

Setting the Example
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1 Timothy 3:1-13

Opening Discussion: Regarding our political leaders, we've heard the quote, even from some respected pastors and teachers: *"We are electing a President, not a pastor or pope."* **How do you come down on that argument?**

Some would say that quote rationalizes bad personal character or conduct. Another position: When it comes to secular leadership I want the most qualified leader regardless of their spiritual or moral life. In a perfect world, we should prefer both competency AND character; but this isn't a perfect world.

What is NOT up for debate is scripture prescribes a higher standard for character and conduct in church leaders than that of corporate or political leaders.

This lesson is entitled, "Setting the Example." As I was preparing for this study on the qualifications of pastors and deacons, I was drawn to our Daddy's certificate of ordination, which I keep, on display in my study. It's a great Fathers Day weekend reminder of how well he fulfilled 1 Timothy 3:1-7. He set a great example and that is the "noble task" pastors and deacons should aspire to.

It has been said that everything "rises and falls" on leadership. That's true of life in general and in the church. The difference with church leadership is that scripture gives us a higher standard for the qualifications of pastors and deacons. These qualifications should be considered biblical requirements not suggestions.

Big Idea: Healthy churches require godly leaders. Every follower of Christ should know how to use scripture to discern if a pastor or deacon is biblically qualified.

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

- “Overseer” means pastor (bishop.) Scripture also uses the terms “elder,” which speaks to spiritual maturity,” and “shepherd” (Eph. 4:11) which speaks to the caring nurture of a pastor in ministering to the “flock.”
- Pursuing the office of pastor is noble, but only if the “desire” comes as a result of an inward calling given by the Holy Spirit.
- Charles Spurgeon in his lectures to his students said:
“Do not enter the ministry if you can help it,”...If any student in this room could be content to be a newspaper editor, or a grocer, or a farmer, or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a senator, or a king, in the name of heaven and earth let him go his way; he is not the man in whom dwells the Spirit of God in its fullness...(26-27)”ⁱ
 - The role of pastor should not come from blind ambition but only from inward calling. If a man can do anything else and be happy then it’s likely that man is not called as a pastor.
 - If the calling is sure then the qualifications and character have been given.

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

⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

- Paul gives some “musts” and some “must NOTs.”
- “Above reproach” or “blameless” – *“No valid accusation of wrongdoing that can be made against him...no overt or flagrant sin...”* (MacArthur.) ⁱⁱ
- The following qualifications describe “above reproach.”
- “Sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable” are pretty clear.
- “Hospitable” – Hosting people in homes, also an attitude of “cordiality.”

- “The husband of one wife” is debated. The translation: “one woman man.”
 - Was this about polygamy? Not prevalent in Roman society and forbidden by scripture (Gen. 2:24, Matt. 19:5-6, Mark 10:6-9.)
 - Was being married required? That would disqualify Paul!
 - Was it about divorce? Some say a divorced man would be disqualified as pastor. Others point out the Bible does not prohibit all remarriage after divorce (Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15.)
 - What is clear: A married pastor should be “faithfully and unquestionably devoted to his wife.”ⁱⁱⁱ
- Last week we covered the issue of whether a woman should occupy the role of pastor. Our denomination limits the role of pastor to men.^{iv}
- “Not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome” – Pretty obvious, not a bully.
- “Not a lover of money” means not greedy or “money hungry.” This is NOT an excuse to fail to provide for the pastor financially!
- “Not a drunkard” is another debated qualification. Our Explore the Bible lesson takes the conservative position: “...*should not be understood as permission for pastors to consume alcoholic beverages.*”^v
- Some interpret this as, a qualified pastor won’t drink alcohol to “excess.”
- This verse speaks to example and reputation (testimony/witness) more than a prohibition on drinking alcohol. A pastor (in his own heart) and a church (regarding their pastor) must prayerfully consider how the use of alcohol impacts the testimony/witness of that leader to a watching world.
- What is clear in the text: A qualified pastor will not have the reputation of an “excessive drinker.”
- Verses four and five: If a pastor cannot manage their own home and (minor) children, how can we expect them to “oversee” the church?
- This doesn’t appear to refer to adult children who have strayed.

- Verse six warns that a “new convert” who isn’t yet biblically knowledgeable and spiritually mature, could become prideful and conceited as a pastor.
- I wouldn’t want a surgeon who hasn’t finished med school. I shouldn’t want a pastor who isn’t biblically literate and spiritually mature.
- While I don’t believe seminary training is a requirement, it’s certainly a major plus! Why WOULDN’T a young pastor get equipped in this way?
- Verse seven: Reputation observed by non-believers. Those outside the faith are scrutinizing our lives (not just pastors) for inconsistency between what we profess and how we perform. They have every right to do so!
- Writing about what is and is not permitted in Christian freedom in 1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV) Paul instructed: ³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
- We all have to ask if our conduct glorifies God to a watching world.
- In verses eight through thirteen Paul gives the qualifications for deacons, which are very similar to those of pastors.

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

- First, let’s be clear that deacon (Greek word: *diakonos*) means servant. Acts 6 gives the history of how these servants emerged out of necessity in the first century church.
- The office of deacon is not the same as the position of elder. Deacons were not intended to be “board of directors” or “supervisors” of the pastor.^{vi}
- I won’t reiterate what has already been covered in verses two through seven, but let’s highlight a couple of things specifically regarding deacons.

- Verse nine: What does “*hold the mystery of faith*” mean?
- One commentator: “*This is a warning against allowing into leadership people who are ungrounded in the Christian faith or who adhere to strange or unfounded doctrines.*”^{vii}
- Remember the false teacher problems in chapter one?
- Wiersbe: “*The word mystery means “truth once hidden but now revealed by God.” The great doctrines of the faith are hidden to those outside the faith, but they can be understood by those who trust the Lord. Deacons must understand Christian doctrine and obey it with a good conscience.” He continues, “...some church officers know their church constitutions better than they know the Word of God. While it is good to have bylaws and regulations that help maintain order, it is important to manage the affairs of a church on the basis of the Word of God.”*^{viii}
- Verse eleven speaks to another debate: Is this verse addressed only to the wives of deacons or is it addressed to women who might become deacons? Can women be deacons? Verse twelve goes back to the question can a divorced person be a deacon?
- How does our denomination interpret these issues? How should we?
- Remember, the SBC is a cooperating body of churches. There is no “top-down” hierarchy. Each local church interprets scripture on these issues.
- Let’s start with divorce which we’ve already covered above and add this comment from our own denomination regarding deacons: “*Given that divorce has become so widespread in our modern culture, an increasing number of Baptists are willing to consider the circumstances of divorce, the timing of divorce (before or after salvation), and the track record of covenant love since one’s divorce and remarriage when evaluating a man’s suitability for ordained leadership. Those who embrace this interpretation point to the “exception clause” in Jesus’ teaching on divorce as foundational to their understanding of divorce and remarriage. This remains a point of continued debate in the Body of Christ.*”^{ix}
- What about women as deacons? This is also not clear-cut in the SBC.

- First, different translations of scripture render the Greek word "gyne" (goo-nay) or *gynaikos* as either wife or woman.^x
- In an article: "SBC Officials Disagree about Women Deacons" Ken Hemphill, former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary was quoted: *"If we take 'women' as a reference to the wives of deacons, we must ask why Paul gave no qualifications or instructions for the wives of overseers?" Hemphill wrote. He also said the Bible gives no evidence of a separate order of deaconesses apart from the office of deacon.*^{xi}
- *"Hemphill supported that interpretation with a reference to Phoebe as a deacon in Romans 16:1, and to a commentary from a church leader in the fourth century that the Timothy verse refers to women who hold the office of deacon.*^{xii}
- In the same article some SBC leaders hold the position that ordination is only for men in both senior pastor and deacon roles.
- Some churches do ordain women as deacons and some don't.
- Verse thirteen is a good ending to this discussion:

¹³ 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.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Healthy churches require godly leaders. Scripture prescribes a higher standard of character and conduct for church leaders than even that of corporate or governmental leaders.
- This passage outlines biblical qualifications for pastors/elders and deacons. These are biblical imperatives not suggestions.
- If I don't feel called to be a pastor or deacon why should I care?
- Every follower of Christ should know how to use scripture to discern if a pastor or deacon is biblically qualified. One day you may feel called to one of these positions, or called on to determine if others are qualified.
- Effective churches that glorify God will hold their leaders to a higher standard straight from scripture.

ⁱ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/a-quibble-with-spurgeon/>

ⁱⁱ THE MACARTHUR BIBLE COMMENTARY Copyright © 2005 by John MacArthur

ⁱⁱⁱ Explore the Bible © 2019 LifeWay. Christian Resources, Nashville, TN 37234.

^{iv} “*While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.*” (Baptist Faith and Message)

^v *ibid*

^{vi} *ibid*

^{vii} Larson, Knute. Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon: 9 . B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

^{viii} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 221). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{ix} <http://www.sbc.net/faqs.asp>

^x Swanson, J. (1997). Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament) (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

^{xi} <https://ethicsdaily.com/sbc-officials-disagree-about-women-deacons-cms-3481/>

^{xii} *ibid*