

Qualifications for Church Leadership

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13

1 TIMOTHY: DUTIES AND ORDER IN THE CHURCH, [1 Timothy 2:1-3:13](#)

The Overseers of the Church, [1 Timothy 3:1-7](#)

[\(1 Timothy 3:1-7\)](#) **Introduction:** the office of *bishop* is probably the same office as **elder** or **presbyter** or **minister** in the New Testament. All three words refer to the same person, to the minister of the gospel and of the church (see below [Deeper Study #1, Elder—Titus 1:5-9](#) for more discussion).

- 1) What are the qualifications of the minister?
- 2) Who should be preaching the gospel and filling the pulpits of the Lord's church?
- 3) Who should be considering the ministry—what kind of person?

Now, here is the most important part of all of this that we need to understand.

All the qualifications he lists are **spiritual virtues, character traits that mark godly teachers and leaders**. He says nothing about the duties of the leaders, **but is concerned only with their spirituality, morality, and virtue as the necessary foundation to duty**. The duties were clear, the qualifications needed to be clarified.

All who serve as overseers or elders in the church must measure up to these standards, or face public discipline ([1 Timothy 5:20-24](#)).

[1 Timothy 5:20-24 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁰ Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of *sinning*.

²¹ I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of *His* chosen angels, to maintain these *principles* without bias, doing nothing in a *spirit of partiality*.

²² Do not lay hands upon anyone *too* hastily and thereby share *responsibility* for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.

²³ No longer drink water *exclusively*, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.

²⁴ The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their *sins* follow after.

Before discussing the individual qualifications against which all pastors are to be measured, however, Paul gives some helpful insight into the call to spiritual leadership. This opening verse suggests six facets related to the call to ministry:

- 1) important calling,
- 2) a limited calling,

- 3) a compelling calling,
- 4) a responsible calling,
- 5) a worthy calling, and
- 6) a demanding calling.

An Important Calling

[1 Timothy 3:1a \(NASB\)](#)

¹ **It is a trustworthy statement:** if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*.

The phrase **a trustworthy statement** is unique to the Pastoral Epistles, appearing five times (cf. [1 Timothy 1:15](#); [1 Timothy 4:9](#); [2 Timothy 2:11](#); [Titus 3:8](#)).

[1 Timothy 1:15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵ **It is a trustworthy statement**, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*.

[1 Timothy 4:9 \(NASB\)](#)

⁹ **It is a trustworthy statement** deserving full acceptance.

[2 Timothy 2:11 \(NASB\)](#)

¹¹ **It is a trustworthy statement:** For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him;

[Titus 3:8 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸ **This is a trustworthy statement;** and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.

Each time, it introduces a basic truth of great importance and familiarity among believers. **A trustworthy statement** is an obvious, self-evident truth that doesn't need proof. Because the phrase appears only late in Paul's ministry, it probably indicates axioms that had become creeds. While the **trustworthy statement** in this passage is about the issue of the call to the ministry, the others refer to doctrinal matters. Including this truth with those essential elements of Christian dogma shows the importance placed on the role of leadership by the early church. **It was and is a serious and sacred trust.**

In Paul's day the pastorate was not entered into lightly. Today people enter the ministry for a variety of reasons, not all of them commendable. Some are in it for the money, others for job security, prestige and respect, the privilege of working with Christians, or other unacceptable motivations.

In the early church, however, conditions were very different. There was little money to be made, since the churches were poor and few Christians were rich. The ministry was not a position of prestige in society, since Christians, and especially preachers, were despised outcasts (cf. [1 Corinthians 1:26](#)).

1 Corinthians 1:26 (NASB)

²⁶ For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

And since the church was a frequent target of persecution, those in leadership roles risked their lives.

The record of the developing church constantly affirms the importance of spiritual leadership. On their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas “**appointed elders for them in every church**” ([Acts 14:23](#)).

Acts 14:23 (NASB)

²³ When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Elders, along with the apostles, presided at the Jerusalem Council ([Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23](#)).

Acts 15:2 (NASB)

² And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

Acts 15:4 (NASB)

⁴ When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

Acts 15:6 (NASB)

⁶ The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

Acts 15:22-23 (NASB)

²² Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,

²³ and they sent this letter by them, "The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

As already noted, Paul had appointed elders at Ephesus ([Acts 20:17, 28](#)).

Acts 20:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

Acts 20:28 (NASB)

²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Paul addressed the book of Philippians “to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons” ([Philippians 1:1](#)).

[Philippians 1:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, **To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:**

He wrote to the Thessalonians, “We request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another” ([1 Thessalonians 5:12-13-NASB](#)).

In a similar vein the writer of Hebrews exhorted his readers to “obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” ([Hebrews 13:17- NASB](#)).

Peter wrote: “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock” ([1 Peter 5:1-3- NASB](#))

Since **godly leaders have always been the backbone of the church, it is essential that they be qualified**. In an unsuccessful church, the issue is all too often not poor programs or uncommitted people, **but substandard leadership**. Godly leaders are not produced by Bible colleges or seminaries; they merely give them the tools with which to work. Nor do pulpit committees or ordination councils make men fit for the ministry; they merely have the responsibility to recognize those who already are. **Only the Holy Spirit can produce a true spiritual leader.**