

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:1-13

Title: *Qualifications For Church Leadership*

Theme: Paul gives the qualifications for the offices of deacon, deaconess and elder. Here we see a high bar for church leadership; we must still establish a standard for church leadership today.

Introduction:

Today, I want to talk for a few minutes about discipleship. Today's Bible text is specific to church leaders, but if you get down to the base of the qualifications for church leadership it is all about being a disciple of Christ.

Are you a disciple of Christ? I really hope so, but we'll come back to that question.

Can you say that you have experienced a time in your life when you were discipled?

How do you study the Bible?

What does it mean to have time with God, or daily devotions?

Several years ago, I was part of a church plant. A church plant is a new church in a certain area. In this case the area was Piqua, OH and I was the youth coordinator at this church plant. I was also on the steering committee. The steering committee was the main board of this church at the time. During one meeting we were talking about small groups. Someone stated that a small group could meet every other week and that would be discipleship. I thought about that for a while, but didn't say anything in response. I still think about that statement. I think my view of discipleship is much more comprehensive than that gentleman's view would be.

At another church which I was very involved in people grew unhappy because the pastor wouldn't allow a particular person to participate in worship leadership. The man in question had many issues with his family and the pastor thought as a worship leader he was a church leader, and his spiritual life was not ready for that type of leadership. That pastor eventually left, and another pastor was called to the church. This pastor allowed this man to lead worship. Over time it seemed evident that this man was having an affair with another one of the worship leaders. How unfortunate the circumstance of that was! How much that harmed that church and his family!

Discipleship and church leadership are connected. In 1 Timothy 3:1-13 Paul writes about overseers, which are elders, bishops, pastors, and Paul writes about deacons. There is quite a list of expectations. These expectations are really about who these people are, not what they do. What I see is that they are discipled Christians. Let's talk about this, but first let's read the passage:

1 Timothy 3

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

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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.

Qualifications for Deacons

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. 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.

- First, this passage shows that leaders have proven themselves to be disciples of Christ.
 - Notice **verse 6** says that he must not be a recent convert. Then verse 10, talking about deacons says that they must be tested. This passage is saying that they are disciples of Christ who have been disciplined. What is the difference?
 - To be a disciple means to be a follower of someone. As a Christian we are a follower of Christ. In Romans 1:1 Paul calls himself a “bond-servant” of Christ. This actually means a slave, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another, his will being altogether consumed in the will of the other.¹ A synonym of this noun is the noun deacon. So, Paul not only calls himself a follower of Christ, but a slave to Christ.
 - Every Christian is a disciple. Now, is every Christian living as a follower of Christ? We hope so, but unfortunately, as I have stated before, Christians are the best and the worst testimonies for and against Christianity. That is exactly why I believe Paul’s requirements for leadership show that a church leader is not only a disciple, but a disciplined leader.
 - **A disciplined person has been a Christian for some time and has shown that they are Disciples of Christ.** In reality, without being too legalistic, a disciplined Christ follower meets this standard.
 - **Verse 7** says that the church leader must have a good reputation with outsiders. This means their life shows that they are a disciple of Christ. This says a good reputation with “outsiders.” This means that the church leader is striving to be like Christ with people who don’t attend his or her church. The church leader is a Christian all the time, not just on Sundays. This means that they are more than the new convert, for the new convert might still be struggling to get

¹ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary : New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

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rid of old ways, but this is someone who is not known as a liar, or dishonest businessman. They can be trusted. This is someone who you can trust to sell you a house or a car. This is someone who is “above reproach.” That is actually exactly what **verse 2** says. The overseer must be “above reproach.” This doesn’t mean that this church leader is perfect. No, this means that one cannot find a pattern of wrong in this person. His or her lifestyle shows that they are Christ-like. They may have a hard day and be disrespectful to their spouse or a co worker and, hopefully, apologize later; but there is not a pattern of disrespect.

- Why is it different if it is outward versus inward? Outward sin a church has no choice but to deal with it. It is proven and it represents the church. We cannot generally quantify sin. This means, from an eternal perspective, one sin is not worse than another. However, whenever someone has a pattern of sin, a lifestyle of sin, have given over to sin, it is worse because they have not dealt with that sin.
- In 1 Thess. 5:22 the Bible talks about avoiding every kind of sin. The church leader is to the point where he or she is striving to avoid sin. This means that we will not find a pattern of living in sin. Not in the church leader. This means that they have been a disciple for some time. This means they have been disciplined.
- This passage states that church leaders must be able to teach **(verse 2)**, this means they know the Scriptures well themselves. How can we teach others if we don’t know ourselves? Remember that in this setting there was a real problem with false doctrine creeping in. How can we make this problem worse? We can make this problem worse by allowing someone who doesn’t know correct doctrine into a position of leadership. So, it is important that leaders are able to teach correct doctrine.
 - Another thing about this “able to teach” statement is that this shows that teaching the Scriptures is important.
 - **Verse 9** even says that deacons are “keeping hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.” This means they are not compromising the faith.
 - Early on in the church, there was a real problem with false doctrine creeping in. It is because of this that for the first few hundred years the church wanted to be clear that there was a line of succession of leadership that went back to the apostles. This means that if I was a bishop, or an actual leader of several churches, I could trace my training back to the Apostle John, or Paul, etc.
 - In today’s day there is still a problem with the devil trying to get in the door of the church and that is why these standards for church leaders are important. We must be

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careful of worldliness getting into the church and we must be ever so careful of false doctrine creeping into the church.

- That idea of “able to teach” and “keeping hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience” points to someone who has been disciplined.
- The problem is that many times a church doesn’t have standards for leadership. Many times, we compromise discipleship in order to fill a position.
- If the leaders are not disciplined, and living as disciples, how can we expect the rest of the church to be disciplined and living as disciples?
- Every Christian is called to be a disciple; this implies every Christian is called to come to a point where they are deeper in their faith journey.
- In Hebrews 5:12-13 the writer talks about those that have been Christ followers for some time but are still on the milk of God’s Word. In fact, the writer says they should be ready for the meat of the doctrines. This means that as one grows in the faith they are called to grow in understanding of the Bible and the Truths of the faith. A baby needs milk, a baby cannot eat Chipotle; however, an adult can, and an adult cannot live on milk alone. This is the same as a Christ follower. A new believer needs the basics, but as one is a Christ follower longer and longer, they should be to the point where they are disciples and have been disciplined. They should be able to take in the deeper Truths about God and His Kingdom.
- So, since this is about church leaders and church leaders are called to be committed disciples, let’s talk about the discipleship process.
- There is no such thing as instant godliness. Paul writes that we are to discipline ourselves in godliness. (1 Tim 4:7)
 - We live in a society with instant everything, don’t we? We are the microwave generation and I am grateful for the microwave. We want fast food. When I was a McDonald’s manager everything was timed, and they had it down to a science as to how long each process was to take. This was all so the customer can have their food within 90 seconds of their order.
 - But being godly, being Christ-like, being a Christian takes time and effort. This is actually called sanctification. What this means is that as a Christian God is shaping us to be more like Christ. From the time we accept Jesus into our life until the time we die God is crafting us and developing us to be more like Him.
 - God has not called Christians to stay babies; He has called us to grow up in Him. We are called to do our best to present ourselves as Christians to: (2 Tim 2:15) *“Do your best to present*

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yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

- So, I believe discipleship is about knowing the Bible, or learning to know the Bible and secondly, I believe discipleship is about living the Scriptures.
 - Discipleship is about knowing the Scriptures and living the Scriptures. Let me repeat that a few times.
 - Discipleship is about knowing the Scriptures and living the Scriptures. Discipleship is about knowing the Scriptures and living the Scriptures.
 - This list of qualifications for church leadership is all about people who know and live the Scriptures. This is a process; it doesn't happen overnight. But we are called to grow up in Christ.
- So, let me give you the process. This is all about Spiritual Disciplines. You don't grow closer to Christ by attending a small group every few weeks. That is part of it, but not enough. Will you grow as a baby if you only drink milk every few weeks? Of course not. No, we must be in Spiritual disciplines.
 - This means that we must be spending time with God most every day, or at least trying to every day. This is what it means to have daily devotions. Spending time with God means that we will pick a passage of the Bible and we read that passage and apply it to our life. Spend time in prayer as well. Prayer is simply talking with God. So, devotions are two spiritual disciplines: prayer, and reading the Bible. God speaks through the Bible.
 - An apple a day keeps the doctor away and a chapter of the Bible a day keeps the pastor away.
 - Another spiritual discipline is meeting with the community of Christians. God speaks through His church. This is important as a larger church gathering, but it is also important in smaller groups of Christians. We need a solid Christian friend we can meet with to pray together and share the Christian life together.
 - Memorizing the Bible is a spiritual discipline. As we memorize God's Word, God can bring it to your mind when you need it.
 - There are more spiritual disciplines, but the point is that we grow as Christ followers through these spiritual disciplines.
- So, let me wrap this up. Church leaders are called to be disciplined believers. This means they are disciples who are further along on the Christian journey than the rest of the church. They aren't perfect, but hopefully our pattern is one of following Christ. Church leaders have followed Christ to

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the point where they can distinguish false doctrine and will not be compromised. Each of the adjectives defining a church leader is really about that, about a pattern of a lifestyle of following Christ.

- If you are not to this point, how do you get to this point?
- Be active in the spiritual disciplines.
 - Attend Sunday school.
 - You must get into the Bible and allow it to transform you.
- Now, again, what do I mean by church leader and what does this passage mean? This passage talks about deacons and overseers. In the New Testament an overseer is the same as an elder. In today's church this is minimally the pastor, but many churches have other elders. I would say that anyone looking over the spiritual care of others must have a higher standard of discipleship. How can one look over the spiritual care of others if they have not grown up in Christ themselves. I cannot teach you the Scriptures if I haven't studied the Bible. I cannot lead you in prayer if I am not praying myself. But more than that, again, this passage is about what type of person these church leaders are:
 - Above reproach, again this means there is not a pattern of sin. Then the next several adjectives are good things which show what above reproach includes:
 - He must have only one wife and be faithful to her (3:2b).
 - He must be temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, and able to teach (3:2c).
 - He must be gentle and have a well-behaved family (3:3c–5).
 - He must be respected by those outside the church (3:7).
 - **Negative qualifications (3:3a–3b, 3d, 6)**
 - He must not be a heavy drinker (3:3a).
 - He must not be violent (3:3b).
 - He must not be proud (3:6b).
 - He must not be greedy (3:3d).
 - He must not be a new Christian (3:6a).
 - **Qualifications for a deacon are similar(3:8–13)**

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1. *Positive qualifications* (3:8a, 9–13)
 - a. He must be sincere and worthy of respect (3:8a).
 - b. He must be a man of spiritual depth (3:9).
 - c. He must be a man of proven character and ability (3:10).
 - d. He must be faithful to his wife, and his wife must be a woman of good character (3:11–13).
 2. *Negative qualifications* (3:8b–8c)
 - a. He must not be a heavy drinker (3:8b).
 - b. He must not be greedy (3:8c).²
- These are critical in that these people are representing the church as leadership. People need someone they can look at and say, “That is a man of God,” or “a woman of God.” What type of image does it give of the church if the pastor is known as the town drunk, or even the church moderator? Some of these leadership qualifications are fruits of the spirit, such as “self-control.” Self-control is a big deal; we want church leaders who have enough self-control to stand up under trial and maintain integrity. We need church leaders who are not greedy and don’t love money. Paul said the “love” of money is the root of all evil.” (1 Tim 6:10)
 - But, this all has to do with being disciplined: this is about growing closer to Jesus Christ by allowing Him to shape and mold you to be more like Him. This happens through spiritual disciplines.
 - Now, lastly, what will this do for you?
 - What will growing closer to Christ, being a disciplined Christ follower do for you?
 - What will being a godly church leader do for you?
 - Those are the wrong questions. Oh, you will reap a reward, some now, but mostly eternal. You are investing in other people. Certainly, growing closer to Christ as a disciplined believer will give you an inner strength of knowing some of the answers to life that are only known from the Scriptures. How encouraging and awesome it is to have the answers to life, doctrine and Theology that come from knowing God’s Word. You will have the fuller life that comes from knowing Christ in a relationship. You see many times people commit to Christ and that is it. That is somewhat the church’s fault and somewhat their own fault. **This is like buying a car and not driving it off the lot. Or, maybe we drive it off the lot but we don’t realize it has a sun roof. Or, it is like getting married and not ever talking with your wife again. Jesus offers us a much fuller life, but we must embrace this life and all He has to offer through the relationship that is gained by allowing God to communicate to us through the spiritual disciplines, this would primarily be, though not limited to, prayer, the**

² Willmington, H. L. (1999). *The Outline Bible* (1 Ti 3). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

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Scriptures and the church. This includes prayer partners and groups. God works through His church.

- Being a committed disciple of Christ is not easy. Read Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book, "The Cost of Discipleship." Bonhoeffer went to death for Christ. But the rewards of discipleship are awesome.
- But as a church leader what an awesome privilege and even if you are not a church leader; as a disciplined Christ follower you are impacting others. Being a man or woman of God who lives a Christ like life impacts the world around you. You have the opportunity to lead others to the knowledge of our Savior. Praise God that you can lead someone else to eternal life! You have the opportunity to represent Christ in an awesome way. You have the opportunity to brighten someone's day. You have the opportunity to be love to people. The list goes on. The rewards are many. You will feel good now, but Jesus called this storing up treasures in Heaven.

Matt 6:20-21

20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- Jesus also said that if we are faithful now with a little He will entrust us with more later. (Matt 25:21)
- The passage itself says that serving in leadership is a noble task.

So, are you a disciple of Christ? If you are a Christian, the answer is yes. As a Christian discipleship is not an option. Have you had a time in your life when you were disciplined? This would mean a time in your life when you made it a practice to read the Bible and spend time in prayer daily? Have you had a time in your life when you began practicing the Spiritual disciplines? I encourage you to allow God to work in your life through the Spiritual disciplines. Also, don't be discouraged. This is a process. It is a process of growing in Christ by allowing Jesus to work in your life. But it does take effort on your part.

Now, this passage expects church leaders to be disciplined believers. Does setting a high bar for church leaders rule out the possibility of church leaders falling into sins such as two worship leaders in an adulterous relationship? No, but hopefully it limits this from happening. The devil will always try to weave his way into our relationship with Christ. I know someone, a family member actually; who was a church deacon for decades, yet now he doesn't consider himself a Christian. Yet, there were no qualifications for leaders, no discipleship, no expectations. This is why Ephesians says not to give the devil a foothold. (Eph 4:27) Leaders must always be held to a higher standard.