Tom Bodette, the guy from Motel 6, who promises to keep the light on for you.

This is so much more. It means being **unselfish in sharing resources with others** and helping others.

### **8. Not a drunkard; not addicted to much wine (verses 3, 8)**

Two distinct words here.

v.3 *paroinon*--given to wine. v.8 *me oino pollo prosexontas*--not addicted to much wine.

W.C. Fields, the actor who often played a drunken buffoon, used to say, '*I always keep a supply of liquor handy in case I see a snake, which I also keep handy.*'

That's a humorous insight into the sad life of the addict. The whole focus of life is on getting the next fix or the next drink. Someone with a serious addiction is not able to focus on the serious responsibility of church leadership.

Alcohol is a scourge in society today. An overseer or deacon should be an **example** whose abstinence or moderation **does not cause others in the church to stumble** spiritually.

### **9. Not violent (verse 3)**

*pléktén*. **Not hot-tempered**. Not a bully. Church leaders are not intimidators, always looking for an argument.

### **10. Gentle (verse 3)**

*epieike*. Kind and forbearing. **Doesn't always have to be right in every discussion.**

### **11. Not quarrelsome (verse 3)**

*amaxos*. uncontentious. **A peacemaker.**

### **12. Not a lover of money; not greedy for dishonest gain (verses 3, 8)**

Two distinct terms here.

v.3 *aphlarguros*, literally, following the etymology, *not a lover of silver*. Not a money lover.

v.8. *aisxrokerdos*, not greedy.

Christian leaders must not be preoccupied with getting rich; not enamored of things. Instead they should be **examples of generosity**.

A mother was making pancakes for breakfast for her two boys, Kevin age 5 and Ryan age 3. The boys started to argue over who should get the first pancake. Their mother seized the opportunity to teach them unselfish generosity. She said, *If Jesus were sitting here, he would say "Let my brother have the first pancake; I can wait."* Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, *Ryan, you be Jesus.*

Christian leaders are willing to set aside their rights and serve others, as Christ did.

### **13. Not double-tongued; not slanderers (verses 8, 11)**

Two terms here also.

v.8 *dilogos*, double-tongued; insincere. Not people who say one thing when they're with one crowd and something different when they're with others.

v.11. *diabolos*. Slanderer. The devil is called the slanderer, the accuser. That's what devil means. *Don't be a devil. Not a malicious gossip.*

Jesus said, '*Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.*' (Matthew 12:34)

If **godly leadership is** above all **a matter of the heart**, then we have to find out what's in the heart of any candidate for church leadership.

Double-tongued malicious gossips don't make the grade to lead the church bought with Christ's blood.

#### **14. A Strong Marriage (verses 2, 12)**

v.2 *'Now the overseer must be . . . the husband of but one wife,'*

v.12 *'A deacon must be the husband of but one wife.'*

A literal, word-for-word translation is *a one-wife husband or a one-woman man*.

It's about marital purity and fidelity.

An overseer must be completely faithful to his wife.

· It is unlikely that any elder or deacon at Ephesus had a sterling record in marital fidelity.

Ephesus was one of the most decadent societies. It was the home of the cult of the fertility goddess Diana (Artemis). It was a pagan environment that celebrated sexual promiscuity.

All the Christian men in Ephesus were well-acquainted with visiting the pagan temple prostitutes. It had been part of their pre-Christian background.

It was still a temptation to spiritually-immature Christian men to gratify themselves in the immoral temple practices.

You can understand why the Apostle Paul insisted that those who would be leaders make a clean break with the past.

Church leaders were to have a **good track record of marital fidelity**.

#### **15. A family leader (verses 4, 5, 12)**

vv.4, 5 *'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?)*

v.12 *'(He) must manage his children and his household well.'*

**This applied to those who had children at home under their authority.**

Christians who have incorrigible children have no business leading the church. Their children at home need extra love and care and attention.

#### **16. Not a recent convert (verse 6)**

v.6 *'He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.'*

The word is *'neophutos'*--from which we derive *neophyte*.

**A church is in deep trouble if those who have never learned to follow are given the responsibility to lead.**

Those who are thrust into leadership too soon are likely to be puffed up with self-importance, as the devil was.

· So those are the standards the Apostle Paul set to make the grade as a church leader.

By the way, there's nothing here about church leaders being faithful in prayer. We have to assume this, because those who give oversight to the spiritual health of the church as the living body of Christ have the priority of giving their attention to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4).

· Paul concludes with this summary: *'Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.'* (v.13)

They gain an excellent standing; they make the grade.

· This was written for the benefit of all of us.

Someone might say: *Those standards are for church leaders. I don't want to be an elder or a deacon or deaconess, so I don't need to live up to these standards.*

These standards are for all believers. Those who meet the standards make the grade.

· Paul began this part of his letter by telling Timothy it's good for people to set their heart on being church leaders. They must also see how high the bar is set.

Is there someone in this church you should go to and say, *'I encourage you to set your heart on being a leader in our church. We need people like you.'*