



Focus Points.../ *Timothy 3*

Listen To...

Paul's "Job Description" for the leaders of Christ's Church.

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, as I open chapter three of Timothy I am impressed that You devoted specific portions of Scripture to speak of the qualifications and character for Christian ministers. Move me to grow in thankfulness for faithful pastors and ministers. And move me to grow in faith in such a way that my character will reflect Your calling for all Christians. In Your name I pray. Amen.

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Commentary:

Perhaps nothing could be more contemporary—and, in some circles, controversial—as I Timothy 3. Here Paul spells out the qualifications for overseers ("bishops") and deacons.

Because of the different types of structures and polity, it is difficult to translate exactly what these two positions really represent today. In Paul's time, the "overseer" was the "bishop" or head director of the church. In many churches today, these would probably be ordained pastors or regional overseers.

The Office of "Deacon" was also a prominent ecclesiastical position. In Acts 6, deacons were those who were placed in charge of various aspects of ministry. Their position was to help the "overseers." Luke records the purpose of their work.

"It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables....Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word." (Acts 6:2, 4)

In the early Church, these deacons were not just warm bodies who happened to be selected to help. These men, like Stephen, were full of the Spirit. They were well-learned in Scriptures, perhaps better than many pastors today.

Whatever the specific offices designated by "overseer" and "deacon," the obvious conclusion is that these were the highest offices in the Church. They were

guardians of the Word. They were responsible—in the highest sense—for the planning, implementing and overseeing of the Church’s ministry.

The higher the position of responsibility, the greater the level of scrutiny should be required. In the Lord’s Church, Paul made one thing abundantly clear: if the church doesn’t have leaders which meet Biblical criteria, the Church will fail. The church which abandons these criteria rejected the inspired command of God. Once God’s Word is rejected, the church stands in danger of losing grace altogether.

The casual reader will notice that the list of qualifications for overseer and deacon are nearly identical...as they should be. After all, it’s the identity, faith and character of God’s leaders which matters most...even in the wives of overseers and deacons.

In 3:15, Paul specifically indicated why he wrote these instructions.

“So you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.”

How do people in your local church conduct themselves? Do your pastors, though imperfect, live to this high standard? Does your church uphold Paul’s directive so as to be founded on the “pillar and foundation of truth?” (3:15)

In a more general sense, what Paul outlines for overseers and deacons applies to every Christian. Though not called to lead the church, all Christians are called to live as Christ disciples.

Paul’s criterion for church leaders is one of the best blueprints for Christian character. How does your life compare to Paul’s blueprint?

Prayer:

Lord of the Church, You have bought Your church with Your blood. Even as the Spirit calls and gathers people for Your Church, move our leaders—and all Christians—to aspire to the character of faith Paul described in I Timothy 3. Bless Your Church as it follows Your instructions on how to care for and oversee Your Church. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

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