

## God's Design for Leadership in the Church – 1 Timothy 3:1-7

**Our goal is NOT to talk about politics or other churches.**

**Main Idea:** The structure of a church's leadership reveals how serious that church is about following Christ.

### **I. The Task | 1 Timothy 3:1**

The structure of a church's leadership reveals how serious that church is about following the Christ who owns it! To be a New Testament Church, we must use and abide by New Testament terms. To say that the government of the church is divinely ordered is to say much more than "here are some big biblical principles for running the church" or "there are some biblical passages that detail matters of church polity." **It is to say that it is ordered by and with a view to Christ and His final glory. Critically, the ordering of the church is not designed to fund or increase but to restrain man's natural thirst for power!** In a church, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the head, holds all governing authority within and under Himself (Matt.28:18). By His free determination and through His free gifts, He calls servants through whom His church is to be ordered and cared. In subjection at every point to the will of Christ, these servants have ministerial authority. When stepping away from the revealed will of Christ (the head), these men have no authority whatsoever. **The effectiveness and testimony of any church is largely a reflection of its leaders.** There is an inseparable link between the character of a church and the quality of its leadership. The church at Ephesus started well, but after Paul left, a group of false teachers arose and began to take over the church. Paul starts the third chapter in his letter with this phrase that is unique to the Pastoral Epistles: "this saying is trustworthy." Each time Paul uses "this saying is trustworthy," he introduces Truth of ultimate importance! A trustworthy statement is an obvious; self-evident statement that doesn't need proof. **Here, the trustworthy statement points to the main issue in the church at Ephesus: the leadership (or lack of) in the church.**

The term *overseer* comes from the transliterated Greek word *episcopos* (translated as bishop); this word is synonymous with two other NT words: *presbiteros* (translated as Elder), and *poimēn* (pastor). Throughout the NT, however, the words for overseer, elder, and pastor are used interchangeably, bearing different functions (at times) but the same authority (1 Pet. 5:1-2; Titus 1:5-7). We are bound to conclude from the biblical usage that there is no difference in rank among the elders of the church, and that therefore **hierarchical forms of church government go beyond the teaching of Scripture. The biblical pattern for church leadership is spiritual government by a plurality of elders.** In the OT, the term "elder" is used to describe the leadership in Israel that assisted Moses (Exodus 4:29; 18). In the NT, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in all churches (Acts 14:23). No one simply decides to become an elder in the church; that is God's call, and requires the church's affirmation following the guidelines set forth in the NT.

#### **To Ponder:**

1. Is there anything you learned regarding the task of elders that you did not know before studying this passage?
2. What kind of authority do elders have in the church, and how does that apply to church members?

### **II. The Qualifications | 1 Timothy 3:2-3**

Choosing the right leaders is to be done by measuring men against a divinely inspired checklist of qualifications. The task of oversight, teaching, and leading a church is a highly esteemed task that must be done not only based on someone's ability to perform certain tasks but only by those who are morally and spiritually qualified to do what God calls leaders to do. The qualifications presented by Paul in verses 2-3 represent a list of spiritual virtues and character traits that church leaders must possess. Note that Paul says nothing about the duties or responsibilities of leaders, but he is concerned with their spirituality, morality, and knowledge of God's Word.

The integrity of an elder must be beyond question. A man above reproach is a man who has no observable or legitimate accusations against his character, spirituality, and knowledge of Scripture. A husband of one wife is a man who is morally accountable for his sexuality and faithfulness to his one wife. God wants leaders in His church to be living examples of biblical marriage, and that is non-negotiable. This does not mean that those not married are not qualified to serve as elders since that would contradict Paul's theology of encouraging men to remain unmarried for the sake of ministry (1 Cor. 7:8-9). Neither does being "the husband of one wife" disqualify those who had remarried under the biblical grounds for remarriage (Matt. 19:9; Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:15-16). A one-woman man is a man devoted in his heart and mind to the woman who is his wife! He loves, desires, and thinks only of her! He maintains sexual purity in his thoughts and his conduct. A sober-minded man is free from every form of excess, passion, and rashness. To be sober-minded is to be cautious and vigilant for the protection and oversight of the church. A vigilant elder notices spiritual needs and warns of spiritual danger. A respectable man is a well-mannered man. There is no place for bullies in church leadership. A man who is either physically or verbally abusive cannot be trusted to tend God's sheep. A hospitable man is an approachable, caring, compassion-filled man. Elders must be available and welcoming to believers and unbelievers as a representation of Christ.

The sixth qualification Paul listed is the most important among all. A man able to teach is a man who is highly skilled in the Word of God. This is the one qualification that sets elders apart from deacons. To teach sound doctrine is the primary task of an elder (2 Tim. 2:15). As imitators of Christ, elders need to know the Word, teach the Word, and obey the Word so that others in the church will be instructed and spurred on to greater faithfulness. A drunkard is directly connected to a man with poor decision-making ability. An alcoholic cannot serve as an elder. A quarrelsome man argues with everyone over everything and often engages in controversies. An argumentative man is the worst kind of man to have on a board of elders. A lover of money is a man who is not content with what God has given Him. It is a great mistake to consider wealth a credential for spiritual leadership. Though being rich does not disqualify a man from leadership, it does not recommend him for it either. An elder must be a man who is content with what he has and does not use his financial status as an influence.

#### **To Ponder:**

1. What are the responsibilities of elders as spiritual leaders in the church?
2. How is spiritual leadership different than corporate/secular leadership?

### **III. The Challenge | 1 Timothy 3:4-7**

The most desirable quality for any leader is integrity! Not intelligence, personality, charisma, courage, humor, administrative skills, vision, or decisiveness (those all play a part, but if there is no integrity, there is no leader—not in the church). The integrity of a church leader does not begin at church but at home! It is not enough for an overseer to have an exemplary public life; he must also have an exemplary private life. He should be able to lead his wife and children by his own example into a path of pursuing Christlikeness! Paul ends this list of qualifications by touching on one of the greatest dangers facing human beings: PRIDE! Placing someone new in the faith in leadership would expose that person to the temptation of pride almost immediately. Not only is the church's leadership designed by God to display His glory, but it's also designed to depend on His gospel. Nothing Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 3 is possible without the gospel of Jesus Christ. The character qualifications, roles, and responsibilities of church leaders are possible only due to Christ living in His people. We must remember that Jesus is our leader and that people are qualified to lead only insofar as He is living and working within them. If we want to understand Christian elders and their work, we must understand the biblical imagery of shepherding. As keepers of sheep, NT elders are to protect, feed, lead, and care for the flock's many practical needs. That is the kind of man we will observe and affirm to serve as leaders at Truth Community Church.

#### **To Ponder:**

1. What role do you see yourself play in the process of affirming the leaders of Truth Community Church?
2. How can we as a church avoid appointing leaders who are not called or qualified to lead?