



“THE ASPIRATION OF SPIRITUAL LEADERS”

1 Timothy 3:1

Theme: *Qualified spiritual leaders are God’s men doing God’s work in God’s ways to serve God’s people to the glory of God’s Son.*

Introduction: Leadership is everything. The reason that the Church has endured for 2 Millennia is because Jesus Christ is our Head. Because He is committed to the task of building His church, we know it will overcome all obstacles – even “the gates of Hell” cannot prevail over it. However, individual local churches are entrusted to spiritual leaders who are entrusted with the stewardship of overseeing the saints as under-shepherds of Christ Jesus. To whatever degree these men are faithful and loyal to Jesus, the church will know blessing and power. As men replace Jesus as the heads of churches, churches will stray. This does not mean that it will fail to grow – many rapidly growing churches are knowing “success” because they are merely affirming what people desire to receive in their temporal or cultural yearnings.

Faithful spiritual leaders focus more on what Jesus desires than what a sinner desires. Spiritual leadership serves Christ as the foremost means by which we serve Christ. It is an arduous task pursued for one reason ... God’s call. No one ought to self-appoint to the role of overseer in the church. Elders are called men who are specifically tasked to fulfill what Christ has dictated they do to represent Him in the church. They are not free to rule God’s people independently from the ordained priorities of preaching, teaching, praying, shepherding, and protecting God’s people using the Word of God. In our text today, we see that **“qualified spiritual leaders are God’s men doing God’s work in God’s ways to serve God’s people to the glory of God’s Son.”**

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| <p>I. The Desire to Lead – 3:1a</p> <p>II. The Designation of Leader – 3:1b</p> <p>III. The Diligence in Leadership – 3:1c</p> |
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I. **THE DESIRE TO LEAD – 3:1a**

A. **The Propriety of the Desire to Lead**

1. As Paul turns his attention back to the responsibility of men to engage in leadership of the church, he states: **“It is a trustworthy statement:”** – a phrase that essentially means an incontestable or indisputable word, lit. =

“faithful the word.”

2. Apparently, not only were women seeking to insert themselves into leadership roles, but men were also abdicating and avoiding stepping up to lead.
3. The welfare of the church rests to a large degree on the leadership of the church – ultimately, we know the church will endure because Jesus Christ, its Head, is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
4. However, those in whom He invests His leadership can poorly represent Him and cause an individual church to weaken, wander, or worse.
5. As a result, Paul declares the propriety of men possessing the desire to lead – “... *if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.*”
6. This is a first class condition indicating that it is assumed to be true when someone “*aspires to the office.*”
7. “*aspires*” [ὀρέγω] – refers to “stretching oneself forward to grasp,” or “aim at” something referring to seeking to make oneself suited to fill that role.
8. Such an aspiration can take the form of:
 - a) *Settling oneself down in relying solely upon God’s Word for direction*
 - b) *Serving faithfully in the mundane tasks of ministry*
 - c) *Seeking to be disciplined in godliness*
 - d) *Submitting consistently to the authority of leadership*
 - e) *Studying diligently to rightly divide the Word of Truth*
 - f) *Spreading the Gospel to those who are lost*
 - g) *Sensitizing yourself to the needs of those around you*
 - h) *Sacrificing personal priorities for the glory of Christ*

B. The Pursuit in the Desire to Lead

1. As we’ve mentioned before, the motivation for what we do can be as important as what it is we do.
2. If a man pursues the role of “*overseer*” out of a desire unworthy of the office, he is unqualified regardless of how noble or virtuous he may appear to others.
3. Some of the unworthy motivations for seeking leadership include:

- a) Profit - cp. [1 Peter 5:2](#)
 - b) Power - cp. [1 Peter 5:3](#)
 - c) Prestige - cp. [3 John 9](#)
4. It must be the yearning to be used to serve Christ and His glory that motivates a person to seek to oversee the work of Christ among the saints.
 5. This is what is referenced by the term “*desires*” [ἐπιθυμέω] at the end of the verse: “having a strong desire or longing for something; or “to set one’s heart on something.”
 6. This is a word that can have a negative connotation of “lust” for something sinful or a positive connotation of “eagerly longing” for something appropriate.
 7. Of course, the origin of such a desire is the Spirit of God who stirs these desires as we seek to glorify Christ - cp. [Psalm 37:3-4](#).

II. THE DESIGNATION OF LEADER – **3:1b**

A. The Role of Overseers

1. In our text, Paul indicates that “*the office of overseer*” is what is desired; the text literally says: “aspires to supervision” [ἐπισκοπή].
2. This came to be associated with the title “bishop” - but this has merely created confusion as the hierarchy of the church was that a man was overseeing other priests which is not taught in this text.
3. The notion here must be clarified as to who is in view and the best text to distinguish these matters is [1 Peter 5:1-3](#).
 - a) **THE WHO:** *The leadership in the church is entrusted to a plurality of men known as “elders” [πρεσβύτερος] - a reference to the spiritual maturity and wisdom of spiritual leaders.*
 - b) **THE WHAT:** *“Elders” - the spiritual leaders - are given a responsibility to “Oversee” [ἐπισκοπέω] or supervise the ministry of the church - a reference to what the “elders” are to do.*
 - c) **THE HOW:** *The “Elders” who are “overseeing” are to “shepherd” the flock of God [ποιμαίνω] - a reference to how they are to go about “overseeing” the people of God.*
4. In this way, we recognize how spiritual leaders are to look at their duties - to focus on the welfare of the people of God through a variety of shepherding activities:

- a) They must pay attention to the saints - [Hebrews 13:17](#).
- b) They must preach & teach the saints - [1 Timothy 5:17](#).
- c) They must pray & with struggling saints - [James 5:14-15](#).
- d) They must provide examples to the saints - [1 Peter 5:3](#).
- e) They must protect the saints - [Acts 20:28](#).
- f) They must preside over controversies between saints - [Acts 15:22ff](#).
- g) They must prove other spiritual leaders among the saints - [1 Timothy 4:14](#).

B. The Responsibility of Overseers

1. Since the responsibilities of “**overseers**” is so eternally impacting, such men are warned to avoid usurping the role when God has not called them.
2. Self-appointment is a disaster not only for the saints within a church, but for the man.
3. James therefore warns that unqualified, ungifted, and unfaithful men who elbow their way into spiritual leadership will regret it - [James 3:1](#).
4. Only men who are “above reproach” are permitted to enter the role of elder who oversees the ministry of a church as those shepherding the saints - cp. [1 Timothy 5:19-22](#).

III. THE DILIGENCE OF LEADERSHIP - **3:1c**

A. The Demands of Leadership

1. Paul states very clearly that what an overseer does is “**work**” [ἔργον] - a “deed,” “occupation,” or “accomplishment.”
2. The reality of the “**work**” of a spiritual leader is that it is not a career or merely a position, but a life; it’s not merely what we do, it is what we are.
3. Spiritual leaders are never not spiritual leaders, there’s no vacation from their existence or suspension of the heart instilled within them by God’s Spirit.
4. Terms that are used to describe ministry:
 - a) “**hard work; labor**” [κοπιᾶω] - [1 Timothy 5:17](#).
 - b) “**striving**” [ἀγωνίζομαι] - [Colossians 1:28-29](#).
5. Spiritual leadership that is performed properly is an exertion that extends beyond what is normal, reasonable, and naturally explainable - possible if, *and only if*, God’s Spirit is filling the leader and empowering him to accomplish the tasks assigned to overseers - [2 Corinthians 3:5; 9:8](#);

12:9.**B. The Delight in Leadership**

1. As stringent as the requirements are, hesitant men ought to be to assume these duties without being truly called, those who are indeed called find marvelous blessing in serving.
2. Paul emphasizes this through describing it as a *“fine work”* they desire to do.
3. The word *“fine”* [καλός] – in this context means to be **“in accordance at a high level with the purpose of something or someone, good, useful.”**¹
4. It describes the moral quality of this work – it is “noble” (ESV) or praiseworthy.
5. The work of overseeing the church, the Body of Christ purchased with His own blood, is the highest, greatest, and most glorious calling to which a man can ever be called – commensurate to the glory associated with a woman who bears children who become vessels of honor as described in the previous verse.

So What?

1. **What is my responsibility in relating to God’s men who are called to exercise oversight in the Church?**
2. **How should I be praying for these godly men?**
3. **What can I do to make elders take additional delight in their ministries?**
4. **What can I do (or help my husband do) to become more interested in and qualified for spiritual leadership?**
5. **What should I do if I notice lack of integrity in an elder?**

Qualified spiritual leaders are God’s men doing God’s work in God’s ways to serve God’s people to the glory of God’s Son.

¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 504.