

Day 178, 1 Timothy 3

by David Servant

The sermon emphasizes the importance of character qualifications and holiness in ministry, as outlined in 1 Timothy 3.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:16

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Christian Character"

Description

David Servant preaches on the qualifications for overseers and deacons in the early church, emphasizing the importance of character over charisma or education. He highlights the role of overseers as disciple-makers who lead by example and the need for both overseers and deacons to be tested for holiness before ministry. Paul's instructions reveal that love of money and maintaining a clear conscience are observable through actions, not just attitudes of the heart, and that holiness is a non-negotiable requirement for serving in ministry.

Transcript

When we read, just a few days ago, the opening sentence of Paul's letter to the Philippians, we learned that the early churches were served by overseers (Greek: episkopos) and deacons (Greek: diakonos), the latter of which is more literally translated "servants." There were no "deacon boards" in Paul's day who ran the affairs of the church. Deacons served in various capacities, such as in administrating assistance to the poor, while it was the overseers (who are synonymous with elders and pastors; see, for example, Acts 20:17, 28) who shepherded the flocks under their care. Timothy was apparently selecting men in Ephesus to serve as overseers, and he was selecting men and women (3:8-13) to serve as deacons. So Paul listed the qualifications that Timothy should require of potential candidates. Obviously not every believer qualified, which is one more indication that all true Christians have not reached sinless perfection, as some tell us.

Any time I read the qualifications Paul lists for one to be an overseer, I am reminded of how much the church has drifted from its original pattern. Note that the majority of the qualifications Paul listed have to do with the candidate's character, and nothing to do with his education, charisma, or ability to deliver interesting sermons (three things that seem to be essential qualifications for pastors in most churches today). The reason is because a biblical overseer/elder/pastor is a disciple-maker, and he teaches primarily by the example that he sets before the members of his little flock. They are all well-acquainted with him and should strive to imitate him (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Eph. 5:1. 1 Thes. 1:6; Heb. 13:7). They likely

meet in a house, and in fact, one of the requirements for overseers is that they must manage their own households well (3:4), because managing a church is so similar.

Paul wrote that elders must be "free from the love of money" (3:3), which indicates that love of money is something that can be observed and judged by one's actions, and thus it is not just an attitude of the heart as is so often claimed. To be more specific, Timothy could, by observing how people gained and used money, righteously judge if they loved it or not. Those who spent all their time working to gain it, or who gained it by unscrupulous means, or who used what they gained to pile up additional earthly treasures rather than lay up treasures in heaven revealed their love of money. If the love of money were only an attitude of the heart, there would have been no way for Timothy to determine if potential candidates for overseers were qualified.

Like overseers, deacons were required to be men and women of holiness, who maintained a "clear conscience" (3:9). Both overseers and deacons should first be tested to make certain they are "beyond reproach" before they were put into their positions of ministry (3:10). Thus we see the repeated emphasis on the necessity of holiness required of those who will minister to the body of Christ. The simple reason is that true Christianity is all about faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and obedience to His commandments. Without holiness, one is not qualified to serve in ministry. Many who are called to ministry disqualify themselves because of their character flaws. Those flaws keep some from entering ministry, yet God will still hold them accountable for their calling. And those flaws are often the undoing of those who are already in ministry, and they find themselves expelled from the very thing God called them to. How tragic this is. Yet, if in either case there is repentance, grace can be found and lost opportunity can be regained.

Those who "have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus" (3:13). As one is established in holiness and bears more fruit, a benefit is that one's assurance of salvation increases. It is those who "ride the fence," dabbling in sin and worldliness, who are always wondering if they are truly saved. Not so for the committed!

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