

1 Timothy 3:1-7 – “What God Requires in a Leader”

Summary Statement:

This passage outlines the qualifications for church leadership, emphasizing the moral and spiritual integrity required in those who aspire to be overseers or leaders within the church.

1. The Calling of the Shepherd – 3:1

3:1 - *This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.*

Ok, first of all, let's be clear what we mean by this word **bishop**. It's the Greek word *episcopos*. It's not speaking of a person with a big hat or robe who has authority over a diocese or a group of churches as we would often see it interpreted today. This word is used interchangeably in Scripture with overseers, elders, or pastors.

We see in Acts 20:17-28 the various names being used. Paul called for the elders in vs. 17 and uses the word *presbuteros*. Then in vs. 28 he called them overseers, which is this word *episcopos*, and he also includes the word *poimano* to speak of shepherds.

Acts 20:28, *"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."*

- When Paul gave the list in Eph 4:11 of various offices to build up the church, he included pastors, using the Greek word *poimen*. Because they are to shepherd the flock of God. Care, protect, and feed the flock. That's the role of a pastor and the position of a bishop to carry out.

And so these words bishop, overseer, elder, pastor, all really describe the same function or role.

- Over history the church has formed a couple different styles of church government. Coming from these Greek names we have the Episcopalians, who operate under a bishop rule; an overseer outside the church giving leadership. And we have the Presbyterians. These operate under an eldership rule – a team of elders giving leadership within the church. We also have today Congregational churches, where the leadership is entrusted to the majority vote of the congregation.

Now all through history there's been discussion over which is the right form of church government. And to be honest, the Bible is somewhat unclear on a definitive governmental structure in the church. I think it's been rather flexible so as to keep the flow of the church Spirit led and not become so rigid to where the Lord can no longer lead. I think you can make a Biblical case for most of these governmental forms (excluding congregational, which I believe is nothing more than an appeal to our sense of democracy).

- Calvary Chapel's form of government is very simple. We believe Christ is the Head of the Church and has placed Pastor's in positions to lead the flock, to be responsible for them, and to faithfully love and feed them. As the Lord leads, elders are appointed to help the pastor in spiritual matters and deacons are appointed as well to assist the pastor in carrying out needs in the ministry.
- This chapter will cover the calling of both elders and deacons. Elders lead primarily over spiritual matters, while deacons lead over physical or practical matters. They help in the service and function of the church.
- And though the Bible doesn't seem to be specific on the form of government in the church, it's very concerned with who is governing the church. This is why we see these lists in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and other places where the necessary character of those who lead are given. The godliness of church leaders is far more important than the structure of leadership. And when you are taking care of the character, proper conduct and configuration will flow out of that.

So the character of the bishop (again: overseer/pastor/elder) is what we'll focus on in this passage.

Now Paul writes, if a person *desires* to be in this role he *desires a good work*. But let me add, this should never be a position that a person desires because he thinks it's going to be a lucrative thing. This is not some career choice that a person makes. This is a calling that must come from God.

- We've sort of in the last century elevated this role of pastor to a very noble and respected position.
- I remember when I was first beginning in the pastorate, there were various golf courses that had days where Pastors played for free. There were some perks that came with the position that people seemed to want to give a

blessing to. That and they thought that the pastors were so poor and beat up they needed a little help.

- Sadly I don't see any golf courses offering these breaks anymore, and that's probably a good thing for me. But my point simply is that there used to be a view toward this position and role that seemed to be to elevate the pastorate and give it an honorable position where people today could easily desire this role. But this should not be a self-driven appointment.
- James would say: **James 3:1**, "*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*"
 - o Being a Bible teacher which a pastor/elder is to be about is not about fitting into some profession or occupation. It's a calling. It's not something to be handled lightly where you can come and just punch your card and put in your hours so to speak. It's a very high calling and heavy responsibility that is not to be taken lightly. Why? Because you are handling the very Word of God. You have people's lives that are being swayed and changed by what you are saying and doing. And you need to be sure that you are rightly dividing the Word of truth and living out the Word of truth – feeding and guiding God's people rightly.

Remember in Paul's day Christians were greatly persecuted. If you wanted to take out the Christians, target the leader. This was a risky position to be in in this day. Yet if a person wanted to step into it, they would be stepping into a good work; a noble work. But it must be something you desire because the Lord has called you into it. **Acts 20:28**, "*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers...*"

It's not an easy work. It's demanding. It's full of pressure. There's great responsibility and great accountability needed. But it's a good work as you do it unto the Lord and through the Lord.

2. The Character of the Shepherd – 3:2-3

As we begin to look at these qualities of a bishop (overseer/elder/pastor) Paul will list 15 things. And notice they are mostly about character, not ability or giftings. Ability and giftings are important, but God doesn't often look at and call gifted or qualified people, He qualifies the called. He calls you and then equips you. What God is more interested in is a heart that is after God.

Of this list of 15, 14 of them are about character, one is about ability or gifting. We're not trying to minimize gifting or ability, but I would much rather have people serving and leading in the church that are people of reputable character over ability. That's why we have a team of pastors that are quite incompetent when it comes to the work, but they have great character 😊.

The List:

1. Blameless
2. Monogamous
3. Temperate
4. Sober-minded
5. Good behaviour
6. Hospitable
7. Able to teach
8. Not given to drunkenness
9. Not violent
10. Gentle
11. Not quarrelsome
12. Not covetous (free from love of money)
13. Rules his own house well
14. Not a new convert
15. Good reputation to those outside the church

3:2 - *A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;*

1. ***Blameless*** – This isn't speaking of sinlessness, or else we'd all be immediately disqualified. The idea behind blameless is to mean that which cannot be laid hold of. In other words, if someone brought an accusation against you, it just wouldn't stand. In other words, you're above reproach. You're living in a way where there's nothing unbecoming of your character or actions.

2. ***Husband of one wife*** – Again, when it comes to the role of leadership in the church, the emphasis is on the male. All these qualification words we're seeing in vv. 2-7 are all in the masculine.

What does Paul mean by husband of one wife? Some have argued he meant that an elder can never remarry if he becomes a widow. Or that he can't be an elder if divorced. Some have suggested it means he must be married before

becoming an elder (you could then argue that he must have children as well according to vs. 4). Some have said that he must not be a polygamist (as was common in Paul's day). This certainly is true and in line with God's Word.

- The Roman Empire would promote the idea that a man should have a legal wife for having his children, a concubine for pleasure, and a mistress for adventure. That sounds more like suicide than adventure. But understand that polygamy was often practiced in this culture. But it should not be so for the church leader. He should be the husband of one wife for that is God's design.

The other aforementioned arguments don't hold a lot of water. What Paul is really getting at is simply saying that the elder must be a one-woman man. If married you're to enjoy a healthy monogamous marriage. Be loyal to your marriage covenant.

3. **Temperate** – This speaks of being self-controlled; disciplined in areas that you could be given to excess. It has in mind that of being well-balanced and clear-headed.

4. **Sober-minded** – This is about being in the right frame of mind and being serious. You're dealing with some weighty things so don't be a clown and make everything a joke.

Now it's not meaning you can't have a sense of humour, it's about being able to think clearly and be self-controlled.

5. **Of good behavior** – Are you acting in alignment with the Word of God? This word means you have things well arranged or orderly. It's the same word translated as modest in 2:9 speaking of the women's clothing. You're to be respectable in your conduct.

6. **Hospitable** – This is about opening your home to others. A pastor should love people and be welcoming of people. It's going to be a difficult task to tend to the flock if you don't like being around the flock. Many pastors are setting themselves up today to just study and pray and do their thing behind the scenes and have no interaction with the people. Even on a Sunday they have a back door by which they slip out and never have any face-to-face time with others. This should not be. A pastor must be a people person.

The Bible says that some have the gift of hospitality. This can come very naturally to some. You may not have this gift of the spirit, but as a church leader these are disciplines of the Spirit you must exercise.

Speaking of giftings, this next qualification seems to be the one qualification tied to a particular gifting.

7. **Able to teach** – This means that the pastor must have a good handle on the Word of God and be able to teach it to others.

One great definition of this is found in **Nehemiah 8:8** when they discovered the Law of God and brought it before the people. It says, *“So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.”*

That’s what pastors/elders are called to do.

- Now there are some elders that function more as administrative elders, and some elders as teaching elders.
- **1 Timothy 5:17**, *“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.”*
- Not all elders are called as teaching pastors, but every elder needs to know how to rightly divide the truth and have a handle on proper doctrine. They’re to oversee things in the church and they need to be able to recognize when false teaching is creeping into the church. To be able to spot the false, they need to know the true.

So, to sum it up, one of my roles is to be able to teach. Make sense of the Word of God. I love the acronym KISS – Keep it simple stupid. That was written for me. That’s about all I can do.

3:3 - not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;

8. **Not given to wine** – This means that they are not to be given to *much* wine. They are not to be addicted to alcohol or getting drunk. This is what is implied. Could you imagine if the pastor has a stash of alcohol in the back green room and in order to take the edge off and calm his nerves, downs a few shots before coming out to preach. And then starts slurring his words as he’s emotionally telling stories about his pet bunny he had when he was 6 years old.

You’d be – should be – a little concerned. That’s no way for a pastor to behave. He’s not going to be able to be temperate, sober-minded, or of good behaviour if that’s the case.

- Now what's difficult is what is that line of drunkenness? How much is too much? It can be a very difficult area to gauge (even more difficult the more you drink). Many pastors have abstained altogether in this area to not even bring that temptation in or cause it to be a stumbling block. Nevertheless, alcohol is not a sin, but drunkenness is, and we need to exercise great prudence in these areas.

9. **Not violent** – If someone were to do something wrong or inappropriate, the elders must not react in violence. The word speaks of a bruiser or bully. The KJV translates this as a *striker* – one who hits. Could you imagine if church discipline was handled more like a UFC match? That would not be good. An elder must know how to restrain himself and not lash out in violent ways.

Not greedy for money is not in some manuscripts. We'll leave it out here as it will essentially be covered by the word *covetous*.

10. **Gentle** – This is one of the fruits of the Spirit. We should all be walking in gentleness one to another. A person should be free to approach the overseer of the church with a complaint or criticism without fear of an angry or out of control response.

11. **Not quarrelsome** – Again, this goes right along with not being violent but gentle. The idea here is that the pastor is not going to be quick to pick a fight or be contentious.

- **2 Timothy 2:24**, "*And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,*"
- Wiersbe said, "Short tempers do not make for long ministries." ¹

12. **Not covetous** – There's lots of things you can covet, but primarily this word is associated with the *love of money*. Serving in the ministry should not become a platform for you to get rich. Many false teachers were characterized by covetousness and greed.

An elder should be motivated by his love for God and desire to serve His people, and not motivated by a paycheck.

- **1 Peter 5:1–4**, "*The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the*

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 221). Victor Books.

glory that will be revealed: ² Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; ⁴ and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."

3. The Credibility of the Shepherd – 3:4-7

3:4-7 - *one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence ⁵ (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); ⁶ not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. ⁷ Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

13. ***One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission*** –

A church leader should be a good leader at home too. In fact, that's where the real ministry starts and flows from. How can an elder lead the church if he can't even lead his own home or have his children in submission to him?

- Could you imagine if on a Sunday I asked one of my sons to go get something for me from my office and they responded with, "*Get it yourself you loser, I'm not your slave.*" Chances are, you're going to lose a little respect for me. It may be difficult after that to take me seriously as a leader in the church.
- So it's important for a leader to have the respect and reverence of their own kids.

Now I will say, I've seen pastors raise their families well and their kids still walk in rebellion. I don't think that automatically disqualifies them from leadership in the church. Kids have free will. I've seen parents do everything right and their kids still walk away from God and the church. And I've seen parents do everything wrong, and yet have kids that are walking in the truth.

So we need to be careful how we judge these situations. It's more about being sure the elder takes proper responsibility at home and leads.

14. ***Not a novice*** – The elders should not be someone who is a recent convert. Give them time to grow and mature in the faith. Let them have some time to understand what serving in the church is truly about.

If you throw someone into an important position as an elder too soon, they may become ***puffed up with pride***. This is what led to Satan's downfall. He had a prominent role but it led him to becoming prideful and desiring the praise of others – the praise that's only reserved for God.

- If people aren't given adequate time to be tested, they could easily be put into a position that can go to their head.

15. ***A good testimony among those who are outside*** – What a sad thing it is to see a pastor or church leader act one way in the church and yet totally different outside the church. I've been with some pastors out in restaurants and seen them behave totally rudely towards staff and those waiting on them. To the extent I'm just embarrassed to be in the same booth with them and praying they don't find out we're Christian.

- The minister should not be looking to cheat systems or do bad business on the outside. He needs to be representing the Lord in all things. His reputation must be solid.

God is not looking for perfect people, but He is looking for faithful people – people whose lives reflect the transforming power of the gospel. The church will only be as strong as the character of those who lead it, and those who lead it are simply those who have first learned to walk closely with Christ. So whether you are called to leadership or not, pursue a life that is above reproach, grounded in truth, and marked by humility – because in the end, it's not position that matters, it's Christlikeness.

Points to Ponder:

1. Am I more interested in position than I am of personal character?
2. Is my private life consistent with my public profession?
3. What are some areas that may be preventing me from being blameless?