



1 Timothy

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This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.
1 Timothy 3:1

Paul, having excluded women from any position of authority within the church, now turns to those positions which need to be filled, and what the qualifications for the men who will fill them will be. He uses the same expression that he used in verse 1:15, "This is a faithful saying." Literally, the Greek states, "Faithful is the word." Paul is making a statement of profound emphasis, and this introduces it. From there, he begins what is the "faithful saying" with the words, "If a man desires the position of bishop."

The word translated as "bishop" is *episkopé*. It literally means "overseer." It should be noted that the term is used elsewhere synonymously with "presbyter" as well as with other positions. Thus, this can be translated as "elder," "overseer," "bishop," etc., without doing damage to the context of the words. A literal translation of "overseer" would be best for clarity though. It actually is one who was to care for, or oversee, the church without regard to actual rank. In larger denominations today, the idea of what is considered a "bishop" is actually not a biblical concept at all. Such hierarchies are unknown in Paul's pastoral designations. For a lengthy and thorough commentary on this, one can refer Albert Barnes' evaluation of this verse.

The word "man" is not in the Greek, but it is rightly supplied based on his words which concluded chapter 2 concerning women. It is men alone that are entitled to this position. In today's play church, women who hold such a position, and act as if their authority of oversight is valid, are not acting in accord with God's word.

Next, the word translated as “desire” gives the sense of stretching oneself out in order to reach an object. It implies more than simply desiring, but to seek after. Thus a term such as “aspire” would be more fitting. The person desires, and works towards the fulfillment of that desire with anticipation. In this stretching himself out in order to become a bishop, Paul says that, “he desires a good work.”

The word “desires” here is not the same as was just used. Instead, it means “to set one’s heart upon.” The office to which such a man desires is truly a good work because it is one of the highest callings of all. Such a man has the desire to lead others in holy living, right doctrine, and a more perfect understanding of the things of God. It is a job filled with difficulties, often tiring in the extreme, and one which is frequently marred by people who wish to usurp the position through various means. This doesn’t mean that those wanting to usurp actually desire the position themselves, but they wish to show their supposed qualifications by making the overseer look bad in order to make themselves look good. One must be ready for many obstacles, and many fiery darts from Satan, when assuming such a position.

Life application: For those who know the rewards and trials of being an overseer in a church, aspiring such a position is truly a good work. The people of the church have need for sound doctrine, patient teachers of the word, and someone willing to repeat his thoughts again and again (and again). For those who persevere in the teaching of right doctrine, those who they oversee will truly be blessed in their knowledge of the word.

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 1 Timothy 3:2

Paul has just said that a person who aspires to being an overseer desires a good work. He now continues with this by describing what the qualifications for such a person must be. He uses the same word for “bishop,” or “overseer,” as in the previous verse.

It is to be of special note that these qualifications are moral and social qualifications. Unlike the priests of the temple in Israel who were restricted from the ministry because of physical defects (see Leviticus 21), no such restrictions are placed on leadership in the New Testament. The reason for this was typology. The Old Testament priests were made to be types of Christ to come, and thus they were to reflect His perfection. Now in Christ, all such things are no longer considered. Physical defects are wholly left out of Paul’s requirements. However, the moral and social traits are specifically stated. First, such a person must be “blameless.”

The word Paul uses is seen just three times, all in 1 Timothy. It signifies being above reproach in all ways. HELPS Word studies says, “...without blame in light of the *whole picture*. Here the person (accuser) trying to seize someone’s character by unjustified censure is shown to be

groundless, i.e. when the matter is understood in *full context*." If accusation comes, there should be complete vindication that the accusations are false, because he has lived his life without fault.

Next, Paul says that he is to be "the husband of one wife." Two major thoughts are to be derived from these words. The first is that Paul is speaking of males. Women don't have wives. A female has already been explicitly forbidden from such a position, but this is a further confirmation of that fact.

The second thought is that this is not speaking of having been married twice. If so, it would mean that a man in such a position whose wife died would not be allowed to be remarried. This is rather speaking of polygamy. No polygamist was to be considered for such a position. What this implies, however, is that polygamy was something Paul does not forbid. And he could not. He is the Apostle to the Gentiles. His words have been carried to cultures throughout the world, many of which practiced polygamy. There is no instruction forbidding this practice anywhere in Scripture, except for church leadership positions. Further, polygamy was acceptable in Jewish religion and culture. He could not forbid what his own culture allowed. Rather, this prohibition is given to church leaders – no polygamy for them to be accepted. It immediately shows that Mormonism was founded on disobedience to the word of God, and its leaders were not "blameless" at all. Instead they were false teachers who founded a false religion.

Next Paul says the bishop is to be "temperate." The word is used three times, and only in the pastoral epistles. It indicates "sober" or "not intoxicated." Although there is scholarly disagreement on its meaning, this does not mean that a person in such a position could not drink alcohol at all. That would be contrary to the entire body of Scripture in both testaments. Rather, it would extend to mean that they are not to be intoxicated from alcohol. As much as the word speaks of sobriety, it is figuratively used to mean "circumspect." It is a warning not against drinking alcohol, but allowing any sin to infect his conduct. A person not known for such an attitude was to be rejected.

Next Paul says, "sober-minded." It is a word found four times, and only in the pastoral epistles. It signifies soundness of mind. Such a person is to be well-balanced from God's perspective. It is a person who lives according to the word of God, setting the boundaries of his life in accord with that word. Thus, a good definition of this word would be "discreet and discerning." HELPS Word Studies gives the following example: "An opera singer controls the length (quality) of their tones by their *diaphragm* which even controls the ability to breathe and moderates heartbeat. Hence it *regulates* ("brings safety") to the body, keeping it properly *controlled*."]

Paul next adds in, “of good behavior.” The word is found only twice, and only in this epistle. It signifies outward conduct. It comes from the word meaning “world,” and thus it signifies conduct which is well prepared and well ordered.

Next the bishop is to be “hospitable.” It is speaking of one’s conduct – being fond of guests, and good towards strangers. Such a person is to be naturally given to hospitality.

And then Paul notes that he must be “able to teach.” It is a word found only twice, here and in 2 Timothy. It is exactly translated.

Life application: Does the overseer of your church meet the qualifications set here by Paul? If not, you are in the wrong church.