

"Words for Pastor and People" (Part 5)

One of the questions every generation of Christian believers has to answer is: What should be the qualifications of church leaders? What qualities should one possess to be a leader in the church? The verses we're looking at today in 1 Timothy address these questions.

As the first century church grew in numbers, an organizational structure developed. Certain roles and offices were created to provide oversight for the expanding church. In the Scriptures for today we'll look at 2 primary types of leaders in the early church. This should help us understand the qualities needed for leaders today!

This section begins: "The saying is sure, whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task" (1 Timothy 3:1). The word translated "bishop" is the Greek word "episcopace" (from which we get the words "episcopal" or "episcopacy"). A better translation than "bishop" is "overseer". An "episcopace" was a person who had *general oversight* of the church. It lists qualities needed for this office.

"Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil" (1 Timothy 3:2-7). *These are the personal qualities that overseers in the early church were to have!*

It also lists qualities needed for another leadership position: *deacons*. The Greek word is "diaconous", and it means "servant". In the New Testament this word describes *any Christian who serves*, but it's also used to describe one of the two main leadership positions in the first century church. These "deacons" performed a variety of *serving tasks and functions*.

Let's look at the qualities needed for them. "Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

That's all that's required to qualify to be a leader in the early church? No sweat! There are times I've read this, and as a leader in the church, I've felt like saying, "I quit! How can anyone measure up to these standards?"

Someone has put together a description of the perfect pastor. (This refers to a male pastor; this could equally apply to a pastor who's a woman).

"The perfect pastor preaches exactly 10 minutes.
He condemns sin roundly, but never hurts anyone's feelings.
He works from 8am until midnight, and is also the church janitor.
The perfect pastor makes \$200 a week, wears good clothes, drives a new car,
and donates \$150 a week to the church.
He is 28 years old and has 40 years of experience. He is also tall and good looking.
The perfect pastor has a burning desire to work with teenagers,
and he spends a good bit of time with the senior citizens.
He makes 15 home visits a day, and is always in his office when needed.
He never misses the meeting of any church organization,
and is always out in the community evangelizing the unchurched."

This is kind of the feeling I get when I read what's required of leaders in 1 Timothy!

Yet, the early church set high standards for those who would lead God's people. And, it's just as important for us to do that in the church today! If the church is to make an impact in the world, it needs capable leaders. *The church can't rise any higher or go any further than the quality of its leadership!* Now it's true that effective church leaders need skills and training. It's a complex world, and skills for ministry are needed. But the kind of leadership described in 1 Timothy 3 has more to do with the *character and spirituality* of leaders. Leaders are to be people of integrity! Godly men and women!

Please note: I'm not just talking about pastors and ordained ministers. I'm including all of us in the church who hold leadership positions! If you're a pastor, or on a church staff. Or a Sunday School teacher or small group leader. Or on the Administrative Board or the Board of Trustees. Or part of the worship team. You're a leader in the church! And that is a sacred calling! Often, churches are so hard up to get people to serve that they're willing to accept any warm-bodied person who's willing to accept a leadership position! But this was not the New Testament church's way of doing things! Leadership consultant Bob Russell says, "Leadership begins with who we are, not what we do."

Let's look more closely at the qualifications of church leaders listed in 1 Timothy, chapter 3.

There are high moral and ethical standards. Leaders are to be "above reproach" (1 Timothy 3:2). This doesn't mean *sinless*. If that were the case, only Jesus would qualify to be a leader in the church! But we should confess our sins and strive for holiness of life!

They should exercise temperate behavior, like not being a drunk indulging in much wine (verses 3, 8). Not greedy for money (verse 8). There are just some things church leaders should *not do*. Think about it, if we lack moral integrity, how effective can we be as a Sunday School teacher, or committee chairperson, or music director, or pastor. I worked at Armstrong the summer between college and seminary. There was this guy who was the gang leader on our tile line. He was okay, but he did all the crude things that most of the workers did in that factory. We were talking one day, and he told me he was the Lay Leader of a church in southern Lancaster County!

Leaders in the church are to have self-control, moral integrity, and purity of heart and life.

Also, leaders are to command the respect of outsiders. 1 Timothy 3:7 says, "Moreover, he (the church leader) must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, and the snare of the devil." Can people *outside the church* respect us?

There was a lady in a church I served who was a young widow. She was in choir, sang solos, led the Jr. Choir, taught children in Sunday School, was active in United Methodist Women. She was a very visible leader in the congregation. I began to hear reports that she was seeing a married man – whose wife was a member of the church! People would tell me that they saw her riding around town in this guy's car, the two of them sitting close together (no bucket seats)!

So, you're the pastor. What do you do? Finally, I spoke with her and said this was reflecting on the church and her witness as a Christian. She resigned her positions. Not surprisingly, some of her friends in the church were not very happy with me. Fortunately, things turned out ok in the end. She was restored, and our relationship was fine. But it doesn't always turn out so good! Leaders in the church should act in a way that gains the respect of non-Christians.

There needs to be integrity in our family life.

In our marriages. It says both overseers and deacons are to be "the husband of one wife" (verses 2 and 12). We're not sure if this means you can't be married more than once (as per some translations), or if it means you just have one spouse at a time! Certainly it suggests integrity in marriage. I know of a situation where a pastor of a church I previously served was on his third marriage, and his third wife was one of the children in our church when I was there! Like, "hello"!

I have to admit I have a problem with verses 4 & 5. "He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? (1 Timothy 3:4-5). How do you guarantee that? We can raise our children as best as we can, but there comes a point where we can no longer control them and their behavior. I've known many fine leaders in congregations who grieve over how their grown children may be living.

How do we interpret these verses? I think the kernel of truth here is that there should be integrity in the way we relate to our family members. How can we lead in the church if we're unfaithful to our husband or wife? If we're physically or verbally or emotionally abusive to our spouse or children? If we're not working on ourselves to become a better husband, wife, or parent? How can we lead in the church if we don't spend quality time seeking to build loving relationships with our kids? Or if we act like a jerk at home? Christian leadership begins in the home and family!

A fourth area that's important for church leaders is ***how we relate to people in general.*** Overseers are to be "hospitable" (verse 2), "not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome" (verse 3).

Deacons are not to be "double-tongued" or "two-faced" (verse 8). This means being deceptive, talking out of both sides of your mouth, inconsistent in your talk. It's hard to be an effective leader in the Body of Christ if you can't relate to people very well – if people can't trust you, if you're not dependable, if you can't control your temper or tend to create dissension in the church.

I've had some church leaders who *intimidate* others by throwing a tantrum, or threatening to quit if they can't get their own way. The former pastor of a church I served – a strong personality in his own right – confided with me that when he had served that church he was afraid of the church organist. Having to work with that organist too, I got what he said! Sometimes well-meaning but dysfunctional people hold leadership positions in the church, and can undermine that church's unity and ministry.

So what do we do? Ideally, try our best to put people in leadership roles who are emotionally mature, with good people skills. Yes, I know, that's the ideal, and often it's hard just to get people willing to serve. But in light of these Scriptures, that's got to be our intention! Emotionally mature people, with good people skills!

Finally, ***leaders in the church are to be spiritually mature.*** Overseers must not be recent converts (verse 6). Deacons are to go through a trial period to make sure they have the spiritual maturity to lead God's people (verse 10). Unfortunately, a lot of churches don't even have new converts – we're not winning people to Christ. But these verses still indicate that church leaders are to be spiritually mature. If we're leaders in the church, we ought to have a prayer life. We ought to be reading and studying the Word of God. We ought to be tithing. We ought to be seeking the Lord daily and growing in our faith.

Okay! By now, probably some of us are thinking, "Phew! I'm glad I'm not heading any church committee or have any leadership role in the church! I'm not that good!" Or, if you are in a position of leadership, you may be thinking: "Maybe I just ought to quit. I can't measure up!" Don't resign! I'm not preaching to lay guilt trips on church leaders, or scare others into vowing never to do any more than just attend church services and sit in the pews!

Quite the contrary – we need people willing to serve in the church, and provide good leadership for the congregation! But isn't it important, also, to set high standards – to strive to be the best we can be if we serve the Lord here!

Look how this passage of Scripture begins: "The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop (overseer) *desires a noble task*" (1 Timothy 3:1). It's a beautiful thing, it's a noble thing, to serve in a leadership role within the Body of Christ!

One last thought about these verses from 1 Timothy 3. I once did an in-depth study of these verses, and discovered that almost everything required here of *church leaders* is mentioned somewhere else in the Bible as qualities *every Christian believer* should have! So even if you're not presently a church leader, if we're saved and followers of Jesus, we are called to a higher standard of living!

