

## I Timothy 3, Sermon #23

I Timothy 3 focuses on the leadership of the church and the qualifications of the elders/deacons

Not just anyone who wants to be a deacon can become one.

Placing unqualified and unfit people into the church's leadership structure is a crucial part of Satan's ongoing strategy for corrupting churches.

One of the major teachings of I Timothy is that a properly ordered church must have spiritually qualified overseers and deacons (I Timothy 3:1-13).

God's paramount concern is not with buildings or programs but with the spiritual character of those who lead and care for His people.

Godly leadership makes the difference in the local church.

I have entitled this series "The Elders and Deacons – God's Leadership Team for the Church, Part 2"

I Timothy 3

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word

I Timothy 3:8-13

Let us pray

You may be seated

## **The Elders and Deacons – God’s Leadership Team (Tag Team) for the Church**

On these issues of leadership, there can be no compromise without long-term consequences to the local church.

Yet, leadership is where many churches repeatedly fail.

So God has given us I Timothy to warn and instruct us regarding the proper character of those who would lead and care for His church.

Since this is a matter of extreme urgency to churches today, let us look briefly at the historical situation that developed in the particular church of this book.

Paul and Timothy visited Ephesus. It was not a pleasant visit.

False teachers held the church in a death grip of false doctrine.

In order to stop these teachers from undermining/destroying the church, Paul had to take radical action.

He excommunicated the two leading perpetrators, Hymenaeus and Alexander (I Timothy 1, verses 19 and 20)

Paul then had to leave for Macedonia, so he left Timothy behind to help the embattled church and particularly to stop the false teaching.

As a result of these problems, God gave principles for the leadership of the local church.

He wanted every church person to know how to act – 3:15

I Timothy 3:15

The principles governing the elders and deacons of the church are absolutely central to the proper order and behavior of a congregation.

The offices of God’s church are not honorary positions bestowed on people who have attended church faithfully for many years.

Nor are they board positions that are filled with good friends, rich people, or successful business persons.

The church offices are only for those who are Biblically-qualified and moved by the Holy Spirit of God to sacrificially oversee and serve God's family.

Elders and deacons hold positions of sacred trust.

They direct and care for the family of God.

They handle problems, finances, and needy people.

They have access to people's homes and the most intimate details of their lives.

They have access to people who are most vulnerable to deception or abuse.

Thus they must be men of proven integrity.

Leaders who have good character provide better judgment, guidance, balance, and stability for the church.

★The big mistake many churches make when first seeking to establish a Biblical eldership and Biblical deaconship is to appoint the wrong men to office.

In the end, the church is saddled with the wrong leaders and perhaps suffers years of problems.

So, we must insist on Biblically-qualified men for church office, even if such men take years to develop.

Complete obedience to God's Word is always the best church policy.

**Vs. 8** – “In like manner” – to the same degree

To think that deacons don't need to meet qualifications is a common, mistake.

This error demonstrates how little people understand about the importance of deacons to the local congregation.

The deacon's significance to a church is clearly displayed by the fact that their qualifications are similar to those of the overseers.

The word *deacons* appears in I Timothy in the plural form, as it does in Philippians 1:1.

It is reasonable to assume that the deacon's office modeled itself like the overseer-elders—the deacons met and worked together as a group.

The Bible teaches the plurality of elders (I Timothy 5:17, 18).

Thus, plurality in overseers and deacons is a thoroughly Scriptural policy for the local church.

Furthermore, the deacons' duties necessitated that they work as a collective body.

Moreover, a team of deacons provides mutual accountability, which deacons need in order to perform their duties promptly and responsibly.

Left to ourselves, we do mainly what we want to do, not what we should do or what is best for others.

This is especially true if we are facing tense confrontational situations with erring members.

Most people will avoid unpleasant confrontation at all cost—we can't afford leaders like that.

Thus we need the loving encouragement and close accountability that a plurality (team) of leadership provides so that we accomplish our Christian responsibilities.

A plurality, a body of deacons helps to lighten a heavy workload.

Group effort provides mutual help and encouragement for difficult labor over a period of time.

So, a plurality of deacons . . .

Folks, it is a serious matter to serve the local church.

Whenever someone is placed in a position of trust or assumes leadership responsibility in the church, the issue of proven moral character should be paramount.

I doubt that you would entrust your children or family finances to an unknown person, so why should the church entrust itself to unknown, unqualified, or unproven people?

Yet that is what many churches do.

They are so desperate for help that newcomers become Sunday school teachers or deacons within weeks, without church officials or leaders having any real knowledge of the newcomers' spiritual or moral condition.

★ Placed too hastily in official positions of trust, unknown and unexamined people have created irreparable damage in numerous churches.

So Scripture warns us against hasty appointments: "Lay hands suddenly on no man . . ." (1 Timothy 5:22).

In the church of Jesus Christ, there are certain credentials that people must have for service.

Scripture demands that deacons be morally qualified and examined before they serve.

The qualifications for the deacon begin in verse 8

The first qualification for the deacon is "gravity" – vs. 8 – it is general in nature. It means "dignity," "honest," "honorable"

Acts 6 – "Look among you for seven men of honest report"

A deacon must be a man who is known and respected by the congregation.

"Worthy of respect", "a good reputation"

This means that the men who are well-known and well-spoken of because of their good character.

**Secondly**, the Bible says about the deacon –

**He is not to be double-tongued: integrity of speech – vs. 8c**

Double-tongued means repetitive tongue—he repeats, repeats, and repeats  
 Person to person and person – repeating a message – like a little drummer boy  
 No purpose – no edificational use in the church

It's a deceitful tongue – that, of course, is a tongue that speaks different things for  
 different circumstances on different occasions for different reasons  
 Greatest testimony of a person is his mouth

“A man is no better than his word.”

Saying one thing to one man and a different thing to the next is wrong

This term plainly prohibits any kind of manipulative, insincere, or deceitful speech.  
 Listen, folks, behind a deceitful tongue is a deceitful mind.

Positively, the term emphasizes integrity of speech, sincerity, and truthfulness.  
 A deacon must be a man of his word.  
 He must mean what he says; his “yes” must mean yes and his “no” must mean no.

Men are not to “spread conflicting stories,” v. 8.  
 He must know how to control his tongue.

A deacon must **not** be **double-tongued**  
 A deacon's speech must be characterized by integrity, consistency, and honesty.

**The third qualification is – not given to much wine – verse 8c**

**Not addicted to much wine: being above reproach in the use of alcohol – vs. 8d**

The Bible contains many warnings against the potential dangers of wine and strong  
 drink.

Drunkenness is sin, and persistently drunken people require church discipline.  
 So a person in a position of trust over other people can't have a drinking problem.

Drunkenness has ruined countless lives.

It is commonly reported that nearly half of the murders, suicides, and accidental deaths in America are related to alcohol.

Alcohol is one of the largest health problems in America.

It reduces life expectancy, breaks up families, and destroys people financially.

It's a moral and spiritual problem of the greatest magnitude.

No one who has family members under the influence of alcohol jokes about its destructive power.

Homer Kent . . . *"It is a fact that wine was the common beverage in that part of the world in that era. Certainly in present-day America, the use of wine by a Christian would be recognized as a social evil, and would set a most dangerous example for the young and the weak. To us, Paul would undoubtedly say, **No wine at all.**"*

Romans 14:21, *"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."*

The fact that deacons were not told to become total abstainers, but rather to be temperate, does not mean that Christians today can use liquor in moderate amounts.

The wine employed for the common beverage was very largely water.

### **The fourth qualification deals with money – filthy lucre**

It is filthy money if it is acquired in a shameful way – business prospecting – marketing group – take advantage – old people

Gain acquired in an inappropriate fashion

The deacon cannot acquire wealth in a shameful way

### **He is not fond of sordid gain: not greedy for money, financial integrity – vs. 8e**

As the treasurer of the Lord's twelve disciples, Judas spoke as if he cared for the poor, but he actually cared for money.

John 12:5-6, *“Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.”*

Throughout the Bible, there are examples of and warnings against people who use their religious offices to achieve financial gain at the expense of others.

I Samuel 2:13-17; II Kings 5:20-27 – Gehazi – Naaman

Jesus blatantly accused the scribes and Pharisees of stealing from “widows’ houses”  
(Luke 20:47a)

Deacons handle money – other people’s money, the church’s money

The church must know of a man’s financial integrity before he is chosen to be a deacon.  
A person who makes bad financial dealings isn’t a good candidate to be deacon.

(I Samuel 12:3)

So, the deacon must not use his office as a means to make money.

That was an important quality in the early church, since deacons would routinely handle money as part of their official duties.

They would distribute money to widows, orphans, and others in need.

The temptation would always be there to steal from those funds.

As you can see, the deacons need to be quality men

Next time, some more qualifications, examination of the deacons, installing deacons,  
much more to go

### **The Elders and Deacons – God’s Leadership Team for the Church**

Let us stand for closing invitation

God loves His church and protects and gives to us the kind of men to oversee and lead  
and serve His people

But oftentimes, we fail to pray and pay attention to what kind of people God demands  
for the leaders of the church

May we be more prayerful and Biblical in our church conduct.

Acts 20:28

Salvation – the blood