

Leadership
Officer Ordination and Installation Service
1 Timothy 3:1-7

I'm glad to be with you again tonight and if I could just say one more time. My wife is here with me today and if you want to meet one of the friendliest people who walks the face of the earth, I don't want to insult anybody by saying she's the friendliest or certainly one of the friendliest.

Tonight is a truly significant, weighty night when a number of men will be installed again to be shepherds, overseers, caregivers, servants in the church and others will be ordained for the first time. And then we get to pray. Now, one of the things that happens at a service like an ordination installation, is you get to hear three sermons for the price of one, and one is called the charge - the ordinance. That's pretty short. One called the charge the congregation. That's pretty short. And I'm going to give you a pretty short sermon as well. If you want to read 13 verses that describe most deeply the life of an elder and a deacon, it's from 1 Timothy 3:1-13 but because we have three sermons. I'm not going to go through all 13 verses, at least not tonight. And yet I do want to read all of them because I want you to notice that the charges Paul gives to elders and deacons are not identical. They're close. They're very close but not quite identical. Tonight, we'll focus on what God says to elders understanding that it applies so much to deacons and everyone in a position of leadership.

Here's God's Word from 1 Timothy 3: 1-13.

Qualifications for Overseers

3 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer^[a] must be above reproach, the husband of one wife,^[a] sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Qualifications for Deacons

⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued,^[a] not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise^[a] must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who

serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

This is God's Word. We give thanks for it. Let's pray for a moment.

Lord, we pray that our meditations tonight on what it means to be leader in a church would be pleasing to you and then find us and we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

Now, 500 years ago or thereabouts, people tended to live to be 60 or 65 years old. Once in a while, 70. And so as Martin Luther said, made better sense then than it does now when people tend to live a little longer. Here's what he said. Men who are young are tempted by girls. Men who are 30 are tempted by gold. Those who are 40 years old are tempted by honor and glory. Luther understood that for many people, as they get a little bit older and 40 was deep in the middle age in those days, as people get a little bit older, they're more and more motivated by desire for glory and for honor and leadership, for enormous number of people means glory and honor.

It means higher pay. People work for you. It means the people respect you. They see your title here, your title, and suddenly you have glory and honor. Different ways to get honor and glory in different places. I was in LA once, by which I mean Louisiana. Just to be clear, I was in LA once speaking at a conference in a small town, and after I spoke in the morning a couple of times, I was being taken around by someone who's obviously an important person in the town, an elected official.

And he also had a business, important man. And I said to him, What does it take to be a man of honor in your town here in the state of Louisiana? And he said, Well, you're honorable if you have a nice pickup truck, a cabin by the river, and you're an elder in the church. And then he paused and said, Of course you can if you can kill a deer with a bow at 50 paces, you don't need anything else.

Have different standards of glory and honor. Jesus talked about that. He said, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them and their high officials exercised authority over them. And then he said, Not so with you. You should be among us, among believers. It's very different. Whoever wants to be great must be your servant or wants to be first, must be your slave.

Just as a son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for money. The call to be a leader in the church is a call to service because our Lord is a servant. In fact, one of the titles of Jesus is the servant of the Lord. Right. So it's service.

Now, a lot of people understand this really well. I remember reading a long time ago a story about Sam Walton, who was the founder of Wal-Mart, and he decided that he wanted to visit his stores when it was a much smaller operation than it is now, but still pretty big. And he would drive into one of his stores in a pickup truck, in all blue jeans and a flannel shirt, maybe maybe a little scruffy beard and walk around and see if his people were helpful to him because he knew he had to go incognito to see if his employees actually wanted to serve somebody.

I mean, if you showed up to Sam Walton, everybody knew, of course, he'd get great service. He wanted to know what would happen when he was incognito. That reveals the character of a worker at Wal-Mart. And of course, it's service that dictates the true character of someone in the Church of God. Character. First, can you look at the passage again?

Would you notice something very interesting? Very almost strange. It says this thing is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of Overseer, now that that's the task of an elder. Elders are called elders and overseers in the Bible. And the word the Paul uses here is overseer. That's the work to watch over the church. So we use the term, describes the work, and then he says, if anyone desires to have the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

And then he says, therefore, and older, an elder overseer must be above reproach. That's odd, he says. If you desire the task, you have to be, not you have to do. When you read here's a task you expect. List of duties. But what you get instead is a list of character traits. Of course, what that means is that the number one job of an elder and a deacon is to what we say to be the man.

It's not what you do not. First of all, it's who you are. It's how you treat the people around you. Now, if you look at the list, there are actually two things in overseer supposed to do. The first one is that he should be able to teach. Deacons hold the mysteries of the faith. Elders teach the mysteries of faith.

They have a job to teach. Deacon serve, teaching and servant teaching is one. The second one is to manage. It doesn't sit quite the way you would expect in a verse, for it says he must manage his own household well, because if he can't manage his own household well, how do they care for God's church? That also is a little bit odd.

You've got to manage your household because you've got to manage the church because you've got to care for the church. You got to care for the church. And that's the way you manage them. You manage the church by caring for the church. You don't manage the church by managing the church. I mean, you manage a little, but above all, you manage by caring.

And that's the way you lead a home, too. We'll talk about that in a moment. Now, if you look at these traits, you might think to yourself that just a bunch of words and we don't have to think about that. We can rush over that above reproach, sober minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, not a drunkard, not violent, quarrelsome. That's just a bunch of words.

Well, it is a bunch of words, but it's a bunch of words that have a pattern to them. And I will tell you that I learned this from one of my students. I signed a paper and one of my most gifted students went on to get a Ph.D. and become a professor himself. So it wasn't an ordinary student.

But I learned. I want you to know, I learned this from a student of mine. And this is what he said. He said, You know, it's interesting. If you look at this list, it is the fruit of the spirit expressed. If you know the list of the traits of the spirit, you might know them. You know, Lovejoy, Peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentle self-control.

You just rattle through them and you could rattle through this list. But this list only overlaps with the fruit of the spirit in the last one. Self-control. That's the only one that appears in both lists, but they still overlap. The traits here are the fruit of the spirit expressed. Look, it says love is a fruit of spirit. Galatians five And what do elders do?

They take care of their families And the church. That's love expressed, isn't it? You with me, Joy? Elders aren't greedy. They're contented. But they have peace. Says here an elder is not quarrelsome. Elders aren't violent. Patience for the spirit. An elders teach patiently says several times in the epistles. Kindness that doesn't say kindness enlist, but assess hospitality. What is hospitality?

Accept being kind to a stranger. Take care of somebody is maybe some of you will do. When someone loses their power, you'll be kind. And elders should be kind. Now, I could go through the whole list, but you get the idea. If you are filled with the spirit, then it will manifest itself publicly. You know who to call as an elder, a deacon.

When you see a public manifestation of the fruit of the spirit, when it's practiced something else along these lines, and that is that there's a list in Titus of the fruits of the character traits of someone who will be an elder. And it's just about identical. The list of those who are elders, which means that when you're in training, you have these traits.

And after you've been an elder deacon for ten or 20 or 30 years, you should have the same traits except maybe, maybe more. Right. So becoming an elder and a deacon requires training in a class, and you learn doctrine and you learn procedures, and you should learn those things. But the interesting thing is, becoming an elder deacon is not like passing a test, like passing a board exam or finishing a degree where once you pass it, you can start forgetting it.

Can I tell you I learned Latin in a hurry When I was working on my Ph.D. I mean ridiculously fast and I forgot it. Just as fast. It's gone. But elders do not pass a test and then start decaying. And deacons don't pass a test and then start to relax. The traits of those who will be officers is the same as those who are officers.

And guess what else? The whole world gets to read it. It's not a letter, Timothy and Titus, not letters written to insiders. It's not a letter written to pastors and elders and deacons and other leaders. And don't tell anybody but Buddy, what the requirements are because they'll hold us to it. No, you all get to hold your officers to it because it's public.

It's read all the time. Everybody gets to hold us to account, which is somewhat alarming, but also very good. Now, I don't have time to dwell on everything that's in this pass, and I'm just going to tell you that if you ever want to dig into this passage, the virtues that are mentioned here actually overlap a little bit with the virtues that secular people admired.

And that day, for example, hospitality, generosity were loved by secular people on that day. So we could say that an elder or leader deacon should meet the valid secular standards of the day, not that secular people get to set the standards, but rather every society gets some things right about what a good man or good woman is, and elders and deacons should meet those.

It's also true, and I don't have to have time to develop this either, that there is a sort of a polemic here against the people who are false leaders that are mentioned here and there that trouble the church, for example, false leaders are violent and quarrelsome. And elders and deacons are gentle and kind and false leaders love money and leaders.

The church don't love money. So the list now, there's one part of it that's perhaps surprising or befuddling to you or wonder what to make of it. And that is an elder, an overseer must be the husband of one wife. And when you think, well, that's easy. I'm not a polygamist, I'm in. But husband of one wife. It's actually been extraordinarily debated.

Some people say, well, that means that an elder overseer must be a married man. And I have to tell you that that can't be right because you don't want to list a criterion of leadership that Jesus doesn't meet. It's just a hint to you if you come up with a list of traits of a good man and it disqualifies Jesus, you've got a bad list on your hands.

So it can't mean that you have to be married. The Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul also commended celibacy as a Jesus. So it can't be that. Okay. Some people say, well, what it means is if you're an elder overseer, your husband of one wife means you can only get married once in a lifetime, which seems pretty unfair to people who are widowed.

It seems like a gratuitous legalism. Why would you? Especially in those days, a lot of people died young. Why would you say you could never remarry? That doesn't make sense. And maybe it is monogamy, but really everybody, almost everybody was monogamous at that time. I got to tell you, it's something else. What it means husband of one wife means faithful to your wife.

It means a good husband. Now, you may say, well, that's a nice opinion of yours, but I'm going to show it to you from the Scripture, because in first Timothy five nine, it says, A widow who's cared for by the church. A widow, indeed. A godly widow is a woman who's been the wife of one husband, meaning a loyal wife, because polyandry was just not known in those days at all.

So a godly woman as a husband of one wife and a godly man. Godly man is sorry I said it backwards. It's so easy to mess this up. A godly woman is a one man woman. So we see it differently. Country music can finally help us hear country music. There's a song, and if there isn't, there should be that says, I was a one man woman, but he was a two time and man.

I was a one man. Woman means I was faithful to one man in the Bible. A godly woman is a wife of one husband and a godly elder is a husband of one wife. Dedicated that one wife. Let me say it very differently. Sometimes I talk to a newly married man and he'll say something like, I don't understand women.

And I say, You've misunderstood your field of scientific inquiry. Your job is not to understand women. Your job is to understand one woman, your wife, study her narrow field of inquiry. Similarly, an elder is visibly qualified to lead the church when he cares for his children. Do you notice what it says? It says he must manage his own household well with all dignity, keeping his children submissive.

Now it's hard to tell. It's really impossible to tell if the dignity is the father's dignity. He's dignified as he takes care of his children, or if the children are dignified as they follow his lead, as they submit to him. But they're both true, of course. Listen, folks, when kids are two, you do not have to be a genius to manage them.

They're hungry. You feed them, they're crying, you pick them up. Maybe not, but usually you do. And if they are screaming and carry on, they're saying things like No bed, no bed, no bed. Daddy, no bed, Daddy. It's real simple. You pick them up, you put them in the bed, pull up the slats, you win. Simple. But it doesn't work that way when the kids are 12 and 14.

If you want to win, when your kids are 12 and 14, you have to love them and they have to know it. That's the way to respect. That's what kids respect. If you shout at your kids, if you're undignified, you carry on.

You threaten. You're not loving your kids. You've got to be dignified. And your children will be not just obedient.

They'll be obedient with dignity. If you love them. And you can say things like, I know this doesn't make sense to you, but I'm saying it because I love you. I'm saying no to this. I'm saying no to this, honey, because I love them and they may hate it, but if you love them, they'll accept it eventually. They may be upset.

They'll come around if they know that dad loves them. And that's how you're qualified to lead the church. Love your wife. Know your wife, love your kids, know your kids, don't force your authority on them. Be kind. Care for them. Notice the two words Manage and take care. You got to manage. But you managed by taking care. That's how it works.

You manage by putting others first and putting yourself last. I'm going to tell you a story because it's just a good story and it does have to do with servant leadership and the story goes like this. There's a lot of long distance runners in our family all around uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews. But the best of the bunch is my oldest daughter, and she's won a lot of races and got a lot of ribbons floating around.

And she started running more or less on a lark when she was in ninth grade. She was a swimmer and could just swimming, swimming. And she said, you know, I think in the non swimming season I'll run two. And she was a big high school with a gigantic, you know, track team had dozens and dozens of girls running cross-country.

And within a few weeks she was winning the freshman races. She was a freshman. And so the coach moved her up to the junior squad. So she was running with sophomores and juniors and pretty soon she was, if not first, second or third. And by that I mean out of, you know, cross-country and like 200 kids are running and then the season's about to end and it's time for districts and their team had a pretty good chance at winning to destruction.

If you win the district, you go to state, everybody's excited about it. And one of the captains, one of two co-captains, both seniors on the team, noticed my daughter's time's times your objective. So subject of like, you know, soccer, basketball, the time of the time. And one of them went to the coach and said, we've all been noticing Abby has had some really good times lately.

And if we want to win districts, we got to move her up to varsity and she can take my place. A senior heading into her last race said, Take me off. The captains of the team said, Take me off the team for the sake of the team. And the coach said, Thank you. I will do it if you want me to.

And she said, I want you to. And then she told the team that she was a Christian girl. She was 17 years old. She was a Christian girl. And I got to tell you, that's Senior leadership. Coaches are always talking about senior leadership. Here is real senior leadership putting the team first. And so I say to you, elders and deacons coming on for the first time, coming on for the fourth time, leadership is putting others first. It's managing. It's taking care, it's manifesting love. That's how we lead.