

Lesson 4 | June 23, 2024

Teaching on Church Leadership

Study Text: 1 Timothy 3:1–13; 5:17–20; Titus 1:5–9

Central Truth: Qualified Christian leaders ensure proper care for God’s household.

Key Verse: 1 Timothy 3:1

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of bishop, he desireth a good work (KJV).

This is a trustworthy saying: “If someone aspires to be a church leader, he desires an honorable position” (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will consider various ministry roles in the church and the qualifications for those who fulfill them.
- Students will appreciate the restorative nature of a disciplinary process for ministers.
- Students will support their ministers with their prayers, finances, and time.

Introducing the Study

Say: Leadership is a major topic in both sacred and secular spheres. Books, blogs, and podcasts abound on the subject. Today we will see the kinds of qualities that must be exhibited by leaders in the church. Primarily, these involve the character of the leader. Are they living the kind of life that God’s people should follow?

Opening Activity—Leaders You’ve Known

Ask. Who are some of the best leaders you have known in your lifetime? What characteristics made them good leaders? Examples may include bosses or supervisors, church leaders, volunteer or community leaders, etc.

Say: As children we played a game in which everyone tried to watch and mimic the actions of one leader. Like that childhood game, we often practice the same leadership techniques we have observed in leaders we have followed. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul had left Timothy and Titus in Ephesus and Crete, respectively, with a task to carry out amid an era of deceptive false teaching. Key to their mission was the appointment and continued cultivation of solid leadership that would help the churches remain faithful.

Ministry “offices” were not yet clearly defined with roles and responsibilities, so we must not think exclusively of “pastors” in the same sense as today. But we will see that the characteristics and qualifications Paul described are still foundational and necessary for

all those who “take care of God’s church” (1 Timothy 3:5, NLT), including pastors and those in ministry alongside them.

Part 1—Qualifications for Pastors

Live Exemplary Lives

1 Timothy 3:1–3

Say: Those who have the responsibility of leading God’s church must live exemplary lives. Of course, none will be sinlessly perfect, but they are to be an example to all of how the gospel truths and the Holy Spirit’s indwelling produce the kind of life that pleases God and shines His light in the world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Greek word translated “church leader” (1 Timothy 3:2, NLT; “bishop,” KJV) describes someone with responsibilities for care and oversight of others. This is “a good work,” (verse 1, KJV; “an honorable position,” NLT), something one might aspire to be. Paul’s list of required characteristics begins with a comprehensive description for a life “above reproach” (NLT). The remaining qualities describe an exemplary life in detail.

For this first-century context, two assumptions can be noted in verse 2: The individual would have been married and male. (Women generally lacked the educational and social opportunities open to males.) This brings into sharper focus Paul’s instructions elsewhere as to how women should learn (2:11), his affirmation of numerous women in ministry contexts (see Romans 16:1–16), and his teaching that the single life as a calling has some advantages (1 Corinthians 7:7,32–35). The Assemblies of God has historically ordained women and men, single and married, to pastoral ministry.

Though marriage could be commonly assumed, marital faithfulness was not an expectation for men in the general culture. Paul, however, required that the church leader be “a one-woman man.” (The NLT has appropriately understood the “husband of one wife” phrasing in Greek to mean “faithful to his wife.”) Paul said self-control and wise living should be characteristic of “older men” in general (Titus 2:2) and they would naturally undergird a good reputation. The leader must be exemplary in the hospitality which should characterize every Christian (see 1 Peter 4:9) and must be able to teach, suggesting that this is one responsibility of leaders.

Church leaders must not be “given to wine” (1 Timothy 3:3, KJV).¹ They must not be violent, but rather gentle. Finally, they must not be argumentative or lovers of money. (Both of these qualities were prominent among false teachers.)

1. “Abstinence from Alcohol,” Assemblies of God (USA), accessed October 4, 2022, ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Abstinence-from-Alcohol.

Discuss

? Do you know individuals whose lives fit these criteria? Is your own life an example of these qualifications?

? Why are these criteria important for leaders in the church?

Be Worthy of Respect

1 Timothy 3:4–7

Say: Pastors and other church leaders must be the kind of people who are respected in their homes, churches, and communities. Their humility, maturity, and wisdom in the things of God, forged through time spent walking with the Lord, will bring honor to them, to the church, and to God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Those who are charged with care and supervision of the church must demonstrate their abilities in the care and oversight of their own households. Faithfulness in smaller areas allows the steward to be given greater responsibility, as in Jesus' Parable of the Talents (see Matthew 25:13–30). We should recall that these Early Churches met in homes and the homeowners would often be the leaders (a further reason hospitality was so important). Relationships within the household (including multiple generations and even servants or slaves) would be very much on display and needed to embody the gospel.

The household codes prevalent at the time instructed wives, children, and slaves to be in complete subjection to the head of household. A smoothly run household was highly prized. Paul's gospel-shaped renditions of such codes (Ephesians 5:21 through 6:9; Colossians 3:18 through 4:1) addressed the same three sets of relationships while making important countercultural modifications. Note especially the demands placed upon the patriarch himself, which was not a feature of the secular codes. The Christian head of household was to model the self-sacrificing love of Christ for his wife (Ephesians 5:25) and to keep in mind that he and his slaves were fellow servants of the same Master (6:9; Colossians 4:1). Even more fundamentally, the structure of the Ephesians passage in the original language makes it clear that the infilling, abiding presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers must permeate and transform every relationship in the household. The results might on the surface look like the ideal Greco-Roman household, but in fact they were founded upon the radically different premises of mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21) and the example of Christ.

Church leaders were to be mature in the faith—seasoned veterans in “the good fight”—lest the enemy exploit a weakness. It is true that even a mature Christian can stumble, but in general the wisdom acquired through a longer walk with Christ will yield invaluable experience that will serve well in discipling others. The two references to the devil in 1 Timothy 3:6–7 “bring together the complementary ideas of coming under his sway and sharing in his condemnation.”² Satan desires to sabotage God's servants; this is a great reason to pray faithfully for our church leaders!

² I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 483.

Discuss

? In what ways might a new convert be more susceptible to pride? What strategy might the enemy use against them in this area?

? How does a church leader's family life reflect upon their leadership of the church? What should characterize faithful leaders' handling of their families?

Part 2—Admonitions for Pastoral Leaders Matters of Compensation and Correction

1 Timothy 5:17–20

Say: Paul consistently upheld the principle that the church must support its ministers. Grounded in the Old Testament, this teaching was articulated by Jesus, who told His disciples to “accept hospitality, because those who work deserve their pay” (Luke 10:7, NLT). It is also critical that ministers be held accountable and corrected if they stray. Paul established guidelines for such cases. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

“Elders” is a very literal translation of the Greek; these were older people who exercised leadership roles. Paul had not used this word in his earlier letters, but it probably includes the “bishops and deacons” mentioned in Philippians 1:1 (KJV). Church leadership was plural, developing, and somewhat fluid in these early years. Some of these elders “labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Timothy 5:17, KJV), that is, in preaching and teaching—activities we today associate with pastoral ministry.

“Double honor” (verse 17, KJV literally translating the original Greek) is rightly interpreted by the NLT as both payment and respect. Ministers who do their work well should be respected and remunerated by the congregation. Paul supported this principle by an Old Testament passage (Deuteronomy 25:4) and a direct quote from Jesus (Luke 10:7). We must support our pastors today in their vital service.

Paul wanted to help Timothy establish corrective measures. These measures should not be initiated by a single, unsubstantiated charge, but when “two or three witnesses” (an Old Testament principle) corroborated the accusation, public intervention was required. The Assemblies of God (along with many other church fellowships) still follow Paul's guidance today, adhering to firm, biblically based guidelines for pastors who stray from the teaching of Scriptures. The fellowship of ministers is designed to hold one another accountable and ensure that everyone matures and learns from the redemptive disciplinary process.

Resource Packet Item 2: Jesus and Paul on Discipline

Distribute the worksheet and allow time for students to read the Scriptures and list the disciplinary steps described by Jesus and Paul. Then discuss the questions together.

Discuss

? In what ways can a congregation show respect for their pastor's ministry?

Further Qualifications

Titus 1:5–9

Say: Paul described the qualifications of elders to both Timothy (working in an established Christian community in Ephesus) and Titus (working among new converts on the island of Crete). The list he gave Titus was similar to the one in 1 Timothy 3:1–13 with a few differences, including that recent converts were not excluded from serving. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

While Timothy was working with an existing group of elders, Titus was charged with the initial appointment of leaders. Titus was completing the work he had begun alongside Paul on the island of Crete. After leaving him there, Paul wrote to encourage him, give guidance, and provide clear qualifications for the appointees.

The “blameless life” (Titus 1:6, NLT) corresponds to the life “above reproach” in 1 Timothy 3:2 (NLT) and the overarching description is filled out by the following qualifications. The first is still marital faithfulness, but the reference to children appears next here. The children “must be believers who don’t have a reputation for being wild and rebellious” (Titus 1:6, NLT). As in 1 Timothy, leading one’s own household well is required for “a manager of God’s household” (verse 7, NLT).

In verse 7, the terminology shifts from “elder” to “bishop” (KJV) or “church leader” (NLT). Such a leader must not be “arrogant or quick-tempered . . . a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money” (NLT). These are either identical to or synonymous with the earlier passage’s prohibitions. Verse 8 lists six things, again largely identical to or parallel to 1 Timothy, that such a leader must be: “a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate” (KJV). The NLT more accurately translates the second quality as loving “what is good.”

Finally, the church leader “must have a strong belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong” (verse 9, NLT). A firm inner conviction and faith in the gospel message enables the minister to fulfill the important responsibilities of exhortation, encouragement, and defense of the truth.

Discuss

? Why is it important for Titus to be appointing solid leadership in these churches? Why are these standards still important today?

? When you think of all the things pastors do, what do you consider their most important responsibility? Which qualifications are most important in that task?

Part 3—Exhortations for Deacons The Men

1 Timothy 3:8–10,12–13

Say: Paul also describes requirements for deacons, although he doesn't describe the specific tasks for this ministry role. Let's take a look at his comments regarding qualifications. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Greek word *diakonos*, from which we derive our word deacon, describes one who gets something done “at the behest of a superior” as an “assistant to someone”³ and is used frequently in the New Testament to refer to service and ministry. It is translated “servant” in Mark 9:35 and 10:43 (NLT). Paul used it to describe both himself and his ministry associates.

³. William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 230.

In this context, following Paul's qualifications for bishops or overseeing ministers, the deacons seem to be ones who help these ministers. Just as with the descriptions of other church leaders, Paul was most concerned with the kind of people they must be and said little about specific duties. “In the same way” (1 Timothy 3:8, NLT) introduces a similar list of standards for this new category of ministering servants.

Again, several of the qualifications are identical to or synonymous with those for bishops and elders, including faithfulness to one's wife, a household in order, not given to much wine or greed, and a respectable life above reproach. The deacons must not be “double-tongued” (verse 8, KJV), what we might call speaking out of both sides of one's mouth (“have integrity,” NLT). They must be committed to their faith (the mystery of gospel faith, no longer hidden but revealed in Christ) and keep a clear conscience.

Those who would be deacons must be examined and their lives found to meet the standards Paul set forth. The text does not indicate who would conduct the examination; presumably these criteria were observable by the whole church. Deacons who served well would receive respect from others and more confidence in their faith.

Discuss

- ? Does your church have deacons or board members? What are their responsibilities?
- ? Do Paul's qualifications still serve a purpose today?

The Women

1 Corinthians 3:11

Say: We're isolating a single verse for discussion because it gives us an opportunity to consider an important matter of interpretation. As one may notice from the NLT footnote, “their wives” has an alternate translation listed: “women.” We'll look more closely at this verse and what it suggests. [Please note: the interpretation presented here is the meaning defended in the Assemblies of God position paper titled “The Role of Women

in Ministry”⁴ and by many New Testament teachers and scholars. However, the biblical argument for women as ministers does not depend on the interpretation of this single disputed passage.] (Share your highlights from the following text.)

4. “The Role of Women in Ministry,” Assemblies of God (USA), accessed November 8, 2022, ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/The-Role-of-Women-in-Ministry.

“In the same way” is a very good translation of the beginning of this verse in Greek. Paul frequently used this phrase to introduce a parallel category. Greek does not have a feminine noun—such as *deaconess*—corresponding to the masculine *diakonos* of verse 8; if it did, that would be what we might expect after “in the same way.” Instead, Paul uses the word *gynaikes*.

In Greek, the words *man* and *woman* are the same words as husband and wife. When these words are used, it is always the context which determines whether the author means an adult male or a husband, or an adult female or a wife. (Remember, it was generally expected that an adult male was a husband and an adult female, a wife.)

The word *their* is not actually used in verse 8 in the original Greek; it was added in English to clarify what translators interpreted as the correct understanding of this passage. This is a quite common practice in translation. Possibly, Paul was *not* referring to “their [the male deacons’] wives” but to “women” who, like their male counterparts in ministry duties, have certain standards they must meet. If so, the women deacons are to be “respected” (verse 11, NLT)—the same Greek word, in its feminine form, that headed the list in verse 8 for the male deacons. “Not slanderers, sober” (verse 11, KJV) parallels “not double-tongued, not given to much wine” in verse 8 (KJV), though the word “sober” in verse 11 (KJV) can describe a more generalized self-control as the NLT suggested. Finally, these women in ministry are to be “faithful in all things” (KJV), a reference perhaps prompting Paul to resume his requirements for male deacons, specifically be “faithful” to one wife (verse 12).

Resource Packet Item 3: Women in Ministry

Distribute the worksheet. Then read it together and discuss the questions about the role of women in ministry.

Discuss

- ? Does this interpretation of verse 11 seem plausible to you? Why or why not?
- ? In what ministry capacities are women serving in your church?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God intends for His church to be cared for by people of integrity. Pastors should be respected and compensated for their work. A leader who fails must submit to an appropriate disciplinary process aimed at redemption. God will gift people for His mission, their lives bearing witness to those outside the church.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Implement one concrete idea for providing support to leaders in your church.
- Discuss with your household how you can more faithfully display God's character together.
- Honestly evaluate your speech, temper, finances, use of alcohol, and self-control.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Good Character Required for Leaders.
Exodus 18:13–24

Tuesday:

Remove Barriers from the Past.
Judges 6:24–32

Wednesday:

God Vindicates Falsely Accused Leaders.
Amos 5:10–17

Thursday:

The Lord Selects His Laborers.
Matthew 9:35 through 10:4

Friday:

Recognize and Support Emerging Leaders.
Galatians 2:1–10

Saturday:

Follow and Imitate Faithful Leaders.
Hebrews 13:1–8