

FIRST TIMOTHY

Chapter 3

Overseers and Deacons

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. ⁸ Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. ¹¹ In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. ¹² A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. ¹³ Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, ¹⁵ if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. ¹⁶ Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

3:1–13 Paul continues his teachings concerning those who may teach and properly exercise authority in a church. (TLSB)

3:1 *trustworthy saying*. See note on 1:15. (CSB)

Apparently it was a well-known adage in the Early Church. Many NT passages reflect a lively interest in Church order (i.e., 5:17-22; Acts 6:1-6; 14:21-23; 1 Th 5:12-22; Titus 1:5-16; 1 Peter 5:1-5). (TLSB)

SETS HIS HEART – Not an ambitious quest for personal gain, but for honorable and commendable service. (TLSB)

overseer. In the Greek culture the word was used of a presiding official in a civic or religious organization. Here it refers to a man who oversees a local congregation. The equivalent word from the Jewish background of Christianity is "elder." The terms

“overseer” and “elder” are used interchangeably in Ac 20:17, 28; Tit 1:5–7; 1Pe 5:1–2. The duties of an overseer were to teach and preach (3:2; 5:17), to direct the affairs of the church (3:5; 5:17), to shepherd the flock of God (Ac 20:28) and to guard the church from error (Ac 20:28–31). (CSB)

NOBLE TASK – Those who are served benefit greatly. The task, or work requires the full measure of a man’s energy and devotion; it is not a mere status to be enjoyed. (TLSB)

3:2 *the overseer must be*. See chart on “Qualifications for Elders/Overseers and Deacons”. (CSB)

ABOVE REPROACH – Literally, “not able to be taken hold of.” One against who no charge of unfitness can rightly be leveled. (TLSB)

husband of but one wife.† A general principle that applies to any violation of God’s marriage law, whether in the form of polygamy or of marital unfaithfulness (see note on Tit 1:6). But see parallel statement on widows and NIV text note on 5:9. (CSB)

Many new converts would have come from a background of polygamy or sexual immorality. The qualification is phrased in terms of sexual fidelity within a monogamous marital relationship. The phrase does not exclude single men from serving as pastors, but clearly shows that the forced celibacy of pastors is an unscriptural requirement. “It is clear that in the Ancient Church priests were married men.... Four hundred years ago in Germany [c 1130], for the first time, priests were violently forced to lead a single life. They offered such resistance that when the Archbishop of Mainz was about to publish the pope’s decree about celibacy, he was almost killed in a riot by enraged priests. This matter was handled so harshly that not only was marriage forbidden in the future, but existing marriages were torn apart, contrary to all laws, both divine and human” (AC XXIII 10–13). Paul’s phrase also makes the implicit affirmation that only males (husbands) may serve as pastors. (TLSB)

sober-minded. Clearheaded, showing soundness in judgment; not flighty or unstable. (TLSB)

respectable. Well-ordered demeanor in every aspect of his character. (TLSB)

hospitable. Not one who merely likes to entertain but, in the first century, one who would take in Christian strangers who were traveling or fleeing from persecution. (TLSB)

3:3 *not violent*. Lit, “not a striker.” the Lord would not approve of a church leader who deals forcefully, using verbal or physical violence toward family or congregational members. (TLSB)

3:4–5 *children submissive*. Not a requirement that the pastor must have children, but that when he does, they should be obedient. See SC, Fourth Commandment, p xxxv. A pastor must teach and uphold this commandment within his family. (TLSB)

3:5 church. See note on Mt 16:18. (CSB)

3:6 recent convert. The Greek word used to describe newly planted trees. The phrase does not preclude relatively young men, such as Timothy, from serving as pastors but rather those who have not attained a satisfactory level of spiritual maturity since their conversion to Christ. (TLSB)

condemnation. The devil was condemned for prideful rebellion. (TLSB)

3:7 outsiders. Unbelievers, non-Christians. (TLSB)

snare of the devil. A trap to which an unqualified overseer would be more susceptible. (TLSB)

3:1–7 Only qualified men may serve as pastors of God’s flock. We should honor and uphold the qualifications that God has set forth for those who would serve in the Office of the Public Ministry, always remembering that the pastoral office is a divine institution—a gift from God for His Church. The Lord Jesus has given this office and its qualifications because He loves us and always desires what is best for us. He Himself is our chief Shepherd (1Pt 5:4). He has laid down His life for us (Jn 10:11) and gives us eternal life (Jn 10:28). • “Almighty God, in Your kindness You cause the light of the Gospel to shine among us. By the working of Your Holy Spirit, help us to share the good news of Your salvation that all who hear it may rejoice in the gift of Your unending love.” Amen. (*LSB Altar Book*, p 987) (TLSB)

3:8–12 The list of qualifications for deacons is similar to the corresponding list for overseers (vv 1–7), with a few exceptions. Notably, it is not required that deacons be able to teach (v 2), or that they care for God’s Church (v 5). These are likely omitted because they were part of the overseer’s role. (TLSB)

3:8 Deacons. In its nontechnical usage, the Greek for this word means simply “one who serves.” The men chosen in Ac 6:1–6 were probably not only the first deacons mentioned in the NT but also the first to be appointed in the church (but see notes there). Generally, their service was meant to free the elders to give full attention to prayer and the ministry of the word (Ac 6:2, 4). The only two local church offices mentioned in the NT are those of overseer (also called elder) and deacon (see Php 1:1). (CSB)

Deacons. They assisted the overseers by handling the distribution of alms, providing for the needs of the sick, and caring for the place of worship. (TLSB)

3:9 clear conscience. Having a pure, clear confession of the faith. (TLSB)

3:10 tested. With regard to the qualifications presented in vv 8–12. The tense of the Greek verb indicates that the testing would be ongoing—a careful and thoughtful evaluation. (TLSB)

3:11 their wives. The Greek for this phrase simply means “the women” and therefore could refer to (1) deacons’ wives, (2) deaconesses (see NIV text note) or (3) female

deacons. However, the fact that deacons are referred to again in vv. 12–13 seems to rule out a separate office of deaconess, but many judge otherwise. (CSB)

Or, “women” as in the ESV footnote. In the Early Church, women likely served as deaconesses, administering physical help and deeds of kindness. Women often did such work alongside men, though they were not to hold the office of overseer (pastor). (TLSB)

3:13 *gain a good standing.* Through the faithful discharge of their particular duties, their beneficial service will receive the approval of both God and people. (TLSB)

confidence. Boldness. (TLSB)

3:8–13 Deacons and deaconesses were faithful people, entrusted with special responsibilities for service to their fellow Christians. Christians today are also privileged to serve others through special congregational offices and service organizations. When given chances to express Jesus’ love in deeds of service, it is easy to pass on these opportunities. But, in truth, God calls every Christian to follow His example of self-giving service. Jesus came to serve sinners like us with His forgiveness and salvation (Mt 20:28). He still serves us today through His means of grace. • Lord Jesus, as You so wonderfully serve us with the rich treasures of Your redeeming grace, inspire us by that grace joyfully to serve others in Your precious name. Amen. (TLSB)

3:14 *come to you soon.* Timothy was in Ephesus, on the western coast of modern Turkey. The journey from Macedonia would involve hundreds of miles through perilous stretches of land and sea. (TLSB)

I am writing ... so that. Here, in brief, Paul states the purpose for writing the letter—to give instructions concerning church conduct. (CSB)

3:15 *household of God.* The place where God dwells with and in His people. The members of this household are brothers and sisters in Christ and children of the heavenly Father. (TLSB)

church of the living God. God’s “household” is also His “Church,” of which He is the living Head. (TLSB)

pillar and buttress of the truth. As pillars and buttresses are needed to support large structures, the Gospel is needed so that not even the gates of hell can prevail against the Church (cf Mt 16:18; Jn 14:6). “We do say that this Church exists: truly believing and righteous people scattered throughout the whole world. We add the marks: the pure teaching of the Gospel and the Sacraments. This Church is properly the pillar of the truth ... for it keeps the pure Gospel as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:11” (Ap VII and VIII 20). (TLSB)

3:16 *confess.* To express the unanimous conviction of all Christians. (TLSB)

mystery of godliness. See notes on Ro 2:2; 11:25. The phrase means the “revealed secret of true piety,” i.e., the secret that produces piety in people. That secret, as the following words indicate, is none other than Jesus Christ. His incarnation, in all its aspects (particularly his saving work), is the source of genuine piety. The words are

printed in poetic form and probably come from an early creedal hymn (see note on Col 3:16). (CSB)

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, especially as set forth in this verse, is neither known nor believed by the world, and therefore must be “proclaimed.” For those who believe, however, it is no longer a “mystery.” See p 1903. “Christ is and remains to all eternity God and man in one undivided person. Next to the Holy Trinity, this is the highest mystery, upon which our only consolation, life, and salvation depends, as the apostle testifies” (FC Ep VIII 18). (TLSB)

vindicated by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit enabled Jesus to drive out demons (see Mt 12:28) and perform miracles. Most importantly, the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead (see Ro 1:4; 1Pe 3:18) and thereby vindicated him, showing that he was indeed the Son of God. *seen by angels.* At his resurrection (Mt 28:2) and ascension (Ac 1:10). (CSB)

He was manifested ... up in glory. This sixfold statement highlights the central events of our Lord’s earthly ministry. Paul is likely quoting an early Christian hymn or creed. (TLSB)

3:14–16 This concludes the section dedicated to the Church’s organization (chs 2–3). We are not free to amend or depart from God’s revealed will concerning the outward organization of His Church, because it is the pillar and buttress of the truth—the Church of the living God that confesses the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a fallen world. In love, God has made us members of His Church by the Holy Spirit. By grace, the Savior’s truth has been made manifest to us and, through faith, we will follow Him in glory. • “Almighty and gracious Lord, pour out Your Holy Spirit on Your faithful people. Keep us steadfast in Your grace and truth, protect and deliver us in times of temptation, defend us against all enemies, and grant to Your Church Your saving peace.” Amen. (*LSB Altar Book*, p 983). (TLSB)