



1 Timothy 3:1-13

# Reflections on Church Leadership

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent – November 27, 2016(am)

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## INTRODUCTION

I've been in Christian ministry for nearly three decades now, and one thing I've noticed during that time is the level of confusion that seems to persist, both in the *church* and in the world, surrounding the topic of leadership. On the one hand, we seem almost intoxicated with it. Leadership conferences abound, for the *church*, business, academia, politics, and more. We're told that organizations will never outgrow their leadership, so they really need to bring in charismatic, energetic, and visionary leaders or they won't survive in this fast-paced, global community. Not even churches will survive. Often Scripture will even be quoted, twisting its meaning to support this idea: Pro.29:18 is central: (KJV) *Where there is no vision, the people perish...* Rooted in the idea this verse *seems* to be expressing, the lines between leadership in the world and leadership in the *church* don't just blur, but the categories can virtually merge into one.

Just last evening I was reading the promotional material on one well-known megachurch's annual conference on leadership. Jesus was never mentioned. Neither was the Holy Spirit. I did find one reference to Scripture, though. It was included in a statement that began as an announcement of the partnering of two high-profile Christian organizations to address *an issue that threatens the Church in the US: The declining rate of Bible Engagement*. What would you expect to be the approach between an association of churches and an organization committed to distributing Scripture around the world? Perhaps a call to churches to preach from the Bible more consistently? Perhaps a network of local Bible studies? Or even a prayer movement seeking God to strengthen His *church* and renew a passion for His Word? No, these two Christian organizations announced that, *working hand in hand with today's best leaders, (they) are sharing the latest research, proven programs, needed technology and tools to help you and your community rediscover, engage and live out the biblical principles and realities found in Scripture*.

Now, I don't want to be too harsh; I really am glad they are doing something to address this issue. But this is just the kind of confusion that arises when the *church* becomes intoxicated with leadership and gets drawn into worldly thinking on the subject. When we have a problem, we seek out *the best leaders*. We forget that the *church* stands apart from the world. We forget that

while there are great similarities between the *church* and other organizations in this world, the differences are more significant than the similarities. We forget that the *church* not just an organization, but a spiritual family, called into community by the Creator God of the universe, cleansed for His use through the sacrificial offering of His Son, and united as one body by the indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

So, on the one hand we are fascinated by leadership, but on the other hand we almost despise it. Authority crowds in on our individuality in the twenty-first century west. For instance, we immediately assume police officers are power-hungry, or have ulterior motives, quotas for traffic tickets. We can all too easily believe that our bosses are out of touch with the real aims and values of the organization, and what it takes to achieve them. Personal autonomy, assertiveness, self-determination, these are qualities we admire and aspire to exercise, even within the *church*. We don't receive leadership well. We don't recognize it and respond to it in a manner worthy of God.

These two competing perspectives lead to a confusing mixture of ideas on *church* leadership. And this confusion on a matter of such profound importance is one of the primary reasons I am grateful to God that Paul was led by the His Spirit to give such focused attention to *church* leadership in his Pastoral Epistles. It helps us understand and better appreciate how leadership is really supposed to work in the local *church*.

I must also say that I am routinely encouraged that the framers of our GCD Constitution gave such rigorous effort to defining the roles and responsibilities of our leaders, (*elders*) and *deacons*, so strictly according to Scripture. That commitment is far more rare than you might imagine.

The passage before us, 1Ti.3:1-13, is easily outlined as *Qualifications for Elders* (1-7) and *Qualifications for Deacons* (8-13). So we could profitably use our time this morning to walk through these qualifications one-by-one, to remind ourselves of what they mean. But I believe we could do better just to reflect on what we can learn and understand about *church* leadership from the cumulative force of these two paragraphs taken together. Surely this was part of Paul's aim as he wrote to Timothy given the presence of those who were *teaching different doctrine* (1:3) and so leading the *church* astray. And knowing better what should characterize *church* leaders could be of great benefit in our day when authority of virtually any kind is so easy for us to resist. By the way, do you know what Pro.29:18 *actually* says? <sup>18</sup> *Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.* Put differently: *Where there is no word from the Lord, the people break loose*, like Israel did down in the valley while Moses was up on the

mountain receiving the Law; they worshiped the golden calf (Exo.32) (cf. Kidner 168). What *God's* people need is direction from Him, guidance from His revelation, instruction from His Word that they keep, follow, obey by the power of His Spirit such that they experience the (*blessing*) of obedience seen here in the latter half of this verse.

So, God gives leaders to His *church* to instruct and teach them according to His ways, and by His grace to model for them what that looks like. He equips His leaders for that responsibility. And we see that clearly in the way Paul addresses *church* leadership with Timothy here. Let's listen to and learn from this passage.

### **REFLECTIONS ON THE OFFICE OF ELDER – 1-7 FOUR PRINCIPLES**

1. *The office of elder is a dignified assignment* (1). Not only is this true, but Paul underscored the seriousness and sobriety of it by calling attention to this affirmation as a *trustworthy saying* (1). In each of the other four appearances of this statement in his letters to Timothy and Titus (1Ti.1:15; 4:9; 2Ti.2:11; Tit.3:8), it is reserved for important doctrinal affirmations. So it is no small matter when someone *aspires to the office of overseer*. Yes, it is a *noble task*. But it is a *noble task* because a sovereign work of God is being done.

Two observations here: first, when it is a fallen person who *aspires* to this *noble task*, we can't just *assume* that God is awakening that aspiration. Like *Simon* aspired to the amazing works God enabled through Peter and John (Act.8:9-25), not everyone who *aspires to the office of overseer* is necessarily responding to the prompting of the Spirit. But the *office* to which they (*aspire*) is indeed worthy. It is *dignified*.

Second, we might be more clued-in to this fact today, but it's quite possible that, given the responsibilities of the *office of overseer* (elder, pastor), it wasn't highly regarded in the first century—perhaps inside the *church* any more than outside. The *church* as an institution, an organization, was not held in high regard by Jews or Romans. And within the *church* the *office* may have seemed like more of a burden than a blessing. The charges over in 5<sup>17, 19</sup> suggest some such ripples, as do the reminders in 1Pe.5<sup>1-3, 5</sup> and Heb.13<sup>17</sup>. It could well be that the headaches kicked up from both directions, those who exercise (*elder*) authority and those who live under it, made *the office* seem not so *noble* in that day. But having been reminded that it *is noble* in any case, there should be an exemplary (Heb.13:7) willingness, an eagerness (1Pe.5:2), a *zeal* (Rom.12:8), a joyfulness (Heb.13:17) to the work, even when it can feel demanding, and thankless.

2. *Personal and spiritual integrity must be well-proven* (2-3, 6). We see a list of qualities in vv.2-3 that, even though they have an outward expression, clearly flow from an attitude of the heart: being *above reproach*, (*a one-woman man*), *sober-minded* (*free from every form of excess... or rashness* <sup>1Fee</sup> <sup>8:11</sup>), *self-controlled*, and *respectable*... We're getting the picture of a mature man of God whose satisfaction is rooted in the Lord, and so is unswayed by hard days.

V.3 picks up on more of the same sorts of traits: *not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money*. He's not dependent on substances for relief or for thrill. He doesn't gain his significance by winning an argument, or by acquiring possessions. His significance is rooted elsewhere, as we have already identified. The fruit of his personal walk with the Lord, the integrity of his spiritual life, is evident and authenticated by testing.

He welcomes people into his home (2), not only showing them gospel love but welcoming their inspection of the integrity of his faith. And while there, he is able to instruct them in the Word and ways of God—a distinctive quality of an Elder, an *overseer*. But this *hospitable* quality leads to a third principle.

3. *He must be well-respected by those closest to him* (4-5). What is seen inside his home is not just the authenticity of his personal faith, but the fruitfulness of it. An *overseer* is well-respected by those closest to him. *He... (manages) his... household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive*. This doesn't mean his *children* necessarily become believers—that is beyond his control. But it does mean that his *children* respect and honor him, and that there is an air of *dignity* to their relationship, a mutual respect that is noticeable, even conspicuous.

The point of reference here is that, 5 ... *if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church, for God's household?* (cf. 15) The home is the proving ground for leadership in the *church*. For that reason we have an item on the *Job Description* of each of our pastoral staff here at GCD: *Attentively develop your relationship with Jesus Christ, your wife, and family*. It is second behind: *Devote yourself to prayer and the ministry of the Word*, because these activities are definitive of a pastor (Act.6:4), and are foundational to leadership both in the *church* and in the home. But an *overseer must also be well thought of by outsiders*...

4. *He must be held in high regard outside his home* (7) ... *so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil*. Such *disgrace* is the (*devil's*) *snare* for (*elders*). And it harms the *church*.

## **REFLECTIONS ON THE OFFICE OF DEACON – 8-13 TWO PRINCIPLES**

1. *The same sorts of characteristics are seen in deacons as are seen in overseers (8-10, 12). Deacons are servants of the church.* The exercise the Apostles went through in Act.6<sup>1-6</sup> to appoint seven men to serve the needs of the body so that they could devote (themselves) to prayer and to the ministry of the word we believe identified the first deacons. Now here Paul is listing their qualifications so that the church can recognize them.

And, my friends, if you want to know what biblical deacons look like in the flesh, look at our deacons here at GCD. <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.* They must really believe the gospel. <sup>10</sup> *And let them also be tested first, as we do here; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless*—not perfect, but qualified by God's grace according to this list ... Again: <sup>12</sup> *Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.*

2. — But look at v.11 (and on this one I'm not going to mention the principle until after we see what the verse actually says): <sup>11</sup> *Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.* Why do you suppose Paul speaks to the wives of deacons when he didn't speak of the wives of (elders)?

While you're thinking about that question, notice that the wording of v.11 is just like the wording of v.8 where Paul was introducing a new office (deacons). And by the way, both of these *likewise* verses (8, 11) are dependent on the verb *must be* (2 [as seen in NASV]). So, as *an overseer must be* all the things listed (2-7), *likewise* with deacons (8-10, 12-13), and *likewise* also with whoever is being addressed in v.11.

Also, something we can't see as clearly in English is the fact that there is no Greek word behind our English *their* at the beginning of v.11. It just begins: *Wives or Women, likewise dignified...* And in Greek you would use the same word regardless of whether you mean *wives* or *women*. Context determines which is in view.

So, here, which is in view? The way both the verse and the passage are structured, I believe the best translation here is *women*, not *wives*. I believe Paul is identifying a category of service in the church, parallel to deacons, that can be filled by women who are *dignified* like deacons (8), *not slanderers, but sober-minded* like overseers (2), and *faithful in all things*. And I believe Paul himself strongly affirms this same idea as he begins his closing greetings in Rom.16<sup>1</sup> *I commend to you*

our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae. The word he uses there for *servant* is the same one he uses to open v.8 here.

So that leads us to the second principle here: 2. *It appears that women can serve as some form of deacon* (11). And I use the words *some form of* not to soften this insight at all, or to cast doubt on it, but precisely because Paul has separated it out here with its own *likewise* and list of virtues. But even so, he has folded it into the middle of his instruction on *deacons*, so he has linked it to that.

We're planning to explore this subject a bit further next Sunday PM, 4 December. Join us for that.

## CONCLUSION

So, what do we learn from this passage? Three Lessons: 1. *It is God who gifts and calls certain ones to fill these offices* (Rom.12:3; Eph.4:11-12; 1Co.12:4-6). What is listed here can only be accomplished in us by His amazing grace. It is not a list that we can just work through and qualify ourselves for either *office*.

2. *We should be seeking God to draw our attention to those among us whom He has gifted and is calling to serve.* This is one of the surest signs that God is still active in His *church*. If He's still raising up godly leaders, and working through them, He has work for us to do as a *church*. And we should be giving our whole hearts to doing it.

But also, we don't just *decide* when we want or need more leaders. It is *God's* job to initiate that process, and direct it. When we sense the need, we should begin seeking Him to do it.

3. *We should use this passage as a prayer list to support our present elders and deacons, and also to open our eyes to new ones He is raising up among us.* I, for one, can tell you that I would delight to know that a good portion of this body is praying that I would live and life *above reproach* (2), being devoted to my *wife* with an undivided heart, and that I would be *sober-minded, self-controlled, respectably, hospitable, and able to teach*, 3 *not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money.* Even at this stage of life I would welcome your prayers that I would 1... *manage (my) household well, with all dignity, keeping (my) children submissive.* Even though I am not a *recent convert*, I'm closer in spiritual strength to those who are than I am to the perfect spiritual strength and maturity of our Lord *Jesus*. So I would covet your prayers that I 6... *may not become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil,* and that I would 7... *be well thought of by outsiders, so that (I) may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil,* and so damage the *God's* work through GCD.

I know my fellow (*elders*) would welcome the same.

And I know our *deacons* would welcome your prayers that they would **13**... *serve well*... and so *gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus*—a reward befitting godly *deacons*, which also, then, blesses the *church* in return.

And we should pray for one another that God would enable us to honor His leaders, and Heb.13<sup>7</sup> ... *consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith*.

My friends, this is what leadership in *God's church* looks like; this is how it functions. It is an extension, an expression of His leadership. It embodies in fallen but saved sinners the very character and leadership of His beloved Son, Who is Head of the *church*. And so it manifest His presence with the *church*, which also underscores all of His promises to the *church*. Godly leaders who can fill *the office of overseer* and serve the *church* as *deacons* in the strength of His grace are reassurances that He is present. May these insights from 1Ti.3<sup>1-13</sup> clear our vision of leadership.