

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST TIMOTHY

SELECTING LEADERS IN GOD'S HOUSEHOLD!

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-16

Introduction.

Since the problem facing the Ephesian church was false teachers, some of whom were elders (Acts 20:30), Paul begins this section by reiterating the qualifications for an overseer. Timothy, of course, is scarcely new to these things. But Paul is putting it in written form to teach the church and buttress Timothy's authority as he works to set things in order. Paul has just written that women are not usurp authority over leaders or congregations, but he did not want to leave the impression that just any man or person is qualified.

Desiring the Office of the Bishop

“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.” (v1)

In verse 1, "being an overseer" (NIV, NASB), "office of a bishop" (KJV, NRSV), the verb is *episkopē* (from which we get our English word "Episcopal") which means, "engagement in oversight, supervision," of leaders of Christian communities. "Overseer" (NIV, NRSV), "bishop" (KJV, NRSV) in verse 2 is the noun *episcopos*, "one who watches over, guardian." The term was taken over in Christian communities in reference to one who served as "overseer" or "supervisor," with special interest in guarding the apostolic tradition.

In terms of desire, the idea isn't, "Good for you, you want to have a place of spiritual leadership," even though that can be a godly desire. The idea is more like this: "This is a good, noble, honourable work. Timothy, you need to look for good, noble, honourable men." Spiritual leadership in the church isn't all about titles and honour and glory; it's about work. Jesus said: *If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all (Mark 9:35).*

Qualifications for Bishops

“A bishop then must be...” (v2a)

God has specific qualifications for leaders in the church. Leaders are not to be chosen at random, nor just because they volunteer, nor because they aspire to the position, nor even because they are "natural leaders." Instead, they should be chosen primarily on how they match the qualifications listed here. The qualifications for leadership have nothing to do with giftedness. God doesn't say, "Go out and get the most gifted men." God may easily and instantly create gifts in a man, because gifts are given by the Holy Spirit as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:11).

Going to seminary doesn't make one qualified for spiritual leadership. Being a good talker doesn't make one qualified for spiritual leadership. Natural or spiritual gifts in themselves do not qualify one for spiritual leadership. What one gives in money or volunteer time does not qualify them for spiritual leadership. What qualifies a man for spiritual leadership is godly character — and godly character established according to these clear criteria.

However, this is not a rigid list which demands perfection in all areas; they are both goals to reach for and general criteria for selection. When looking for church leaders, one should look at this list and ask:

- Does this person in question desire all these things with his whole heart?
- Does that desire show itself in his life?

- Are there others available who better fulfil the requirements of this list?

List of Qualifications

“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover, he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” (vv2-7)

- **Blameless:** This word literally means, “Nothing to take hold upon.” There must be nothing in his life that others can take hold of and attack the church.

This is a broad term for a man who lives a righteous life that can be seen as righteous. No one can stand up and rightfully accuse the man of grievous sin. In 1 Timothy 3:10, in speaking about deacons, Paul used the phrase being found blameless. This implies being blameless is demonstrated by a track record of behaviour.

- **Husband of one wife:** The idea here is of “A one-woman man.” It is not that a leader must be married (if so, then both Jesus and Paul could not be spiritual leaders in our churches). Nor is the idea that leader could never remarry if his wife had passed away. The idea is that is love and affection and heart is given to one woman, and that being his lawful and wedded wife.

This means that the Biblical leader is not a playboy, an adulterer, a flirt, and does not show romantic or sexual interest in other women, including the depictions or images of women in pornography.

- **Temperate:** The idea is of someone who is not given to extremes. They are reliable and trustworthy, and you don’t have to worry about wide swings of vision, mood, or action.
- **Soberminded:** This describes the person who is able to think clearly and with clarity. They are not constantly joking but know how to deal with serious subjects in a serious way.
- **Of good behaviour:** The idea is “orderly.” It is the same word translated modest in 1 Timothy 2:9.
- **Hospitable:** They are willing and able to open up their home to both friends and strangers.

The word means literally, "love of strangers." The Middle Eastern culture, of course, is well known for its hospitality toward strangers. It was considered a duty of all to show hospitality. A leader who doesn't show hospitality to others is likely to lack two-character qualities: (1) generosity and (2) openness towards others. Of course, in many cultures today hospitality is practiced less in the home and more in restaurants. But the attitude of generosity and help toward others must remain the same.

- **Able to teach:** This means they are skilled enough in the Bible to teach, either in a public or one-on-one setting.
- **Not given to wine:** The idea is of not being addicted to wine or intoxicating drink. This verse clearly discourages drinking alcohol beverage of any type perhaps, except medicinal.

- **Not violent:** This is a man who is not given to violence either publicly nor privately; a man who can let God fight his cause.
- **Not greedy for money:** The King James Version puts it far more memorably: not greedy of filthy lucre.
- **Gentle:** The kind of man who takes Jesus as his example, not the latest action hero.
- **Not quarrelsome:** The kind of person who is not always fighting over something or other.

The person should not be a person itching for a good fight -- not if keeping the peace of Christ in the church is a priority. The false teachers at Ephesus were known as quarrelsome. That trait itself should disqualify them from leadership.

- **Not covetous:** This is a more encompassing thought than merely greedy for money. The covetous man is never satisfied with anything, always demanding something more or different. A man who is constantly dissatisfied is not fit for leadership among God's people.
- **Who rules his own house well:** The godly leader demonstrates his leadership ability first in his own home; Paul recognized that it is in the home where our Christianity is first demonstrated.

It is true that a child may rebel from even a good home; but is the rebellion because of the parents or in spite of their job as parents? This is the question that must be asked.

"Manage" (NIV, NRSV), "ruleth" (KJV) is *proistēmi*, "to exercise a position of leadership, rule, direct, be at the head (of). If he is acting effectively, his children should (1) obey him, (2) respect him, and (3) be believers themselves. Of course, children will increasingly exhibit their own personalities and character. But observing them will tell you something about the candidate for church leadership. If his children are "wild and disobedient" (Titus 1:6), that may be a sign that something is wrong with the leader. Of course, our cultures are different than the strong patriarchal family structure of the first century, so that must be considered, also.

- **Not a novice:** New converts should not be given leadership too quickly. The leader should be well past the novice stage in their spiritual development.

Novice is literally "newly planted." When someone first comes to Jesus, it isn't good to put them into a place of leadership until they have been allowed to grow long enough to put down some deep roots. Promoting a novice too quickly gives occasion to the great sin — pride, in imitation of the Devil himself.

- **A good testimony:** These characteristics must be evident to all, even unbelievers to see. The potential leader must be a good Christian outside the walls of the church.

