



# SETTING THE EXAMPLE

Godly leaders are needed to lead healthy churches.

## 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13

Organizations rise and fall with leadership. Leaders who reflect the values of the company make a lasting difference. Most of us want our leaders to represent us well. We don't want to see our leaders' names in the news for the wrong reasons. Paul specified high standards for church leaders knowing that their influence would go beyond the local body of believers they served.

***What requirements do you value the most when it comes to church leaders? Why do you include each requirement?***

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13; TITUS 1:6-9

In the previous chapter, Paul provided instruction to men and women in the church regarding what they should do and how they should live. In 1 Timothy 3 he offered instruction about what church leaders must be and their qualifications for service.

False teachers were creating instability in the church by their spurious doctrine. They were undermining the confidence of believers. Moreover, the false teachers were bringing the gospel into disrepute. The church was floundering and desperately needed godly leadership.

Consequently, Paul addressed the need for qualified individuals to serve as pastors and deacons. First, he expressed God's requirement for overseers. The words *overseer* and *elder* are interchangeable terms for the role of pastor. The requirements did not give a job description for the pastor, but they do indicate the character qualities of a person who would serve in that position (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9).

In a similar manner, deacons, their wives, as well as other ladies who served the church were expected to uphold a high standard of godliness and faithfulness in keeping with their positions (1 Tim. 3:7-13).

The qualifications were designed to encourage the right persons to serve and discourage the wrong persons from leadership.

***As you read 1 Timothy 3:1-13, compare and contrast the list of qualifications for a pastor and a deacon. What do the similar qualifications reveal about the expectations for all believers?***

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## A PASTOR'S HEART (1 TIM. 3:1)

**<sup>1</sup>The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.**

## VERSE 1

There is a link between godly pastors and healthy churches. God intended for His churches to have pastors, and He intended for His pastors to meet holy qualifications that reflect His heart. This was a **trustworthy** saying because the life and work of a pastor is a sacred responsibility that carries eternal implications. The trustworthiness in this context focused on the character and competency of anyone who **aspires** to be a pastor.

Aspiring to be a spiritual leader is worthwhile, but there can be a big gap between aspiration and qualification. Therefore, Paul emphasized the qualifications for serving as a pastor. The word **•overseer** described a pastor as someone who directs and oversees the church's ministry. Paul was not advocating a church hierarchy or a governing episcopacy. Throughout the New Testament, the terms "pastor," "overseer," "elder," and "bishop" are used synonymously. Two examples highlight the interchangeable nature of the terms. First, Paul requested a meeting with the "elders" of Ephesus, but when he exhorted them he addressed them as "overseers" (Acts 21:28). Second, Peter appealed to the "elders" and encouraged them as overseers ("exercising oversight") of the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-2).

Paul reminded Timothy that serving as a pastor was a **noble task**. It was an honorable calling from God that required an honorable life as a testimony to His grace. To represent the Savior in the task of spreading the gospel and leading His church is a rigorous responsibility that should never be regarded lightly. A pastor's heart must beat in rhythm with the Savior's mission while leading believers to reach the unsaved and equip the saved.

***How was Paul's affirmation of those desiring to be a pastor also an affirmation of Timothy? Why is it important for every believer to seriously consider the role God wants him or her to play in His work?***

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## KEY DOCTRINE: *The Church*

While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture (1 Tim. 3:2).

## A PASTOR'S CHARACTER (1 TIM. 3:2-7)

<sup>2</sup>Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup>not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup>He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup>for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? <sup>6</sup>He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup>Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

### VERSES 2-3

Spiritual leadership necessitates exemplary behavior. The expression *above reproach* does not mean sinless perfection. Instead, it depicts the virtuous life of a redeemed individual. A pastor is expected not only to believe and preach the gospel but also to behave and practice the gospel. In significant ways, the call to live a life *above reproach* was spelled out in Paul's list of behavioral virtues.

The first key virtue is marital fidelity. The statement *the husband of one wife* translates a Greek phrase that is literally "a one-woman man." In interpreting what this means and how it applies, several options exist. One option is that a polygamist cannot serve as pastor. This is certainly true. However, polygamy was rare among Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus. A second option is that a single man should not be a pastor. Yet Paul's praise for singleness and his own status as unmarried appears to allow a single man to serve as pastor. A third and common approach would understand this passage to mean the pastor should not be divorced and remarried. It is not certain Paul had divorce in mind here since he did not use the Greek word meaning divorce. It is scripturally reasonable to understand the *husband of one wife* statement as referring to a man who is faithfully and unquestionably devoted to his wife and that his covenant of marriage presents a magnetic witness for Christ.

*Sober-minded* points to a man who possesses the ability to refrain from making rash decisions or living irresponsibly. *Self-controlled* describes one who is reasonable in human interactions.



A person who lives in this manner is **respectable**. Being **hospitable** includes the practice of welcoming others into your home and also the attitude of cordiality.

Another essential quality for a pastor was an ability to communicate God's Word. The phrase **able to teach** pointed to the effective explanation of doctrinal truths and the skillful refutation of heretical ideas. An able teacher was one who possessed a spirit-endowed gift to connect with listeners and impart Scripture in a manner that enabled them to understand and apply God's message.

Four more character qualities are listed in verse 3. Each one is stated as a prohibition to emphasize behavior that a pastor should avoid. The phrase **not a drunkard** should not be understood as permission for pastors to consume alcoholic beverages. Strong arguments can be made for total abstinence when we consider the tragedies that results from drinking. (See Prov. 20:1.)

The statements **not violent** and **not quarrelsome** stood in sharp contrast to the false teachers at Ephesus who were known to be divisive and combative. A quarrelsome individual rarely is a productive leader. A pastor who is **gentle** serves with humility rather than harshness.

Paul's admonition for a pastor not to be **a lover of money** should not be misused by a church as an excuse for failing to provide financially for their pastors. A church should take good care of its pastor and his family.

***What dangers do churches face when they compromise these biblical qualifications for leaders?***

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#### **VERSES 4-7**

The word **manage** denotes the exercise of discipline and authority immersed in compassion. When a pastor leads well on the home front, he demonstrates that he can **care for God's church**. By modeling integrity on a small scale in a family, a pastor proves his capability of spiritual leadership on a larger scale like a church.

Pride is an obstacle for any Christian but can be especially so for

a pastor. Consequently, Paul argued that the pastor **must not be a recent convert**. A believer needs a certain level of biblical knowledge and spiritual maturity before assuming the role of pastor.

At the other extreme from pride is **disgrace**. Paul indicated it was essential for a potential pastor to **be well thought of by outsiders** by living in an undeniably Christlike manner. Otherwise, unbelievers could disparage the name of Christ.

**How can you help your pastor consistently achieve these qualities?**

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### **BIBLE SKILL: *Comparing similar passages***

Create a list of the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3. Compare the following passages related to biblical expectations for every Christian: Ephesians 5:6-18; Philippians 1:27; 2:14-16; and Colossians 3:5-13. In what ways are the qualifications for pastors and deacons different from qualities of all believers? How are they similar? Compose a personal statement committing to fulfill scriptural expectations as you serve your church.

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### **A DEACON'S CHARACTER (1 TIM. 3:8-13)**

**<sup>8</sup>Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup>They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup>And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. <sup>11</sup>Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup>Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their**



children and their own households well.<sup>13</sup> For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

#### VERSES 8-10

The word *deacon* means “one who serves.” Although the men in Acts 6:1-6 were not called deacons, they functioned as servants to meet needs so that the apostles could focus on prayer and preaching. Those men may be regarded as forerunners of deacons.

A deacon’s character must ***be dignified***. This expression combines the idea of earnestness and dignity. A deacon was not to be glib or flippant. A man assuming the position of a deacon in a church would need to be known for his godliness.

Second, a deacon must not be ***double-tongued***. Literally, this word means he must not be guilty of double talk. He cannot say one thing to one person and something else to another. Deacons must be sincere and maintain integrity in their interactions. They cannot put forth a righteous image at church while behaving like unbelievers outside of church. Deacons, like pastors, should also be known for their self-control in regard to drinking and money.

In verse 9 Paul turned the focus from behavior to belief. A deacon should hold firmly to the ***mystery of the faith*** in Christ. The word ***hold*** means not only to possess, but also to preserve. The word *mystery* referred to truths previously hidden but now revealed through Christ.

According to verse 10, a deacon should not be put into his role hastily. To be ***tested*** involved an observation and examination of belief and behavior. The general evaluation of being proved ***blameless*** mirrors the pastor’s qualification to be so irreproachable in ethical demeanor that no charge against him could be proven legitimate.

#### VERSE 11

Whether Paul referred to the ***wives*** of deacons or women in general is unclear. Since Paul was addressing deacons, the context would suggest Paul had in mind here the wives of deacons. Nevertheless, the application applies to every woman in the church. Four requirements are needed.

First, she was to ***be dignified***. Godly behavior is to be expected of all church members, regardless of role or gender. Second, she is to

avoid being an accuser or slanderer. The word **slanderers** is derived from a word designating the devil, because he is one who makes accusations falsely. She must also be **sober-minded**. In summary, she must be **faithful in all things**, whether it is her family or her service in the church. Reliable is an appropriate synonym for *faithful*.

## Godly behavior is to be expected of all church members, regardless of role or gender.

### VERSE 12

Paul changed the focus back to the character of **deacons**. Identical to the requirement for a pastor, Paul pointed out the necessity of a Christ-centered home life for a deacon. Like a pastor, a deacon must be a one-woman man, upholding God's ideal for marriage. Furthermore, he must set a worthy example so that his **children** may have a clear comprehension of how a godly man lives.

### VERSE 13

Quite likely, false teachers in Ephesus had weakened respect for church leaders and their roles. Consequently, Paul reminded the deacons about their spiritual reward for having served well. First, they **gain a good standing for themselves**. When a deacon serves the Lord and the church in an exemplary manner, other believers recognize his dedication and sacrifice. As a result, he is esteemed as a person with an honorable reputation. Second, a faithful deacon receives **great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus**. Deep devotion to the Lord enhances the assurance that Jesus is worthy of our best service. It stirs a greater level of confidence in the power of Jesus to overcome any obstacle. Not only a deacon, but any believer who lives honorably for the Lord discovers an ever-growing boldness in the faith.

***How does faithful service honor God? How might memorizing 1 Timothy 3:13 be a way for all believers to remember the importance of service?***

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# IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers must consider what role God desires them to play in their local church.
- Believers can affirm men who demonstrate the qualities of a faithful pastor.
- Believers should seek to live a life that honors God through service.

***Spend time praying about the role you play in your church. Ask God to help you faithfully serve in that role. Are there other roles He may be asking you to consider? What keeps you from taking on that additional role?***

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***Discuss ways your group can encourage your pastor and his family. What actions should be taken as a result of this discussion?***

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***List ways you honor the Lord both in your church and outside of it. What actions will you take this week to honor Him in your church? List actions you will take to honor Him outside the church.***

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## Prayer Needs

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