

A Church with a Good Overseer is Truly Blessed
1 Timothy 3:1-7

Exegetical Idea: Paul lays out the necessary qualities of those who aspire to the noble office of a bishop by addressing issues of behavior, character, and spiritual development.

Intro: “Bishop” (“overseer”) and “elder” and “pastor” all the same office.

So What? I see three reasons why it is important for the church and her members to know this:

1. God thinks you should know and understand this because he preserved his opinion of the office of overseer in Holy Scripture.
2. The Apostle Paul thought church members should understand this because he wrote of it in a letter that was to be read to the whole church (and perhaps other churches).
3. The church will function better if every member understands the blessing that a good overseer is to the church.

Homiletical Idea: **Recognize the importance of having a good church overseer because...**

I. The Scriptures hold the office in high regard (1).

- A. It is introduced with a solemn formula, “This is a faithful saying,” used to introduce the most important of truths.
- B. It is something one may aspire to. It is not something to be taken lightly.
- C. It is a noble office. It is a “good work”: not just because it fulfills a vital role (and not just because you can get him to do other things like clean restrooms or mow the grass), but because it is ordained of God to fill this role in his church.
- D. It is a work, not merely a position. It is a work if you do it right.

Illustration: I came home the other day and my 3-year-old daughter was acting strangely: walking around with her hands in her armpits making funny noises. When I asked her what she was doing she said, “Being a duck!” and went right back to what she was doing. Some pastors are like that: they get a conception in *their* mind of what a pastor is supposed to do and they think that because they call themselves “pastor” or something similar and do certain things (like talk for 30 minutes on Sunday morning) then they are pastors.

Application: The calling to serve in this office is not something to answer lightly. It is not something to do because you can do nothing better or because you think it’s neat. Remember **James 3:1** – Do not desire to be a teacher because we will receive the greater condemnation. It is easy to be lazy and not get caught, but if you do the work of ministry as it should be done, it is work, and often hard work. It is also not something to do to gain prestige in the community.

The overseer is not a dignitary, he is a servant who serves by leading God’s people in God’s truth, by proclaiming God’s truth to those in and out of the covenant community, and by modeling the truth of God in his walk and ministry.

If the Scriptures hold the office of overseer in high regard, then you as church members must also hold it in high regard by following the overseer’s lead and by lifting him up in prayer, encouraging him with love and faithful submission, and following him in worship and service; we, too, who occupy this office must hold it in high regard by living as we ought and fulfilling our office faithfully and obediently for the Lord’s glory.

Transition: It is not just about learning theology and doing things right; it is about discipleship and walking with the savior. That’s why...

II. The qualities of an overseer emphasize character, not performance or results (2-3, 7).

- A. These qualities defy hard and fast categorization (as was usually the case in lists such as these, common in ancient times) but it seems that they fall into two broad categories (per Knight, 156): “(1) personal self-discipline and maturity, and (2) ability to relate well to others and to teach and care for them.” These qualities may be summed up by the qualities listed in Acts 6:3 – the personal: “full of the Spirit and of wisdom,” and the interpersonal: “of good reputation.”

- B. The “therefore” indicates that these qualities are important because of the importance and nobility of the task.
- C. It is preceded by the word that means “must” or “of necessity,” a formula which covers everything from v. 2 to v. 6, then end of the sentence in Greek. This word serves to indicate that these qualities are not things that we would like to have in an overseer, but qualities that are essential and therefore non-negotiable. This, however, is along with the understanding that the man is not perfect.
- D. With many of these qualities there is both a concrete, literal understanding and a broader significance to the teaching.
- E. The necessary qualities and the significance of each:
1. To be “blameless” or “above reproach” is not giving any cause to be accused either with regard to the Christian life or with regard, probably, to these qualities listed following. [This doesn’t mean that no one will ever throw mud; it means that if they do, make sure that it won’t stick!]
 2. To be “the husband of one wife” is a prohibition against polygamy, unlawful divorce, and general unfaithfulness with regard to marriage and sex. (All three were problems in the ancient world just as the last two are rampant in our culture.) It is interesting that the same standard is applied to the widows when they are considered for recognition in the congregation.
 3. The word translated “temperate” (NKJV, NASB, NIV) or “vigilant” (KJV) [“sober-minded” in ESV] means “clear-headed.” The following word, translated “sober” (KJV) or “sober-minded” (NKJV) [“prudent” in NASB, “self-controlled” in ESV, NIV] is has similar meaning and carries the idea of being self-controlled with the emphasis on being prudent and thoughtful. This means he has to learn to think before he acts or speaks and must act and speak deliberately.
 4. The next quality is translated “of good behavior” (KJV, NKV) or “respectable” (NASB, ESV, NIV) and speaks of virtue or good behavior. The overseer must have a sense of decency and propriety in his dealings with people inside and outside the church. His behavior must demonstrate that he is worthy of respect.
 5. The next quality relates to hospitality which, though valued in the ancient world among both pagans and Christians, is still essential today in demonstrating the overseer’s concern for them through openness and love.
 6. The final quality in v. 2 relates to teaching and may be understood not only as ability to teach, but also willingness, desire, and skill in teaching.
 7. The five negatives and one positive in v. 3 are self-explanatory and speak of a man whose life is not controlled or dominated by money, alcohol, or strife, but is instead characterized by peace and gentleness.
 8. Verse 6 indicates that the spiritual maturity of the overseer is vital to his role and his tasks:
 - a. Paul uses the word “novice” which comes from the same word as our word “neophyte” (“newbie” as we might say today).
 - b. This is not an age issue but a spiritual maturity issue. There must be time for the man to develop both as a believer and as a leader.
 - c. The purpose clause explains what this negative standard is to prevent: receiving the same condemnation that the devil received for his sin of pride.
 9. Verse 7 reminds is that his reputation must be untainted among those outside the church also so as not to bring reproach upon the church or the gospel ministry.

Application: These qualities focus not on performance and results (such things are often inadequate to measure a man), but on character.

Why no mention of tasks?

1. The tasks are spelled out by Paul elsewhere (some in this epistle).
2. Character will lead one to do the right thing, even if they don’t do it the same way as someone else or even as effectively as someone else.

3. Corrects the human view of valuing works, performance, and results over character and faithfulness.

Illustration: B. P. in Atlanta and B. G. in Florida both had great results but seriously flawed character. There is no way to prevent this from happening, but this doesn't mean we abandon these qualities, but seek to hold ourselves and our leaders to them. This serves to remind us that we cannot place our confidence in men, but only in Christ who saves us.

The overseer's character is not exceptional, but exemplary. These standards are not exceptional; they do not reflect a higher stature of person or Christian. Accordingly, these are qualities to which every Christian man (and woman) must and should aspire.

So we look for a man with these qualities, but we remember that we respect him as a person because he is a human being and a Christian and has these qualities, but also we show him respect because of the office he holds.

A danger: Leaders should be held to a higher standard; the danger of evaluating the pastor, however, is two-fold: we often seek to hold him either to (1) a double standard or (2) to an impossible standard.

While the gifts needed to lead and to perform certain functions in the body such as teaching, administration, etc. are a combination of talents and spiritual gifting, all the qualities listed here are the outworking of God's grace and thus are not only available and possible for all believers, but are necessary and important for all.

Transition: Character is important because of the responsibility of the overseer with regard to the church.

III. The leadership of the overseer is exercised with loving care (4-5).

- A. The leadership qualities of the man are demonstrated in his ability to lead and to care for his household. Stated in other words, a man's family life is indicative of his ability to lead and care for others under his charge (5).
- B. A man's ability to rule is demonstrated not only in the submission of his children (4a) but also in the way such submission is manifested (4b) (Knight, 161).
- C. This relationship is two-way: the children's submission is reflective of the way the father deals with them.
- D. The verb "rule" means just that (it is used in 5:17 in such a sense and there is no reason to assume the sense is different here) which means the overseer has real authority within the church. *Just because some have abused this authority doesn't negate the Bible's teaching about the real authority the elders have in the congregation. It also does not contradict the Bible's teaching elsewhere that the congregation itself has real authority.*
- E. The importance is not leadership simply as in giving orders, but oversight in terms of care. The verb "care" in v. 5 is used in reference to the Good Samaritan and paints a picture of how this thorough care is to be exercised.

Application: The word "rule" being used of a parent to child and of an overseer to congregation should reveal how Paul and other NT writers viewed this office. In fact, Paul's most oft-used metaphor or image to describe the relationship between pastor and congregation is the image of father and child. Many people won't see beyond the ruling aspect and make the relationship an "Us vs Them" struggle, and sadly that is often what it becomes. The NT intends, however, that the pastor, the "overseer" serve like a father, caring for, providing for, loving, etc. just as a father would with his own children.

Conclusion and Application Points:

The overseer is to represent Christ to the people; if these standards were so extraordinary as to make him a higher class of Christian, he would not be a good role model because he would set the bar too high; he would also not be representing Christ because Christ became as one of us, though without sin, not only so that he could identify with us but so that he could identify with him.

The overseer is to speak God's Word to you and to lead you as Christ would lead you. The overseer is not perfect, however, and never will be perfect so you must learn to see beyond the overseer to see Christ.