

1 Timothy 3:1-7 — The Qualifications Of Elders

February 5, 2017

Maybe you saw the headline in the newspaper in January — “Florida pastor flees naked and afraid.” A title like that always catches my attention. I couldn’t help but read the article. It turns out a well-known Tallahassee, FL, pastor was forced to run from a woman’s apartment naked. Her husband came home from work early to find his pastor in bed with his wife. The man of the cloth was under the cloth! The husband ran to another room where he grabbed his handgun. He burst back in the bedroom threatening to kill the pastor in bed with his wife. When the pastor saw the gun, he ran from the house naked and hid behind a neighbor’s fence. When the neighbor saw the naked pastor in the backyard, she called the police. After negotiations with police, the husband eventually agreed to return the pastor’s clothes and car keys. It was later learned this was not the first time things happened between this pastor and that women. They had been involved in an affair for the last four months.

What happened next is what takes the cake. Instead of this pastor offering to resign, he refused to quit. After his affair hit the papers, he went before his congregation and gave a sermon on forgiveness in which he said these words: “What I want from God, I have already received — that’s his forgiveness. What I am asking is your prayers and forgiveness too.” The congregation stood and applauded him for several minutes. He continues as the pastor of that church today, having suffered no consequences for his infidelity.

Now it gets even stranger. The same week this Florida pastor's affair was exposed, he released his first book. You will never guess the title. It is, I Need A Man: A fresh perspective on godly manhood and mentoring.¹

I don't know what crosses your mind but his fresh perspective on manhood is a little too fresh for me because it goes very soft on adultery.

Truth be told, when it comes to church leaders that tarnish the name of Christ, each of us have a long list of names that come to mind. Some of those leaders even come from our own community or communities only a few miles away.

What are the standards church leaders should hold? Why do so many church leaders fall? These are some of the questions we will look at this morning.

On both our Spirit Lake and Spencer campuses we are studying through the book of 1 Timothy. In chapter one of 1 Timothy, we learned why Jesus Christ must always be the center of everything at church. In 1 Timothy 2, we learned how we honor Christ at church by being people of prayer. We pray all kinds of prayers for all kinds of people. We also learned how we can dishonor Christ by our lifestyles. This morning, as we start 1 Timothy 3, we will learn the qualifications for leaders in the church.

The letter of 1 Timothy was written by the apostle Paul to a young pastor named Timothy. Timothy pastored the church in the city of Ephesus. Nut-jobs infiltrated the leadership of the church. In the letter of 1 Timothy, Paul was instructing Timothy on how to restore order to this church with elders gone wild.

¹ <http://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/2017/01/30/tallahassee-pastors-tryst-spotlight/97135232/>

In chapter 3, he told Timothy that he was going to get the right church leader in place. Just so you know, the pastor from Florida would not qualify.

Before we jump into the qualifications of church leaders, let me give you a 5,000-foot overview of church leadership in the New Testament. As you scan around the Bible, you will find a variety of terms like overseer, elder, deacon, deaconess and pastor. Some older translations will also use the word bishop. The key to understanding these words is to realize the terms overseer, elder and pastor are used interchangeably. They are the spiritual leaders of the church. The term deacon and deaconess are also used but they refer to the serving leaders in the church. This week, we will look at a profile of the elders, overseers and pastors. Next week Paul shows us the qualifications of deacons and deaconesses in the second half of 1 Timothy 3.

Before Paul went over the specific qualities essential in the life of church leaders, he took a moment to go over church leadership in general. Let's begin with that in verse 1.

The saying is trustworthy: *If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.* 1 Timothy 3:1 (ESV)

There are three things I want to point out in this verse.

The top church leaders must be men.

Paul began with these words, "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer..." While the ESV says *if anyone*, some translations say *if any man*. Which one is correct? The Greek ending on the word *any* is in the masculine. It is assuming the elders and overseers will be men. In addition, as the sentence continues, it says *he desires a noble task* which is clearly referring to men. In

fact, all the adjectives we are about to study that describe church leaders are in the masculine form. In addition, we will see in a moment that an overseer is to be a one-woman man. Paul didn't say a one-person spouse. He assumed elders and overseers would be men. In addition, Paul said about an elder or overseer in these verses that , "he must manage his household well." He clearly uses the masculine pronoun. Also, in the ancient world, it was the men who were responsible for the health and integrity of the home. I don't want to camp on this today but it would be irresponsible of me to not point out that Paul assumed the top spiritual leaders responsible for the church would be men. I know some of you might not agree with me, but I am not writing the mail. I am just reading the mail. This is what the Bible says even though it is not popular in our culture.

Men should take steps to prepare for church leadership.

Something else for us to notice is Paul said, "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer in the church..." Aspire means to reach out for something. It is talking about an external action. Paul said that if someone wants to be a leader in the church, he should take steps toward becoming qualified for that position. In other words, if you want to be a leader in the church, you prepare today to lead successfully tomorrow. What do these steps look like? They involve regular Bible reading and study. They involve joining a CWU class. You need to be reading books to grow you in your walk with Christ. Church leadership isn't something that magically happens one morning after eating your corn flakes. To lead a church successfully, you prepare for it.

Men should feel a God-given desire to serve Jesus by sacrificially serving others in the church.

In addition, Paul said, “If you desire church leadership, you desire a noble task.” The word *desire* talks about an inner pull in your heart. Paul said that overseers, elders or pastors should possess an inner desire to be leaders in the church. That is not a desire for power or control but a desire to serve. It is a God-given gift for sacrificially serving others.

Peter reminded us of something similar.

...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly... 1 Peter 5:2 (ESV)

Peter said church leadership must not be something men do because they have to but because they want to.

Before we jump into the qualifications of leadership, I want to ask the young men in this room, what do you want to be in the future? Some of you want to be bankers. Some of you want to be farmers. Some of you want to own a business. I want ask you a question. Do you think God might want you to be some kind of leader in his church someday in the future? Every church is only one generation away from extinction. Every pastor and elder has an expiration date. One day, it will be up to you to lead. Will you be prepared for that moment? If God is beginning to form that desire in your heart, what steps of preparation are you taking today so you will be ready for tomorrow?

If you think God may be calling you in that direction someday, write something down on the back of the yellow connection card and leave it in the

pew. Pastor Stephen or I will contact you and do our best to get you on a plan to grow you in Christ for that day.

Let's dive in and see the qualifications Paul gave.

A church leader must be above reproach.

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach...

This is talking about our reputations. Pastors and elders don't just have positions of leadership. Their jobs are to provide a moral and spiritual example for others with their lives. The term *above reproach* doesn't mean a person is sinless. It means without obvious defect in character. The idea is when a spiritual leader's name comes to people's minds, there shouldn't be a bunch of junk that comes with it. Our pastor friend in Florida may have God's forgiveness but he is not above reproach. Not a single man in his church will trust the pastor around his wife for more than two minutes because there is a glaring character defect in his life that overshadows everything. Paul said spiritual leaders' lives shouldn't be marred with obvious character flaws and sin flaws. Instead a leader's life should be an example for others to follow. Peter said the same thing.

...not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:3 (ESV)

A church leader must be a one-woman man.

...the husband of one wife...

Church leaders must be especially above reproach when it comes to women. Some translations, like the ESV, use the phrase *the husband of one wife*. That can be misunderstood. Some people think Paul was talking quantitatively when in reality was he talking qualitatively. It doesn't mean all

church leaders must be married only once. The Greek clearly reads that a church leader must be a one-woman man. It is referring to being a man who only has affections for one woman.

In other parts of the Bible remarriage after the death of a spouse is permitted under the right conditions. For instance, in 1 Timothy 5:14 Paul counseled younger widows to remarry and have children. In 1 Corinthians 7:39 Paul said a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives but she is free to remarry another Christian husband if her first husband dies. Remarriage is permitted after the death of a spouse.

In addition, the Bible says remarriage is even permitted after divorce in some situations. In Matthew 5:32-32;19:9 Jesus permitted divorce in the case of adultery. In 1 Corinthians 7:15 Paul also permitted divorce if an unbelieving spouse insists on leaving. That never makes divorce a good thing. Malachi 2:16 tells us that God always hates divorce. This is saying that after the death of a spouse or even divorce for the right reasons, men are permitted to remarry and presumably become an overseer or elder in the church if they are biblically qualified.

We must understand Paul was talking about the heart of a church leader, which must be single-focused on one woman, his wife. Job said it this way.

I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? Job 31:1 (ESV)

I think the reason this qualification comes at the head of the list is because this is one of the most common ways Satan takes out leaders in the church. Just last week I found out the true reason why one of my friends is out of the ministry.

He had an affair with his administrative assistant and left her pregnant. When I was a youth pastor, I had a kid in my youth group from another church. He left his church because his teenage sister confessed to her mother that she was sexually involved with the youth pastor of their church. The mom said, "You can't be having an affair with him because I am having an affair with him too." That crazy nut was sleeping with a mother and her daughter plus he was married with a family of his own. This is the kind of stuff you see on "Jerry Springer," but it was taking place in a church!

Some of you know that once a year I get together with about 30 other pastors from EFCA churches our size. One of the questions we always ask is "Who will be the empty chair next year?" Two years ago we lost a pastor in our group from Detroit due to infidelity. Last year there was a pastor in a slightly larger EFCA church that killed himself because he was having an affair that was about to be exposed.

This is why Paul told men that if they are aspiring to be leaders in the church, they must be radically committed to being one-woman men. If there are gaps in this area of your life, Satan will leverage it to take you down as a spiritual leader. If he takes a spiritual leader down, he damages the church. This is why you don't look at pornography on the Internet. You don't spend much time alone with women in your office. You guard yourself like crazy in this area. You don't allow yourself to develop friendships with women. You don't allow an inch of compromise in this area.

Let me give you a little advice on how to avoid sexual compromise.

1. **Don't take a second look at a woman.** It doesn't matter if you see her in person or on your computer. The first look wasn't planned, so it isn't sin. The second look is where sin begins. Don't take that second look at the gym when you see the skinny woman in spandex. Don't take that second look at the beach. Don't take that second look at that lady sunning herself on the boat. Radically guard yourself in this area. In addition, be very careful what you watch on television and in the movies. Most programs are filled with people entering into sexually provocative situations to inflame your lusts. Don't feed that stuff to your mind.
2. **Read God's Word.** Psalm 119:11 says one of the things the Word of God does is it keeps us from sin. The more we put yourself in God's Word, the more clearly we will think God's thoughts after him and come to conviction of sin leading to repentance in our lives.
3. **Pour your affections on your wife.** If you are married, pour your sexual energy into your wife. Go out of your way to spend your sexual energy at home. When things are good at home, you are less likely to be tempted when away from home. I also want to talk to some of you men in this area. Some of you guys claim your wife is a bore. You say she has no passion for you. Do you know why things are cold in that area of your marriage? It is not your wife's fault. It is your fault. As men, it is your job to pursue your wife. A wife responds to the energy her husband puts into loving her. If your wife has little energy for loving you, it is because you are a bad lover who puts little energy into loving her. Some of you men need to repent of pouring your sexual

energy into other women on the Internet or of pouring your relational energy into other women at work instead of your wife at home. Pour so much sexual energy into loving your wife at home that you have nothing left to pour into another woman.

A church leader must possess self-discipline.

...sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable,...

The next three terms all talk about the self-discipline that must be possessed by an elder or pastor.

A leader must be sober-minded. This literally means wineless. Leviticus 10:9 forbids priests from drinking wine while on duty. Proverbs 31:4 tells us kings and rulers are to abstain from wine so nothing impedes their judgment. How would you feel about Trump drinking too much when the guy walking behind him at all times has the nuclear briefcase? Paul said church leaders should be people that can think clearly at all times. They must refrain from anything that would dull their judgment at any time. Some of you know I don't drink. One of the reasons I don't drink is because you never know as a church leader when the phone will ring and you need to help someone in need. I remember when I was celebrating at my son's birthday party. The phone rang, and it was a call from a high school girl in our church. Her mother died at home with her teenage daughter in the room. It was a good thing I wasn't drinking at the party. I couldn't tell her to just hang out with the dead body for an hour until the birthday party was finished. I couldn't tell her I would be over in four hours after I had a chance to get sober. I just had to go. A church leader is always on call, whether they like it or not.

A leader must be self-controlled. This literally means self-disciplined. It means a church leader must know how to order his life and priorities. This means if you are always late for things, you are not qualified to be a church leader because you have no self-control of your time. This means if you are constantly carrying a balance on your credit card, you are not exercising self-control in your money, and you are not qualified to be a church leader. If you are significantly overweight, it is because you are not exercising self-control in the area of your eating and you may be a glutton. If you are overweight, you may be disqualifying yourself from church leadership.

A leader must be respectable. This carries the idea of orderliness. While self-control talks about a well-disciplined mind, this talks about a well-disciplined life. It means the opposite of chaos. If you go over to someone's home and it is a complete mess, he does not have any ordered life and he is not qualified for church leadership. If his front lawn is over your knee caps, he does not have a well-ordered life and is running the risk of disqualifying himself from church leadership. If his office always looks like it was burglarized, you better think twice about having him as an elder.

I know some of you didn't expect to come to church and find yourself encouraged to go on a diet and clean your garage so you can have a well-ordered life, and maybe you think these are overreaching examples, but in truth, they are not out of line. All Paul was saying is if we cannot bring order to our lives and our homes, we will never be able to bring order to a church. If you want to be a good church leader, start by organizing your life and your home.

A church leader must be hospitable.

...hospitable...

A church leader must love people. When we see the term hospitality, we immediately think this means church leaders need to have people from church over to their homes for dinner. That isn't hospitality. That is fellowship. Hospitality means love for strangers. It is not bringing church people over to your home. It is bringing people who don't go to church over to your home. Paul said this is something all Christians should pursue, especially church leaders.

...seek to show hospitality. Romans 12:13 (ESV)

Often times we think one of the best ways to lead someone to Christ is to bring him or her to church. That is definitely important. One of the best things we can do to bring people far from Christ closer to him is simply by bring them over our home for a meal. It is the power of the kitchen. We have all seen the statistics telling us how important it is for a family to have dinner together many times a week for the family to be healthy. Inviting people who don't go to church to our home for a meal exposes them to the fabric of our family where they feel close. They trust us and will want to hear about Jesus.

Let me talk to the ladies about this for a moment. You are typically the ones in charge of the home and in charge of the meals. Ladies, you have a very powerful position of influence. Actively working with your husband to have people into your home to share meals is extremely important for the spread of the gospel. It is an essential part of the life of Christians. I know showing hospitality isn't easy because it involves cleaning the house and making a nice meal if

someone is coming over, but I want you to see what Peter said should be our attitude when we show hospitality.

Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay. 1 Peter 4:9 (NLT)

Loving strangers is essential for a church leader and the spread of the gospel.

A church leader must be able to teach.

...able to teach...

This is a qualification that sets the elders apart from the deacons. Since the spiritual health and instruction of the church fall into the hands of the elders and overseers, this is an essential quality. There are different parts of this gift.

First, there is the ability to teach. We all sat under Bible teachers that are boring. Paul said the elders of the church shouldn't be this way. If you don't know how to teach, learn how to teach. You may not become a super-gifted teacher like Billy Graham, but each of us can improve.

Second, the part of this qualifications means you need to understand your Bible. I have met plenty of people that are gifted orators but they are shoddy theologians. A church leader must learn his Bible so he has something to teach, and he must learn how to teach so he can communicate so people learn.

A church leader must not be a drunkard.

...not a drunkard...

If your accountability group is Jack Daniels and Jose Cuervo, you don't qualify for church leadership. You qualify for rehab.

A church leader must not be violent but gentle.

...not violent but gentle...

This literally means a church leader is not a giver of blows. You don't get to hit people in church leadership. No matter the pressure, church leaders must be cool, calm and collected. This means that if you have a short fuse and are given to fits of anger, this is something you will need to get under control before you serve as a church leader, because church leadership is filled with pressure. I am usually a calm person but sometimes the pressure of church leadership gets to me. As a church leader, I have learned people can get angry at you for just about anything. People have complained about my socks, the way I part my hair, my pants, and my shirt. Those critiques are before anyone has even shared their thoughts on the sermon. The ability to be calm under high amounts of stress is essential.

A church leader must not be quarrelsome.

...not quarrelsome,...

This means there are lots of things in the church we can fight about. A church leader refuses to create camps. He refuses to create division. He focuses on unity around Jesus at all costs. The truth is most church conflicts create far more damage than the issue was worth. Are there things we need to have as closed fist issues? Of course. Good church leaders know the difference between a closed fist issue and an open fist issue that isn't worth dying over. They refuse to put blood on the carpet unless it is absolutely essential. Some men disqualify themselves for church leadership because everything is always a problem. They

always have a problem with someone or they had their feelings hurt by someone.

Get over it! Stop being quarrelsome!

A church leader must not be a lover of money.

...not a lover of money.

You don't become a church leader to get rich. You lead a church because God has called you to serve him by serving others in his church. Church elders usually serve their church without pay. Joel Osteen's Bible apparently doesn't have this verse. We have it in our Bibles, so I am preaching it.

A church leader must manage his own family well.

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 1 Timothy 3:4–5 (ESV)

Notice it says he must manage his family. It assumes a church leader is married. It doesn't require a church leader to be married but it assumes most church leaders are married. Notice church leaders are not required to be celibate. My wife is very happy about this text. There are times in history where people thought the holier people were the more celibate people. The idea that church leaders should be celibate was even cropping up in the church of Ephesus because we will see in 1 Timothy 4:3 that the faulty elders in Ephesus were telling people not to marry.

Instead, one of the ways we are told to screen potential candidates for church leadership is to see how they lead their homes. When we see how a man leads his home, we will see how a man will lead the church.

The term household includes all aspects of someone's life. It means how someone manages his possessions and how he manages his finances. If you

can't balance your checkbook and your house looks like a dump, you are disqualifying yourself for leadership in the church because you are not managing your own house well.

Incidentally, one of the best places to examine a potential church leader is to look at his children. Paul said a church leader's children should be submissive. That means they fall in line. The kids don't run the house. Mom and Dad are in charge of the house. Paul expanded on this a bit when he wrote to Titus about elders.

...if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. Titus 1:6 (ESV)

The church leader's children should be believers. This means if you can't lead your own children to Christ, you are going to have a hard time leading other people in the church to Christ. You begin your personal evangelism training with your kids.

A church leader must not be a new Christian.

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 1 Timothy 3:6 (ESV)

One of the great challenges of spiritual leadership is pride. Humility is an essential quality. A new Christian that finds himself in a position of spiritual leadership is in a very dangerous position. When people look up to you, it is easy to get a big head. Paul said men can easily become puffed up. Literally that means someone gets a head filled with smoke. It is easy to think you are really something when in reality you are just a bunch of hot air. Paul warned about not

putting young Christians in positions of spiritual leadership so their egos don't kill them and hurt others.

A leader in the church must be well thought of by outsiders.

Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. 1 Timothy 3:7 (ESV)

This is the same place we started. A church leader must have a good reputation with outsiders.

Conclusion.

The position of an overseer, elder or pastor in the church is an awesome responsibility. The qualifications are high but the job is extremely important. Here are two ways for us to respond to the text this morning.

1. If you are a young man, I want you to ask you if God is calling you to be a future church leader in some form or capacity. Too many young men only think about the future of their careers. They don't think about the future of their church and stepping to the plate and being a spiritual leader. If you think God is calling you to some form of leadership in the church, use this list to examine your life and set some goals to move forward in aspiring for ministry. Put your name down on a response card and Pastor Stephen or I will call you. We will do what we can to help you prepare to lead.
2. Other men, and women, this morning may not feel called to leadership in the church but parts of this list convicted you. Maybe it was the lack of self-discipline in your life. Maybe it was the lack of orderliness in your life. Maybe it was the importance of gentleness instead of anger for your Christian witness. Maybe it was the essential nature of hospitality and having people

over to your home. Before you leave, I want you to circle one or two of these qualities that God is calling you to work on in prayer and dependence upon the Holy Spirit this week. Over lunch today, talk with your spouse or your family and see what qualities God was touching in their hearts or lives to develop.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

© You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided (1) you credit the author, (2) modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web address (www.Christ2RCulture.com) on the copied resource.

