

Studies in 1 Timothy-03 1 Timothy-3

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of character and self-control in the life of a Christian, particularly in the roles of elder and deacon.

Duration: 43:08

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Christian Conduct"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the qualifications and behavior of elders and deacons in the church. He emphasizes the importance of experience and maturity in the faith, cautioning against pride and the condemnation of the devil. The speaker also highlights the need for a good reputation among both believers and unbelievers, as well as a modest standard of living. He encourages a spirit of giving and selflessness in the service of the Lord, drawing from biblical examples and teachings. Overall, the message applies not only to elders and deacons but to all believers in their conduct and testimony.

Transcript

This morning we come to 1 Timothy chapter 3 in our studies. We're going through this book, and so shall we turn to 1 Timothy chapter 3, and we'll begin reading in verse 1. 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 1. This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop, then, must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach, not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient, not a brawler, not covetous, one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.

For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must have a good report of them which are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, holding the of the faith in a pure conscience.

And let these also first be proved, then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderous, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children in their own house as well.

For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee

shortly. But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." Now, as we mentioned before, Paul's first letter to Timothy gives instructions as to behavior in the church of God. That's what it is all about.

This chapter will not tell you, for instance, how to be saved. Other parts of the word of God tell us that we're saved by grace through faith, quite apart from law-keeping. But this chapter tells us how we ought to behave after we are saved, and you probably noticed that the chapter is divided into three parts.

First of all, you have the qualifications of elders in verses one through seven, and then you have the qualifications of deacons in verses eight through thirteen, and deaconesses, incidentally. Qualifications of deacons and deaconesses, and then in verses 14 through 16, the apostle explains why he is giving these instructions to produce correct behavior in the church. And so, the chapter begins, this is a true saying, and true there means faithful, it means worthy to be believed.

Not just a true statement, everything in the Bible is true, but this is a faithful statement. It's singled out as especially worthy of attention by us today. It says, if a man desire the office of a bishop, it really means if a man desire overseership.

If he desires to be an elder in the local assembly, he desires a good work. In Acts chapter 20, we find that only God can make a man an elder. In First Timothy chapter three, verse one, we find that the man has to desire it himself.

Those are the two sides of the truth. In order to be an elder in the local assembly, a man must be qualified by God, he must be fitted by God, and the other side, he must have the desire in himself. You have this curious mingling of the divine and the human in the Christian life.

You have it all the way through the Christian life. For instance, only God can make me holy, but he'll never make me holy without my cooperation. You have the divine part, you have the human part.

Here you have it in connection with the work of elders. We believe, according to the New Testament, that there should be a plurality of elders in the local assembly. That is, not one elder ruling over the assembly, but a group of men, a group of godly men serving as guides to the flock.

And in this portion of Scripture, where you have the qualifications of elders, what they really boil down to is that these men must be men of good Christian character. That's what they say. If we were just to boil down everything that we have in these next verses, verses one through seven, they're emphasizing the character of these men.

It doesn't say that these men have to be successful in business. It doesn't say that they have to have high IQs or anything like that. It says that they must be men of God, is what it says.

And that always comes first in the New Testament. What you and I are is far more important than anything we ever do or say. God desires truth in the inward parts.

Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. Now, a very comfortable way of handling this chapter is to just apply it to elders and deacons and deaconesses, and sit comfortably and undisturbed. But what we're going to do today is apply these things to ourselves, because what's true of elders and what's true of deacons should be true of every one of us.

And so, I think it'll do us far more good if we turn the searchlight in on ourselves today and say, this is what I should be if I am a Christian, if I am a child of God, this is what I should be. So, the bishop or an elder, then, must be blameless, and blameless means that no charge, no serious charge can be sustained against this man. It does not mean sinless, fortunately for all of us.

It doesn't say a bishop must be sinless. It means he must be blameless, and that means exactly that. He must not be open to justifiable accusation.

I think there's another thought here in connection with blameless. It means that when this man does something that isn't right, he's quick to repent, to apologize, to ask forgiveness. Now, this is one of the greatest marks of spiritual maturity that there is in the Christian life.

To be blameless means that when I do something wrong, I break readily. I don't just bite my lips and determine to go through with it at all costs. Instead of that, I repent, and I go to the person whom I've wronged, and I say, I was wrong.

I am sorry. I want you to forgive me. It's really what it means to be blameless.

Now, any of us can be blameless if we're not too stubborn, if we don't have too much of a flesh about it. It's very hard to do. It's very hard to do.

It's devastating to a person's pride to do that, but the more we have to do it, the more we learn the lessons. All right, now it says secondly, and this I apply to myself today, am I blameless? And, I think everyone should apply that to his own life today. Am I blameless? Is there something in my life that I've tried to sweep under the carpet? Is there someone I've offended, and I refuse to go and make it right? Well, I should do it.

Life is too short to hold those things. Then it says, the husband of one wife. Now, this has been given many, many different interpretations.

Some say this means that an elder must be married. Some say it means that if his wife dies, he must not marry again. Husband of one wife.

Some say it means he must not be divorced. Some say it means if he's divorced, he must not be remarried. Some say it's a prohibition against bigamy and polygamy, especially throughout regions in Africa and other countries where polygamy is still practiced.

I think that we're safe in saying here that this teaches that the man of God must have an exemplary married life. He must have a faith, he must be a faithful husband and have a faithful married life. I have no doubt that this is the general thrust of the subject.

We are living in a day when the marriage institution is being dragged in the mud by Satan, and it's very easy for us to accommodate our thinking to the thinking of the world about us. But the word of God still stands, and we must be governed by the word of God, and not by what the politicians or the news media

are saying. The third is he must be vigilant.

He must be vigilant. I'm using words that are synonyms for some of these that he used. It means literally unmixed with wine.

That's a strange thing, isn't it? That word means unmixed with wine, and the word we would use today would be temperate. And this word really means that he must be self-controlled, not only with regard to his appetite, but with regard to every area of the Christian life. He must be restrained, not indulgent, moderate, not extreme.

So, God looks at these things in our lives. He likes to look down and see a child of God who is self-controlled. And, incidentally, you can be self-controlled and under the control of the God at the same time, because one of the fruits of the Spirit is temperance.

That's really the thought here. He must be temperate. You know, some of us are creatures of extreme.

Very hard to be moderate. We go in for something, and that's all we can see. That's all we can do.

A part of the secret of the Christian life is to be self-controlled, to be moderate, to be restrained. A next qualification is sober, and this means sober-minded. It means that this person must be serious about the issues of life and of eternity.

It means that he must be given more to trying to build up others than to light frothy conversation. Really, the issues of life are serious, aren't they? I was listening on the radio coming out today to the memorial service for Hubert Humphrey. It's sobering, isn't it? Think of men marching across the little stage of life, and then coming to the end and going out to meet God, and then what? So, you can see that an elder especially, but any Christian, should really be sober-minded.

Not perpetually cracking jokes, but exhorting, teaching, guiding, comforting, warning, and encouraging. This man must be a sensible, mature man, not a spiritual featherweight. He must be prudent and sound in judgment, not characterized by levity and whirly wisdom.

That's what the scripture says. It says the dead flies cause the apothecary's ointment to stink. So, a little folly in a man of understanding.

Okay, then it says next he must be of good behavior, and that means orderly. The real meaning there is orderly. This means that he be disciplined in his personal life, disciplined in the home, disciplined in business, and disciplined in assembly life.

Very unpopular word today, but it requires that a man not be careless or slipshod. For instance, a disciplined man's a man who keeps appointments on time. He does his work on schedule.

He's neat and methodical, working systematically, not helter-skelter. These are all the things that are laid down, and as I say, they're not only true of elders, they should be true of every one of us. And this also may include the idea that this man is dignified and respectable.

It says given to hospitality. This means that the elder keeps open house for all, both saved and unsaved, and that he's always ready to provide spiritual and material help where needed. This had a special significance, I think, in the days in which it was written.

It's easy for us to say given to hospitality, but we should remember that when Paul wrote these words to Timothy, Christians were on the run. Christians were really being persecuted. They were being driven from dens to caves of the woods, and all the rest, and when a Christian came and knocked on your door, and you opened the door and received him in, you were subject to prosecution by the law.

You were really at the mouth of the cannon then, and that's what this really means here, given to hospitality. When that happened, when some Christian who was being pursued by the legal authorities, and perhaps to be put to death, came to your house, you welcomed him in. It makes us realize what a light form of Christianity we have now spared we have been in this country from that type of thing.

Of course, in order for an elder to be hospitable, his wife must be too. She must share his goals and be willing to spend herself in this important ministry. But hospitality is a wonderful thing for all God's people, and some of the most important teaching and ministry can be done around a table.

I often think of that. I often think of the emphasis in the word of God. I'm just sitting around a table.

It says concerning the prophetic future, many shall come from the east and the west and the north and the south and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the Father. Even in heaven, there's going to be that idea of sitting down and fellowshiping at the table with the great men of the ages. Okay, apt to teach is the next thing.

Apt to teach. This means that the elder must have a working knowledge of the holy scriptures, a working knowledge of the holy scriptures, so that he can go into a situation, a problem has arisen, and he can go in, and he knows where to turn in the word of God to deal with that problem. What does it mean? Well, that's good for every one of us.

We shouldn't just shunt that off to the elders, should we? We should all have a working knowledge of the holy scriptures, able to teach, exhort, expose, rebuke false doctrine wherever it arises. Now, this doesn't mean that he has to have the gift of teaching. It doesn't say that.

It doesn't mean that he can get up before 5,000 people and just give an exposition of a passage of scripture and hold people in the palms of his hands. It doesn't say that. It just means that he must be able to communicate the word of God to others in a non-threatened and objective manner.

And, of course, to be able to teach others, he has to be teachable himself, apt to teach. Then it says, "...not given to wine," and once again we come back to this matter of temperance. "...must not be given to excess, but able to control his appetite." And there's also, in this word, believe it or not, the thought that he's not a brawler, and not quarrelsome over wine.

You know, the abuses that come with drinking, the loud shouting, and the fighting, and all the rest. This qualification might seem superfluous in a country like ours, where this doesn't seem to be a great problem among Christians, but just remember that the Bible was written for all cultures, and for all countries, and all parts of the world. The next qualification here is, "...no striker," and the Greek here means exactly what the English does, as it usually does.

It means that he mustn't hit other people. You say, well, it's a funny thing to put in the Bible. It's not so funny at all.

If you read church history, you'll find that dignitaries, church dignitaries down through the years, oftentimes thought nothing of giving a clout to some parishioner who wasn't staying in line. They'd just haul off and hit him. Of course, it's forbidden in the word of God.

No striker is what it means. It's not speaking about striking in the labor union. That's not the idea.

It means it means this man is not pugnacious or combative. It may include the idea of emotional violence, as well as physical violence, but it does not exclude discipline of a man's own children. There are other portions of the word of God that take care of that.

Spare the rod? He that spares the rod hates his child, scriptures says. Now, the order in this next passage is a little bit different in most of the versions. We'll go to the next as being patient, and here the word is gentle.

Patient has the idea of being gentle. He's meek and long-suffering. He doesn't cut down people with words or treat them harshly.

Rather, the elder here treats people like a shepherd treats lambs. That's a good way to describe what the word gentle or patient means here. The elder is an under-shepherd of the sheep, and he treats the people of God the way a shepherd treats lambs.

Now, I can imagine that for many leaders of God's people, it's very easy to become impatient and lose your cool, because we really are sheep, and really I'm never flattered when the Bible calls me a sheep, because I know enough about sheep to know that they're not the smartest animals afoot, and they do some pretty dumb things. And you remember how impatient Moses became with the people, and God kept him out of the promised land. God doesn't really like that type of thing.

God loves his people, and he doesn't like anybody to lose their temper with them. Then it says, not a brawler. That means not quarrelsome.

If a man is contentious, argumentative, or quarrelsome, then he's disqualified. And, you know, there are people like that. There are people that just seem to have that gift of stirring up trouble all the time.

A godly overseer doesn't go around with a chip on his shoulder. He's not always carrying on a debate with some fancy opponent, and he's not a source of disunity among God's people. Now, this should be true of every one of us.

Then it says, not greedy, a filthy looker. It says it really means no lover of money, no lover of money. That means that the elder realizes that he is here for bigger business than to make money.

You know, really what what your life and my life turns out to be at the end depends on our priorities, and what value we assign to things. Here it says, no lover of money. In our priorities, we should always put the eternal ahead of the temporal.

We should always put the spiritual ahead of the physical, and we should always put people ahead of things. And if your life and my life is built with those priorities in view, we'll have something to show for it at the end. Let me go over that again.

The best priorities in life put the eternal ahead of the temporal. Only the eternal really counts. Put the spiritual ahead of the physical.

Put people ahead of things. I've often quoted Paul Little, the author of *How to Give Away Your Faith*. He came into the room one day where his mother was sewing, and he said, Mother, I'm so glad that God has given me a greater love for people than for things.

Good, isn't it? A greater love for people than for things. Well, here it says, no lover of money. For him, for this man, the spiritual has a higher priority than the material.

Money is not an end in itself, it's a means to an end, and this elder adopts a modest standard of living so that everything above his needs and the needs of his family can go into the work of the Lord. He doesn't serve the Lord for pay. You don't find that here.

He feels it's better in the service of the Lord that things should cost rather than that they should pay. That's not exactly the spirit in evangelical Christendom today, but it's a good principle for us to follow. It's far better in the things of God that things should cost rather than that they should pay.

When Jesus sent the disciples out, he sent them out imbued with the spirit of giving, not getting. Give, and it shall be given unto you, good measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over. With what measure you meet to others, it shall be measured to you with all the Savior said.

It says next, one that ruleth well his own children. This doesn't mean that an elder must have children, but it means that if he does have them, he must rule them well. Certainly, a man who does have a family is far better able to counsel in family problems that arise in the assembly if he's raised children himself.

The eldest children must be believers and must be subject to his leadership in the home. It certainly applies to little children living in the home. After the children have left home, I think it's a different story.

After they're on their own, the elder can hardly be responsible for what they do. But the principle here is that if a man can't rule his own family well, it's unlikely that he'll be a suitable elder, since the same principles apply in each case. Then it says in verse 6, not a novice.

This means that you don't take a man whom you hardly know and push him into a work of leadership in Christian service. The theory falls into the trap of the devil, and yet this goes on in Christian circles today. A gangster or an actor or a TV celebrity gets saved, some famous person gets saved, and immediately they're pushed to the forefront in Christian testimony.

After a while, you don't hear about them, because a terrible tragedy has taken place. They become easy prey for the devil's trap. A baby should crawl before it walks, and there's a certain process in the Christian life as well, a certain period of growth and development that we must go through.

A man should have a spiritual childhood. Do you know that if a baby doesn't crawl, it never talks well? That's true. If a baby never learns to crawl, it never talks well.

This is a problem sometimes with children who are cerebral palsy victims, and that's true spiritually, too. There's not a novice. Lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

There must be that training and seasoning that come with years of Bible study and experience in the things of God. Next, he must have a good testimony from outsiders. You think, well, it's just enough that he have a good testimony with Christians, but that isn't so.

He must have a good reputation among unbelievers as well in his business and social contacts. His life must match his impression. If unsaved people have to say of him, what you are speaks so loud I can't hear what you say, it's too bad.

Or if they have to say what the Indians said, high talk, low walk. Keep high talk, keep low walk. Next, he must not be, well, that's really the end of the qualifications for the elders here.

There are qualifications in other portions. Now, it says next about the deacons, and the qualifications for deacons are very much the same. You say, what's the difference between an elder and a deacon? Well, I think that the distinction is very simple.

The word deacon means one who serves. Anyone who is not an elder who serves in the local assembly is a deacon. Anyone who has any sphere of service in the local fellowship who is not an elder is a deacon.

It's not a very official thing in the New Testament, it's very unofficial, but what this passage is saying is that anybody who publicly represents the assembly in any way should be a man of Christian character, or a woman of Christian character, because we have deaconesses here as we shall see. Likewise, must the deacons be grave once again the idea of serious about the things of God. The issues that we as Christians handle are serious issues.

The everlasting joy or misery of men and women around us. Not double-tongued. This means he mustn't speak out of both corners of his mouth, he mustn't say one thing to one person and another thing to another person, or say one thing at one time and a contradictory thing at another time.

That's what double-tongued means. Not given to much wine, we've already dealt with that, and he must be a temperate man. Not given to extremes, he must know how to practice self-control.

Not greedy of filthy lucre, he doesn't live for money, he doesn't worship money with the image and superscription of Caesar upon it. He worships the Lord and uses money for the glory of God and for the satisfaction of his needs. Then it says, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

Even the deacons are concerned with the spiritual side of things, and the mystery of the faith means here the Christian faith, and he holds that in a pure conscience. It isn't a case of a Sunday religion with him, but throughout the week his life is consistent with what he professes. And let these also first be proved, then let them use the office of a deacon being found blameless.

And that means that the man starts off with a certain responsibility, he's found faithful in that, he's advanced to greater responsibilities. You find that in the New Testament in connection with Stephen and Philip. They started off administering funds for the care of widows in the assembly, but before God got through with them, one was a flaming evangelist and the other laid down his life as a martyr for the Christian faith.

They were first proved, and then as they were proved, they were advanced, and as they kept showing themselves faithful in the duties that were given to them, they were given more and more duties. In the Christian life, the reward for faithful service is more responsibility. It's interesting, but that's the way it is with God.

Even so must their wives... Now, you'll notice in your Bibles that the words must and their are in italics, meaning that in the original language there's no word. It says, even so must the women. Now, it could

mean the wives of the deacons, but most Bible students think it means deaconesses, women who are serving in connection with the local church.

Now, were there people like that? Yes, Phoebe. In Romans chapter 16, 1, Paul speaks of Phoebe as a deaconess in the church in Cenchrea. What did she do? Well, it doesn't say what she did.

If I were to say, it would be mere speculation, but she did have a ministry in connection with the church. Most Bible students think that the women mentioned in verse 11, even so the women, must be grave, serious about the things of God, not slanderers, not gossips or backbiters. They must be sober or temperate.

Here it means temperate, not given to extremes, faithful in all things. These must be women, too, of Christian character who are dependable in all their ways. And it goes back to the deacons again.

Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife. That is regularity in the marital relationship, ruling their children in their own house as well. Testimony of their family.

Bad thing to have people representing the local fellowship if their family life is a disaster area. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. A good standing.

The word degree doesn't mean Ph.D. or D.D. It means a good standing, and that means that faithfulness in the duties that are assigned to us in the Christian life gives a man a standing of reputation and boldness in the faith. And then in the closing verses, just briefly, Paul explains to Timothy why he is writing these things. These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly, but if I tarry long.

In other words, there was the possibility they might not get to Timothy soon, and Timothy is in Ephesus, and he wants him to know these things. Timothy was on a temporary assignment in Ephesus trying to straighten out things in the local church. These things, writers, that thou mayest know how to behave thyself in the house of God.

The house of God here is the church. The church. Spoken of the house of God.

In the Old Testament, God dwelt in the tabernacle or in the temple. In the New Testament, he dwells in the church. The passage explains that.

The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. Now, the word pillar here is an interesting thing. When we think of a pillar, we think of a pole-like structure that supports a building.

Well, that includes that idea here, too, but it means more than that. A pillar also was a device for posting notices, and if you go to France and some other countries of the world today, you'll notice these big round pillars, and there are all kinds of notices posted around them. Proclamation.

That's what I think part of the meaning here. The church is designed not only to support the truth of God, but to proclaim the truth of God as a pillar does in those countries. And then the ground of the truth.

The ground here means the foundation, the stay, the undergirding of the truth. And then he says, without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. And this is an interesting passage.

He doesn't say, great is the mystery of God. He said, great is the mystery of godliness, and what it says to me is that godliness visited this planet of ours in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The world saw once, when the Savior came, godliness and piety enshrined in a human life.

And it goes on to explain that God was manifest in the flesh, or he who was manifest in the flesh, referring to the Lord Jesus, referring to the incarnation at Bethany. Just think of it, God was manifest in the flesh. This presupposes an existence before.

It wouldn't do for me to say I was manifested in the flesh. Of course, what else? What else is new? But when it says concerning the Lord Jesus that he was manifested in the flesh, it means that he existed prior to that time. Justified in the spirit, that refers to his resurrection.

His resurrection. God raised him from the dead is absolute proof that his work was sufficient for the redemption of sinful mankind. Seen of angels.

The Lord was seen of angels at many different instances. He was seen of angels, of course, at his birth and at his baptism, and certainly at his resurrection and his ascension to the right hand of God. Preached unto the Gentiles.

This is the message that has been going forth. Salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Believed on in the world, and this refers to the results of the gospel proclamation as it has gone out these two thousand years.

And then it says received up, and the thought is not so much received up into glory. He was received up into glory, but the thought here is received up in glory, in a tremendous display of glory. What must it have been like when the Lord Jesus ascended back to heaven? He went through the air, through the atmosphere, the realm of the Prince of the Power of the Air, taking captivity captive and going back to the right hand of God the Father.

Paul speaks of it here as being a tremendous display of glory, and glory means manifested excellence. And so, Paul has been giving Timothy some very practical advice as to behavior in the church of God, and as to the personal behavior of Christians. The qualifications for elders and deacons are ideal, but they should apply, really, to all the people of God.

So, we just can't say, yes, well that was a message for the elders and deacons today. It's really a message for every one of us who professes the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Shall we look to him in prayer? Father, we thank you for your word, how full of admonition and counsel it is to us today, and we thank you that the grace of God that brings salvation to all men also teaches us, it teaches us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Father, we realize that oftentimes our lives in the everyday world nullify our testimony. Help us to be the men and women of God that you would have us to be. Help us never to bring shame or dishonor upon the lovely name we bear, the name of the Savior who died for us.

Give us always a single, pure desire to live a life that's pleasing to him, that brings joy to his heart. We ask it in the Savior's name and for his sake. Amen.

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