

What the Advertisement Did Not Say

A Bible Study on 1 Timothy 3

Study Bible Studies Not stated

1 Timothy 3 (quoted)

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. 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.

— 1 Timothy 3:1-13, King James Version

A Typical Advertisement

Let us spend a few minutes reading a typical advertisement for a business leader.

President and Chief Executive Officer

Immediate opening for a dynamic and energetic executive for an exciting information technology consulting position in a multinational organisation with a new and innovative business model. The successful candidate will have fifteen to twenty years of excellence in information technology executive management, of which at least five years as president or chief executive officer, with commendable experience carrying full profit and loss responsibilities within the information technology consulting

industry; strong presentation skills are essential. Qualified in the field of computer science from one of the Indian Institutes of Technology, the person should also be a postgraduate of one of the Indian Institutes of Management. He or she should possess:

- *Strong leadership skills*
- *Excellent communication skills*
- *Excellent people skills*
- *Successful start-up experience*
- *Knowledge of daily operations*
- *Strong project-management skills*
- *Sales-and-marketing management experience*
- *Offshore outsourcing experience*
- *Financial control and fund-raising experience*

Excellent pay, an equity position and financial growth await an enterprising chief executive who will report to the founder.

If a church were to place an advertisement in a newspaper inviting applications for church leadership positions, would it read like this, with a little theology thrown in for good measure? Looking closely at the leadership requirements of any modern church, one might argue that successful business executives make the best elders—after all, management is management. We may agree that the skill requirements of a business leader closely match what is required of a church leader. There are, however, a number of attributes that such an advertisement leaves unstated but which are implied in positions of church leadership. Let us look at what these might be.

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By implication, the successful candidate should:

- Be prepared to be available around the clock, every day of the week
- Be prepared to live out of airports
- Be prepared to delegate all the responsibility for bringing up the children to the maids, spouses, teachers, neighbours and others, and at times to the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary
- Be ready for partying at the drop of a hat and keep others happy by getting high on spirits that are anything but holy
- Be prepared to liaise with government departments and think nothing of offering bribes in any manner required, so long as the work gets done
- Be ruthless with employees and ready with the redundancy notices to be handed out the moment the first whisper of recession is heard in

the United States

- Have the urge to amass wealth through stock options and the like

I am sure by now you know where I am going, so let me stop the list there. Please do not carry away the impression that I am being hypocritical about it. I am not. All I am trying to say is that while some of the qualities described are true of both secular leaders and church leaders, church leaders require additional qualities that a business leader may or may not possess, or may not even care to develop.

None of these job descriptions ever addresses the moral and ethical issues involved, let alone the spiritual aspects of a person's conduct. It is precisely these matters that Paul addresses in this chapter, probably as a guideline for the less experienced Timothy as he selects and assigns responsibilities to his ministers—elders, deacons, bishops.

Books that deal with leadership training for church leaders often highlight the sense of calling, dependence on God and perseverance that we see in the great biblical characters—Moses, Jeremiah, Paul—and hold them up as a model. Of course, these figures were powerful leaders, and there is much to be learned about leadership from them. But if the question is "Who is fit to lead in the church?" and this decision falls to other church leaders, then the place to begin is with the kind of concerns raised in 1 Timothy 3:1-13.

Tone of the Chapter

At this point in the letter, the tone changes. What had been a discussion of what the church and certain groups within it ought to do becomes a discussion of what leaders in the church ought to be. The moral lapse and defection of some of these leaders in Ephesus had undoubtedly left the fellowship in a state of instability, and the internal disruption was likely to be met by severe criticism from unbelievers. For these reasons, the two lists included at this point describe the necessary qualifications for the offices of overseer and deacon.

In each case the focal point is the candidate's reputation among believers and also among unbelievers, to be assessed on the basis of proven moral character and maturity. Duties are hardly mentioned. The standard set—"blameless" in verse 2, or "found blameless" in verse 10—is extremely high, but not out of proportion to the importance of the church's mission in the world, which always hangs in the balance.

Leaders Described

Who were the overseers and deacons? The term translated "overseer" in the New International Version was first used outside the church to refer to supervisors of various sorts. As a description of one level of church leadership, it appears in Acts 20:28: "Take heed therefore unto

yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

Again, we see deacons placed alongside overseers in Philippians 1:1, which reads: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." We read in 1 Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." From this, together with the reference Paul made to elders in Acts 20:17-38 and the instructions concerning elders and overseers in Titus 1:6-7, we may observe that the terms "overseer" and "elder" referred to more or less the same office. Moreover, the church leaders mentioned in Romans 12:8, in 1 Corinthians 12:28 (which speaks of "governments"), and in Ephesians 4:11—pastors, teachers and perhaps church administrators—would probably have held this office of overseer.

The office of deacon (which may have included women; see below on verse 11) probably emerged as the church grew in size and the demands on the leadership required that certain functions be delegated. The table-waiting deacons of Acts 6:1-6, a position created to release the apostles for the ministry of the word, may have been prototypical of the office referred to here. Teaching and ruling are not specifically mentioned in connection with deacons; they were apparently subordinate to the overseers and were generally charged with seeing to the fellowship's practical needs. Nevertheless, some deacons would also have been active in preaching the gospel.

Concern about the Reputation of the Leaders

In chapter 1, verse 15, we saw Paul promoting the office of overseer as a noble task. Perhaps the problems in Ephesus had led some to regard the offices with suspicion and disrespect. If so, a reminder of the honour and importance traditionally attached to the position might restore some of that respect and instil confidence in carefully chosen leaders. But as the guidelines Paul lays down imply, the viability of the office is closely linked to the character of the one who seeks to hold it. For us today, whose overfull schedules lead us rather to disregard offices in the church, the same reminder could well be taken as an exhortation to availability.

Observable Conduct of Church Leaders

The code that follows in verses 2 to 7 gives guidelines for measuring a candidate's reputation, which must be above reproach. The attributes that follow give an idea of the direction in which this irreproachability should move. Generally, the focus is on observable conduct.

Most of the attributes of behaviour that follow require little explanation. The reference to the overseer's marriage, however, is an exception. Although we might cringe at the thought, most of us would probably admit that one's marriage sheds a good deal of light on one's character. Paul apparently held similar feelings. But the meaning of the condition that the overseer be "the husband of one wife" (literally, a "one-woman man") continues to provoke discussion, and some of the interpretations deserve a closer look.

1. The qualification prohibits polygamists from holding this office. However, this is unlikely to have been Paul's intention. Monogamy was by far the norm of that day; polygamy was generally regarded as objectionable and would not have needed mentioning in such a list.
2. The qualification excludes those who have remarried after the death of a spouse. This too is an unlikely suggestion. Remaining single, particularly in the case of widows, was often commended, but Paul seems to have allowed and even encouraged the remarriage of the surviving partner (1 Corinthians 7:39-40; 1 Timothy 5:14).
3. The qualification specifically rules out those who have remarried after divorce. But even granting a fairly strong New Testament stand on the issue of divorce, exceptions to the rule prohibiting remarriage were made in the case of adultery (Matthew 5:32; 19:9) and perhaps also in the case of desertion by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15).
4. The qualification is a requirement of faithfulness in marriage. Given the context, this interpretation seems the most reasonable. Indeed, the tone of the phrase is positive rather than prohibitive, which suggests a nuance of meaning different from the first three positions. The flow of thought in the list moves from personal to church life, from domestic to official functions. Implicit in this movement is an important truth: what one does or is in one's private life has consequences for the church. It follows that within Paul's holistic outlook, which brings together personal and domestic qualities, it is far more likely that he intends to stress fidelity in marriage. So the point of the phrase is probably not how often one can be married, nor precisely what constitutes a legitimate marriage, but rather how one conducts oneself within one's marriage.

Above Reproach

Without a break in the sentence, Paul inserts several personal qualities to amplify the meaning of "above reproach." The candidate must be temperate, or "sober"—which, taken figuratively, as is probably intended here, especially in view of the prohibition of drunkenness in verse 3, means to be clear-headed or vigilant. Vigilance is the opposite of drunkenness or fuzzy thinking, which in this context has the life of faith in view. Christians are to guard against spiritual laziness and avoid

habits that lull one to sleep—in other words, to stay away from things and activities that draw us away from God.

Self-control

Self-controlled, which is next on the list, is a quality Paul refers to frequently in the Pastoral Epistles as a basic element of the observable Christian life (1 Timothy 2:9, 15; 2 Timothy 1:7; Titus 2:2, 4, 5, 6). As a fundamental aspect of the new existence in Christ (Titus 2:12), it is the ability to take charge of the mind, and Christians have this possibility opened to them. This allows control over impulses that lead to overindulgence of the physical appetites, or to wrong thoughts about others and ourselves, which if not kept in check would drive us to excessive behaviour.

Respectable

Respectable refers to observable behaviour that corresponds to inner self-control. It is behaviour of every kind marked by self-discipline, order and balance. Paul's use of this traditional quality, especially in connection with self-control, sets before us the possibility and challenge of developing a life in which inner motivation and outer action achieve a harmonious balance, dovetailed neatly together. The ancients viewed inner control as the strength of life and outer balance as the beauty of life.

Hospitality

Hospitality was a virtue also widely heralded in Greco-Roman culture. Within the church, however, the practice of hospitality was imperative. Some Christians had been forced from their homelands by persecution or found it increasingly difficult to make a living, and the practical, sacrificial sharing of one's home and modest resources might mean survival for someone. The New Testament enjoins all believers to practise hospitality (Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9), but the Pastoral Epistles mention it only in connection with those who would serve (1 Timothy 5:10; Titus 1:8), who are then to be examples to others.

Ability to Teach

Able to teach relates more directly to the ministry connected with the office of overseer. In the context of the heresy then doing the rounds in Ephesus, this qualification would necessarily include teaching, preaching and refuting error (2 Timothy 2:24; Titus 1:9). In view of the apparent division of labour among the elders referred to in 1 Timothy 5:17, perhaps this qualification is typical, and the ability to teach need not be equally evident in every candidate.

Present-day Applicability

Paul was not simply lauding traditional values that, some two thousand years later, are of no use to us. Vigilance, self-control, respectability, and the balance of inner and outer life that Paul envisions are realities available to us in the Spirit—and they are also necessities. Without vigilance and spiritual awareness we will not exercise self-control. Without self-control we will indulge ourselves freely according to the advice of the world around us, instead of setting the limits that produce godly balance.

As the list continues to probe the background of the candidate for leadership, it goes on to prohibit four characteristics of behaviour.

Drunkenness

Tendencies towards drunkenness and violence (Titus 1:7) are clearly reasons for rejection. The church cannot afford to be led by those who allow themselves to be controlled by intoxicants, which enslave the user and impair sound thinking and emotion. Evidence of these traits in any believer calls for immediate action; they are signs of a loss of control.

Quarrelsome

At the same time, the overseer must not be quarrelsome. This tendency betrays an inability to get along with and accept the views of others, and perhaps deeper personality flaws besides. The false teachers in Ephesus were known for their quarrels (1 Timothy 1:5; 6:4-5). A leader prone to this weakness will produce discord instead of harmony. But a leader—or indeed any Christian—who promotes peace among people will create and preserve the relationships necessary for building a unified church.

Love for Money

Then, the overseer must not be a lover of money. This means the candidate's attitude towards material wealth ought to be one of healthy detachment, though certainly not irresponsibility. Such a leader can be a model of generosity and simplicity of lifestyle, knowing that whatever one's economic status might be, all that one has belongs to God and must be looked after faithfully for him (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

Applicability for Us

But this applies to every believer, and the issue raised by this characteristic is one we all ought to face. Many of us are capable of generating a comfortable income. How much is enough? How can we know if we have begun to put money and material things before God? What does responsibility mean in this area of our lives? These are hard

questions, the kind we usually prefer not to ask. The very fact that these questions make us uncomfortable proves their relevance for us, just as Paul's word was relevant for overseers. All we can do here is suggest a beginning: our attitudes and motivations where money and the acquisition of things are concerned must be brought before God for evaluation. God's word, and not the values of the society in which we live, must be allowed to shape and correct our thinking and behaviour in this area (Matthew 6:19-24; 2 Corinthians 8—9; 1 Timothy 6:5-10, 17-19).

The profile of the ideal candidate concludes with three further conditions, each accompanied by a statement of rationale, in verses 4 to 6.

Management of the Household

First, Paul cites proficient management of the household as a prerequisite of church leadership (verses 4 and 5). Indeed, if one's marriage hints at fitness for leading a church, then the effectiveness of one's attempts to lead and provide order in a home speaks volumes. Paul has in mind the typical householder of Greco-Roman society. Besides the male head of the house, household members included the wife, children and, depending on the economic status of the householder, slaves. Normally the authority structure of the household was strictly patriarchal, and at each level subordination to the householder was expected. Anything less than this kind of obedience was taken as a sign of disorder and even political subversion, for the stability of the household was regarded as fundamental to the well-being of society as a whole.

The value system in this regard has changed in the present day, but such changes have brought upon wives equal responsibility, along with their husbands, to manage the home well. Though the hierarchy may have flattened, the focal point remains Jesus Christ and what is pleasing to him.

Nevertheless, given the value system that existed then, it would have been unthinkable for Paul to sanction as church leaders those whose households belied their leadership skills. Society expected the householder to command the respect of his wife, children and slaves. However, this particular condition was not meant to exclude the unmarried from holding positions of leadership in the church, though in those days marriage was almost the universal rule.

Not a New Believer

Second, the overseer must not be a new believer, or "novice" (verse 6). The reason is not lack of leadership potential but lack of spiritual maturity. The new believer is more likely to see such a position of

leadership as an opportunity for personal advancement, and to fail to understand the gravity of the task.

Not Conceited

The danger, as Paul describes it simply, is becoming conceited, or "lifted up with pride," and falling into the condemnation of the devil (verse 6). This may mean falling under the same judgement as the devil, or, as seems more in keeping with the next verse, being condemned by the devil. The point is that conceit, especially among church leaders, is just the kind of chink in the spiritual armour that the enemy often exploits. In Ephesus, conceit was the bane of the false teachers (1 Timothy 6:4; 2 Timothy 3:4), who may well have been immature overseers. Their rapid rise to a position of authority could easily have led them to think more highly of themselves and their teaching than they ought, hardening them in stubbornness and causing no end of arguments in the church. Conceit and cooperation have nothing in common. Unfortunately, when the enemy discovers this breach in defence and a church leader falls into sin, the testimony of the church falls as well.

Good Testimony before Outsiders

The final condition states clearly what has already been implied: the overseer must have a good report of those who are without, that is, a good testimony before outsiders (verse 7). Here the list of requirements concludes by returning to the general thought of irreproachability, but now with a particular audience—unbelievers—in mind. Deficiencies in the overseer's reputation or behaviour that damage this testimony open the leader up to reproach from outsiders, which is to say, to the snare of the devil. Perhaps in Paul's mind the greater danger lies in the fact that a fallen leader brings disgrace on the church and its message before those it is meant to reach.

The Right Perspective

Let us put the overseer code into its proper perspective. The importance and urgency of the church's evangelistic mission require that its leaders be of the highest calibre. They must be leaders whose management skill and purity of lifestyle instil confidence in Christians and elicit respect from those outside the faith. But the emphasis of this code is often missed. Irreproachability does not mean perfection. If Paul meant "without defect" or "in no need of growth," no one would qualify. Rather, as the range of qualities suggests, the code stresses wholeness as a measure of development towards maturity. That is, Paul wanted in leadership positions those in whom the Spirit was evidently and actively at work—though not necessarily finished—in the whole of life. Although realistically life is far too complex for anyone to be able to say at any

one moment, "The Spirit is now renewing every part of my life"—who could stand such a strain, anyway, one may ask—still, from one's conduct and attitudes, and from evidence that renovation is already under way, this kind of thoroughgoing commitment to God can be seen.

Application in Our Lives

As a guide to spiritual maturity, this code is applicable to all believers. It may serve as a map, charting for us a course to those areas of our life that need attention, while along the way we receive encouragement at the signs of progress already made. And if we lose our way, the map can bring us back onto the right road. A thoughtful look at this map from time to time will keep our attention fixed on thorough and balanced growth in Christ, with no area of our life escaping notice.

Deacons to Have a Blameless Reputation

Candidates for the office of deacon come under the same careful scrutiny as bishops. The qualifications they are to meet are closely similar to those of the overseer. As verse 10 indicates, "blamelessness" represents the acceptable standard. Verses 8 and 9 explain what is meant by "blameless," and again the concern for wholeness of development emerges. The qualities listed in verse 8 fall into familiar categories of observable conduct. To be "grave"—worthy of respect—implies a bearing that is obviously respectable. The deacon must also have control over drinking and must not be greedy of filthy lucre, or allured by dishonest gain. Plainly, the same kinds of qualities expected of the overseer are to be apparent in the deacon.

In verse 9, Paul inserts what appears to be a spiritual requirement—namely, that the deacon hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. They must prove themselves unconnected with the false teachers, though very likely some had once been deacons in the church.

Wives and Women Deacons

The qualities enumerated in verses 11 and 12 clarify the meaning of "blamelessness" still further. At verse 11, however, a new sentence begins, and Paul issues instructions that refer either to the wives of deacons or to women deacons ("deaconesses"). It is difficult to be certain which meaning Paul intended. Those who favour the meaning "wives" point out that the requirements concerning the women are surrounded on either side by those relating to deacons. The question remains open; but it is worth keeping in mind that, in the absence of a technical term such as "deaconess," a reference to "women" within a code listing requirements for the office of deacon would have sufficed to direct attention to those candidates who were in fact women. This also helps to set at rest the rather uncomfortable statements about women

and their conduct in chapter 2. I read these conditions as requiring modesty in everything a woman, whether a wife or a woman deacon, should exercise in her conduct.

The actual qualities expected of these women parallel those expected of men in verses 8 and 9. They are to lead lives that command respect, no doubt because they speak prudently and with self-control, are not slanderers, are not given to much wine, and are generally faithful in all things (1 Timothy 5:10). The patterns of behaviour that characterise overseers and deacons are also to be obvious in the lives of these women. Furthermore, as with the deacons, these women represent the antithesis of certain other women who had come under the influence of the false teachers (1 Timothy 5:15; compare 2 Timothy 3:6-7).

Deacon's Responsibilities towards Family

A final word reminds deacons of their responsibilities towards wife and family (verse 12). Like the overseer, the deacon must be the husband of one wife—a faithful spouse—and must also have proved a capable manager of the household. As we saw, this was a quality greatly admired in, and expected of, the householder by that society. Paul's point is again that one who would lead in the church must first know how to lead in the family, in a way that promotes harmony among its members and loyalty to its leader.

Verse 13 concludes the list of requirements for these offices with an encouragement to those who serve well: "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."

The Role Model

We always look for role models in every aspect of our lives. At the beginning of this study we spoke briefly of Moses, Jeremiah and Paul as men to be looked upon as model leaders. All of them were, agreeably, leaders worth studying and emulating. But if we are looking for the best role model of a leader, it is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.