

# GUARDIANS OF THE MINISTRY

## 1ST TIMOTHY 3:1-16

### Notes on

### 1 Timothy 3:1-16

Paul now turns his attention from worship practices to the church in general. His aim of combatting false teachers rather than providing a blueprint for successful ministry is evidenced by the fact that he says nothing about the *duties* of church leader only about their *qualifications*. The presumption that God intends His Church to have pastors is well established and assumed here. Paul, following the Lord, appointed teaching elders for churches wherever he went (Acts 14:23, 20:28; Eph. 4:11 & Titus 1:5).

The chapter concludes with a monumental statement about the nature and purpose of the church which some have called the theological center and “heart” of this letter because it defines the church “by her relation to the glorious Christ” (C. Spicq, *Pastoral Epistles*).

**v. 3:1 - The saying is trustworthy...** here is another apparent “pre-formed saying” or proverb that Paul is quoting concerning the nobility of the task of church leadership... He is encouraging those called and qualified to **aspire to** (literally “stretch out one’s hand for”) this role... He will also discourage those without such a calling from doing so by showing that the standards are high and the work is difficult... **overseer** (Greek - *episkopos*)... Some would translate this word “bishop” as opposed to “elder” (*presbyteros*), but this is to place later notions of church order on Paul who uses the words interchangeably... “Elder” comes from Jewish synagogue practices and indicates the *seniority and dignity* of the pastor/elder/overseer... “Overseer” comes from the workings of Greek institutions and indicates the *superintending function* of the pastoral ministry... For all Christians, the model of leadership is Jesus who said “*I am among you as the one who serves*” (Luke 22:27)... From here and elsewhere, we see that there are three aspects to an authentic call to church leadership: 1) God’s call 2) One’s own inner conviction & 3) A careful examination by the church according to principles like these...

#### **Qualifications for Overseers**

**3** The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup> 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**

<sup>8</sup> Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup> They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup> And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. <sup>11</sup> Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup> Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. <sup>13</sup> 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.

#### **The Mystery of Godliness**

<sup>14</sup> I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, <sup>15</sup> if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. <sup>16</sup> Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit,  
seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations,

believed on in the world, taken up in glory. - 1 Timothy 3:1-16

**vv.2-7 - above reproach...** This does not mean projecting the illusion of perfection, but in general the overseer/elder/pastor’s observable behavior is to leave no room for significant concern... **husband of one wife...** Who does this exclude? Four main suggestions have been made... 1. *Those who have never married* (Though the experience of faithful marriage is helpful, Paul & Jesus both affirm that some people are called and equipped by God to remain single.)... 2. *Polygamists* (a better answer, perhaps, since it was widely, though illegally, practiced by Romans & tolerated in Jewish culture, but there is no evidence that Christians ever practiced this... 3. *Those who have divorced and remarried* (Possible, but problematic, especially in light of the Cross of Christ. Is this the sin that Jesus cannot wash away or one the church rightly holds onto even in the face of true forgiveness and repentance?)... 4. *Those guilty of married unfaithfulness.* (One who is involved in any kind of extra- or pre-marital sexual relationship. A candidate must be faithful to his

one wife! This seems to be the best understanding of this phrase.)... **sober-minded & self-controlled** have to do with inner discipline that results in the external appearance of one seen as **respectable... hospitable** means, literally, a “love for strangers”... **able to teach...** teaching is a vital part of the church which exists to defend and proclaim the truth of God (see below)... **not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome...** these are self-explanatory... **not a lover of money...** Later (6:10) Paul will call this “a root of all kinds of evils.” Bad people are always trying to make ministry essentially a money-making venture. They will answer to God... **manage his own household well...** Household (*oikos* in Greek) is a word used for both one’s home & God’s church (vv. 4, 5 & 15). The church must pay attention to servant-leadership in the first as the proving-ground for such a role in the second... **not be a recent convert...** the enthusiasm of such people is mitigated against, especially, by the danger of pride which would elicit **the condemnation of the devil... well thought of by outsiders...** This points to the fact that the outside world, in need of hearing and knowing God’s truth, is watching. It is a well-known strategy of evil to discredit the Gospel through the public **disgrace** of church leaders who

thereby fall into the **snare of the devil...**

**vv.8-13** - Qualifications for deacons are similar. It is interesting to note that they too have an indispensable call to **hold the mysteries of the faith** (all of the deep truths revealed by God to His people in Christ) **with a clear conscience...** Deacon and elder/pastor ministries are both concerned with keeping and teaching the truth... **Their wives likewise...** this is literally “women likewise” and could indicate wives of male deacons or female deacons (Why would deacons’ wives be mentioned when elders’ wives were not? But on the other hand these women are never called “deacons” in this verse, and the next verse talks about deacons being “husbands.”)

**vv.14-16 - if I delay...** Paul plans to come to Ephesus to sort things out, but he is not sure when he will be able to do so. This was a good thing for us because it resulted in this inspired letter of 1 Timothy the purpose of which is revealed with the next words: **so that... you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth...** for insight concerning these three designations of the church and the concluding Christ Hymn please turn to the back page...

### Read & Reflect - 3:1-16

**First Reading:** As you read the list of qualifications for Elder/Pastor and Deacons in the church (vv. 1-13), what is your reaction?

As you read the words about the church and the hymn about Jesus (vv. 14-16), what is your reaction?

### Search & Consider

**3:1-13** - Briefly rewrite each of these words and phrases in your own words...

1. above reproach	8. not a drunkard/addicted to much wine	15. dignified
2. husband of one wife	9. not violent but gentle	16. not double-tongued
3. sober-minded	10. not quarrelsome	17. not greedy for dishonest gain.
4. self-controlled	11. not a lover of money	18. hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience
5. respectable	12. manage his own household well (keeping his children submissive)	19. not slanderers, but sober-minded
6. hospitable	13. not be a recent convert	20. faithful in all things.
7. able to teach	14. well thought of by outsiders	

Why are these important requirements for leaders in the church?

**3:14-15** - Why is Paul writing this letter to Timothy?

What three phrases does Paul use to describe the church? What do they mean?

**3:16** - What do each of these phrases about Jesus mean?

- |                             |                                 |                             |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. manifested in the flesh  | 3. seen by angels               | 5. believed on in the world |
| 2. vindicated by the Spirit | 4. proclaimed among the nations | 6. taken up in glory.       |

## Apply

1. Which of the qualifications for Elders/Pastors & Deacons do you find most difficult to understand or most difficult to meet? Why?

2. Do you think it is difficult for churches in general today to do a good job of upholding these standards? Why/Why not?

## For Small Group Discussion - 1 Timothy 3:1-16

**A. OPENER...** When have you either applied for a position that had certain qualifications you had to meet or evaluated and accepted/rejected someone else based on certain requirements? How did it feel? Why were the qualifications important?

**B. 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-16...** Share your Personal Study Guide answers above... As time permits, you may also want to focus on these questions...

1. Who have you known in your life (besides yourself) who well meets the qualifications for overseer/pastor/elder/deacon?
2. What do you learn from this passage about the church's relationship to truth?
3. What do you learn from this passage about the relationship between truth and Jesus Christ?

**C. A FINAL THOUGHT...**

What happens as the Church defends and proclaims the truth of Jesus Christ (positively & negatively)? Why is it a significant tragedy, for the Church and for the world, when churches deny or downplay their vital relationship to the truth of Jesus?

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## John Stott on The Nature of the Church

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From the qualifications for the pastorate Paul turns to the church in which pastors serve. For the nature of the ministry is determined by the nature of the church...

Paul uses three descriptive expressions of the church, each of which illustrates a different aspect of it, namely *God's household* or family, *the church of the Living God*, and *the pillar and foundation of the truth*.

*God's household*... By new birth of the Spirit we become members of the family of God, related to him as our Father and to all fellow believers as our sisters and brothers... as God's children we have an equal dignity before him, irrespective of age, sex, race or culture; and that as sisters and brothers we are called to love, forbear and support one another... *The church of the living God*... On a number of occasions in the

Old Testament Yahweh is named 'the living God' in deliberate contrast to the lifeless idols of the heathen... But where does the living God live? Joshua answered this question succinctly: 'The living God is among you' (Joshua 3:10). For thus was the essence of God's covenant promise to Israel: 'I will dwell among you and be your God, and you shall be my people' (Exodus 25:8). Israel's consciousness that the living God lived among them profoundly affected their community life... An even more vivid consciousness of the presence of God should characterize the Christian church today. For we are 'the temple of the living God' (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16), a 'dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit' (Eph. 2:22). When the members of the congregation are scattered during most of the week it is difficult to remain aware of this reality. But when we come together as *the church of the living God*, every aspect of our common life is enriched by the knowledge of his presence in our midst (Mt. 18:20)... *The pillar and foundation of the truth*... The *hedraïoma* (foundation) stabilizes the building. Just so, the church is responsible to hold the truth steady against the storms of heresy and unbelief. The word *stylos*, however, means a pillar or column. The purpose of pillars is not only to hold the roof firm, but to thrust it high so that it can be clearly seen even from a distance. The inhabitants of Ephesus had a vivid illustration of this in their temple of Diana or Artemis. Regarded as one of the seven wonders of the world, it boasted 100 Ionic columns, each over 18 meters high, which together lifted its massive, shining, marble roof. Just so, the church holds the truth aloft, so that it is seen and admired by the world. Indeed, as pillars lift a building high while remaining themselves unseen, so the church's function is not to advertise itself but to advertise and display the truth.

Here then is the double responsibility of the church *vis-a-vis* the truth. First, as its foundation it is to hold it firm, so that it does not collapse under the weight of false teaching. Second, as its pillar it is to hold it high, so that it is not hidden from the world. To hold the truth firm is the defense and confirmation of the gospel; to hold it high is the proclamation of the gospel. The church is called to both these ministries...

What then is the truth which the church must both guard against every distortion and falsification, and proclaim without fear or compromise throughout the world? It concerns Jesus Christ, to whom Paul now bears witness by quoting from an early hymn or creed. He introduces it with the following words: *Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great*. First, it is a 'mystery,' a cluster of truths which are now known only because God has been pleased to reveal them. Secondly, it is a 'mystery of godliness'... because it stimulates our worship, our humility and reverence before God, as all truth does. Thirdly, this divine godliness-promoting revelation is 'great beyond all question' or 'by common consent'... And fourthly, it focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ, since 'the mystery' is essentially 'the mystery of Christ' (Col. 1:26-27; 2:2-3; 4:3).

The liturgical statement Paul goes on to quote consists of six lines which, stylistically speaking, closely resemble one another... They may be read chronologically, each denoting a fresh, consecutive event or stage in the career of Jesus, taking us from his first coming to his second, from his appearance in flesh to his welcome in glory... The best suggestion, however, is that the hymn consists of three couplets, in each of which there is a deliberate antithesis: between flesh & spirit, between angels & nations, between world & glory. The first couplet speaks of the revelation of Christ (*he appeared in the body, was vindicated by the Spirit*). Here are the human and divine aspects of his earthly life and ministry in Palestine. The second couplet speaks of the witnesses of Christ (*was seen by angels, was preached among the nations*). For now the significance of Jesus Christ is seen to extend far behind Palestine to all the inhabitants of heaven and earth, to angels as well as humans, to the nations as well as the Jews. Then the third couplet speaks of the reception which Christ was given (*was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory*). For heaven and earth did more than see and hear him; they joined in giving him recognition and acclaim...

The mystery of godliness which the church proclaims, the truth of which the church is the foundation and pillar, is the historic yet cosmic Christ... One of the surest roads to the reform and renewal of the church is to recover a grasp of its essential identity as *God's household, the church of the living God, and pillar and foundation of the truth*. - John Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*, pp.102-108

He was manifested in the flesh,  
vindicated by the Spirit,  
seen by angels,  
proclaimed among the nations,  
believed on in the world,  
taken up in glory.