

RUF Bible Study – 1 & 2 Timothy
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1 Tim. 3

1 This is a trustworthy saying: "If someone aspires to be an elder, he desires an honorable position." 2 So an elder must be a man whose life is above reproach. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exercise self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must be able to teach. 3 He must not be a heavy drinker or be violent. He must be gentle, not quarrelsome, and not love money. 4 He must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him. 5 For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?

6 An elder must not be a new believer, because he might become proud, and the devil would cause him to fall. 7 Also, people outside the church must speak well of him so that he will not be disgraced and fall into the devil's trap.

8 In the same way, deacons must be well respected and have integrity. They must not be heavy drinkers or dishonest with money. 9 They must be committed to the mystery of the faith now revealed and must live with a clear conscience. 10 Before they are appointed as deacons, let them be closely examined. If they pass the test, then let them serve as deacons.

11 In the same way, their wives must be respected and must not slander others. They must exercise self-control and be faithful in everything they do.

12 A deacon must be faithful to his wife, and he must manage his children and household well. 13 Those who do well as deacons will be rewarded with respect from others and will have increased confidence in their faith in Christ Jesus.

14 I am writing these things to you now, even though I hope to be with you soon, 15 so that if I am delayed, you will know how people must conduct themselves in the household of God. This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth.

16 Without question, this is the great mystery of our faith:

Christ was revealed in a human body and vindicated by the Spirit, He was seen by angels and announced to the nations. He was believed in throughout the world and taken to heaven in glory.

I was Ozark High School Student Body President 1988-89. I remember I beat out Sarah Gardner, who thus became vice-president.

I aspired this presidency. What did I do to get elected to such an honorable position? Not much. I made some posters. I think mostly I ran on a platform of being a fairly popular kid on the basketball team. I had been in student government every year, but I cannot think of one thing that we did. I did protest the raising of lunch from \$1 to \$1.10 by bringing my lunch money in pennies for a few weeks. And I also protested the practice of putting all of the condiments on one table instead of each table having its own. Free the condiments. Neither of these enacted much change.

Sarah would have been a better president, not that there was much to the job. I didn't want to do anything. I just wanted to be president.

Unfortunately, the church has treated the job of pastor in much the same way. What should be a noble, honorable position has far too often been a laugh, as we have ordained 18 year olds, unqualified, unfit, unable, thieves, adulterers, those out to make money, those who have harmed the church in every way possible. There is a lure of power, a seeming prestige to the leadership of the church. Some people can get quite a rush out of the spiritual directing of peoples' lives. Others love the access to supposed mysteries of the church (like the budget).

It's not supposed to be that way. We need to look at the standards for our leaders, set the bar high and hold it there. We need to insist upon these things for the good of the church. It is no small deal. The way the leaders go, the way the church goes.

1 Timothy is a letter from Paul about what we are to be like and what we are to act like. In chapter three, Paul writes, *14 I am writing these things to you now, even though I hope to be with you soon, 15 so that if I am delayed, you will know how people must conduct themselves in the household of God.* Paul cares about the church's conduct, its organization, its structure.

Let's look and see what these church leaders should be like and how they should act.

Leaders are Elders

1 This is a trustworthy saying: "If someone aspires to be an elder, he desires an honorable position."

The word Paul uses here is bishop, or *episkopos* in the Greek. But we can see through doing word studies that this is the same position as when he uses the word *presbuteros* or presbyter. We translate it into our English word elder or overseer. Both carry the right meaning. Bishop is more of a Greek word and presbytery or elder carries more of a Jewish connotation, but don't take those too far. They mean the same thing. They are positions in the church. The church has a structure, it has

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For this series, I used commentaries on 1 and 2 Timothy from Hughes, Stott, Knight, MacArthur, Ryken, and Clinton. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

ordained leaders. That is God's plan for the church and its mission and structure. God affirms leadership. There is not a strong clergy hierarchy where the pastors rule like kings over the people. Nor is there to be a totally flat structure, where everyone takes turns leading and preaching. The laity shouldn't rebel against this structure and just have anyone who wishes to lead and teach. There is to be a duly elected and appointed pastor. My denomination calls this a teaching elder, and he should meet with what we call ruling elders, a position that we'll encounter later in 1 Timothy. But they are essentially the same thing – elders. The church is to have godly elders to lead it.

What are these elders to be like? Paul gives the qualifications of the elders first, then moves to deacons. We'll work through these and I'll attempt to keep the similar ones together, giving brief comment along the way.

2 So an elder must be a man whose life is above reproach. Elders are to be above reproach. This doesn't mean sinless, for that is impossible, but they are to have an outward integrity in all things. People should think well of them in a meaningful way, not in a popularity contest like high school president.

He must be faithful to his wife. There is a lot of discussion as to what this means and who this might disqualify. Rest assured, that marriage and sex were just as messed up in Paul's day as they are now. Polygamy, rampant divorce, sexual deviances, mistresses – all of that was in play then too. The text says that an elder is to be a "one-woman man," and I think that means he should love only his wife. It doesn't mean that you have to be married (doesn't disqualify single men). It doesn't mean you can't have remarried because your wife died (disqualify remarried widowers). I don't think it means that divorced and remarried men cannot be elders, although the reputation of the man would have to be looked at in this issue. It means he loves his wife, doesn't flirt with other women, would not do anything inappropriate with anyone. Needless to say this has been broken time and time again.

Similar is the injunction that *4 He must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him. 5 For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?* This logic is inherent in Paul's sentence. If you can't manage your own family, how can you manage God's family? Wives and children should be considered in the ordaining of a man to the position of elder. Does he love his wife and kids? What do they think of him? Are his kids listening to him? Do they resent him?

He must exercise self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. This is similar to being above reproach. If a man can't control himself, how would he be able to lead others? He must be well thought of and live a wise life. I think this might disqualify people who get into huge debts and various other unwise ways of living.

Under this category, we could put these qualifications: *3 He must not be a heavy drinker or be violent. He must be gentle, not quarrelsome, and not love money.* Paul doesn't say you cannot drink alcohol, but he says you mustn't be a drunkard. That is true for all of us. Don't get drunk. We cannot ordain angry people. Abuse is never okay, certainly not for church leaders. Leaders should be gentle, loving. Listening. Not quarrelsome. And they shouldn't love money. Wealth is not a credential for leadership. Too often we have ordained wealthy businessmen to positions. We reason that if they have done well in business, they obviously can lead the church. But the church and a business are not the same thing! This isn't about being rich or poor but about how does he use his money? Is he content? Does he give generously? Or does he love money?

I'm sure I don't need to mention how much money has been made by people using ministry in order to get rich. It is easy to do. Or to fund their favorite projects. Or a way to mask their greed. That is not the job of an elder.

He must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must be able to teach. These are really the only two things an elder has to show that he can do, at least in this list. Elders need to have people in their homes. Hospitality is a way to invite people into your family and provide for them, giving them a comfortable atmosphere to share life together. I would say this is one of the primary means of evangelism for all of us, especially then for elders.

He must be able to teach. He must know the truth and be able to communicate it to others with firm conviction. All elders should be judged able to teach.

6 An elder must not be a new believer, because he might become proud, and the devil would cause him to fall. 7 Also, people outside the church must speak well of him so that he will not be disgraced and fall into the devil's trap. Paul's last qualification is that an elder be – an elder. Not necessarily in age, but in a spiritual age. We can delay people too long, for this isn't talking about grey hairs. But we can also push men too fast, not allowing them to wait until they have more experience and humility.

What do you think?

Sometimes these lists can feel overwhelming. But they are meant for our good. So much harm has come from bad pastors. Or good hearted men who are too young, untrained or inexperienced. Or men who fool people and want power. Or those who go astray and no one calls them to account. Elders should shepherd the flock, not feed off of it. They protect the flock and nourish it.

It is a good thing to desire. I pray that God would raise up godly elders to lead the church for years to come.

Leaders are Deacons

There is a second kind of official leader in the church (remember there are many informal or unofficial leaders), and he is called a deacon. The qualifications are similar and are as follows: *8 In the same way, deacons must be well respected and have integrity. They must not be heavy drinkers or dishonest with money. 9 They must be committed to the mystery of the faith*

now revealed and must live with a clear conscience. 10 Before they are appointed as deacons, let them be closely examined. If they pass the test, then let them serve as deacons.

11 In the same way, their wives must be respected and must not slander others. They must exercise self-control and be faithful in everything they do. 12 A deacon must be faithful to his wife, and he must manage his children and household well. 13 Those who do well as deacons will be rewarded with respect from others and will have increased confidence in their faith in Christ Jesus.

The word deacon comes from the word for servant. Deacons serve people. The title comes from the book of Acts when men were elected to help the elders with the needs of the people, but there have always been those who have served the church.

The most amazing example of a servant, though not the office necessarily of a deacon is Jesus when he washed the disciples' feet. He took the form of a servant, a slave, and did a task that showed his love and care for his disciples. And really he was showing them he would die for them. It wasn't a ritual to be repeated for us, but a display of his sacrificial love. In Mark 10:45 we read: *For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.*

All of us are called to serve, but deacons have that official role in the church. They serve the elders and the people in the church with practical needs, with the hands and feet of the ministry. They help feed the poor, care for orphans and widows. They distribute funds to those in needs. They take care of and manage the property of the church. They mobilize others to do these tasks.

And these men are also to be qualified. They aren't just good-hearted and nice. They must be well respected and have integrity. They must display self control with drinking and money. They are to know the Word of God, the mystery of the faith. That is because even though they do not have teaching positions, they do teach. They will end up spending a lot of time with people in need, so they need to know the Bible and doctrine in a way that is deep within them.

With the reference to deacons' wives, again see that deacons should be men. And these men must be faithful to their wives and raise up godly children. In no way are their wives afterthoughts. They are extremely important. Their wives are to be respected too and they must not slander. Wives will end up knowing a lot of things about people, so they have to be able to keep their mouths shut. A loose tongue will be disastrous to a church and ministry. We have to be able to keep things in confidence, and to share when appropriate.

Good, godly, loving, serving deacons receive rewards. They don't get medals or pins. They get respected by others, because people love them. And they grow in their faith. Those are great things.

Deacons have important and difficult jobs. I pray that many of you will be deacons, serving the earthly needs of the church in such an important way.

When we apply this, I want you to pray for your church's elders and deacons. That they would be well-trained, godly, respectable, ministering, heart-felt, loving and gentle men. And that God would raise up more of them. I want you to ask yourself if you might be one of them, in God's good timing. And I want all of you to live that way.

We must all have self control and wisdom. We must all pursue opportunities of hospitality and ministering to others. This isn't *only* the job of the elders and deacons. I set you free to minister on campus. Use your apartments, houses, dorm rooms, food and meal points to show hospitality to others. Encourage and teach bible studies. Do not get drunk. Pursue sexual chastity and faithfulness to your future spouse. Hold fast to the mystery. Be men and women, be leaders, of character.

Leaders Have a Mystery

14 I am writing these things to you now, even though I hope to be with you soon, 15 so that if I am delayed, you will know how people must conduct themselves in the household of God. This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth.

16 Without question, this is the great mystery of our faith:

Christ was revealed in a human body and vindicated by the Spirit, He was seen by angels and announced to the nations. He was believed in throughout the world and taken to heaven in glory.

Paul cares about conduct. So is he like the elder/deacon/morals police? Is he saying we all have to be good people?

It's a fair question. I know I have asked it many times, and have felt both sides of the spectrum on my answer. In some ways I feel like a big loser. I don't feel qualified at all. My heart is sinful and I don't repent of these sins. You have messed up time and again. Some of you don't even care about it any more. You don't even want to live like a Christian, much less an elder. You're happy in your sin, happy to keep God, Jesus and the Bible far away from you.

The other side is pride. I'm not like them. I'm not getting wasted every weekend. I'm not out whoring around, sleeping with every guy I see like some people on campus. I'm good. I'm doing well. Yes, I do stack up. I pray. I go to church. I don't cuss. I could probably be a deacon soon if people would just notice more.

We often live on these two sides of conduct. We're either proud of our goodness, or happy with our badness, making excuses for our sin. When we see lists like this, we either ignore them as too fanciful or we latch onto them as more rules to follow.

That's why Paul has something else to say. He does care about our conduct. I care about your conduct. Stop sinning! Pursue righteousness and godliness! But I don't only care about your conduct and neither does Paul. The conduct of the church

matter because people are watching us. They already think we're hypocrites, so let's not give them even more reason to do so. The best way I think we do this is when we believe the gospel and we repent of our sins. That is believing in the mystery – the mystery that God saves sinners because of his Son, Jesus Christ. And he transforms us into a different kind of person. Not a good one, but a redeemed one with new loves and affections, a new direction in life, new priorities.

We need to care about how we conduct ourselves in the household of God. In the family of God. What you do and think matters to the family. We all feel disconnected, but really we are brothers and sisters in a family. What decisions you make in your fraternity house at 2am on Saturday night affect me. What I do with my money affects you. We go on family vacations together. We are all immigrants, migrating to a distant land, with a Father who loves and guides us. We are family. Brothers. Sisters. This is a real thing that should affect us. Do you have the family identity?

We are the church of the living God. The word church is the word "assembly." We assemble together, we gather together. This is important. We spread out throughout the week and forget who our father and savior are. We make decisions that hurt ourselves and our family. But we must gather and remember. We worship together. We confess our sins together. We experience forgiveness together. We hear the word together. We sing old and new songs together. We eat at the table of the Lord's Supper together. We are blessed together. We assemble. Pastor Kent Hughes writes, "Listening to the Word of God alone is a good thing and singing to God alone is also a good thing. But singing to God together and hearing his Word preached together is better. Our hearing and singing intensify when we are with brothers and sisters in whom God also dwells."² It is a mystery as to how God forms, nurtures and chooses his family. But it is a mystery worth discovering.

Don't give up assembling together. You need to be there. I need to be there. We need each other to be there. This is one reason why we do a mid-week bible study on campus. It's not The Church, but it is a good reminder in your week of who you are and what you're about. Even more so on Sunday morning worship. Cyber church just won't work. Reading the Bible on your own isn't church.

The church is the foundation and pillar of truth. Foundations give strength to the building. I'm actually unsure of how strong my foundation is right now and it worries me. With all the rain we've had in Oklahoma, my house might be sinking and shifting. So we're getting someone to come out and look at it. So we can be strong and true. Foundations are built on solid things like the truth of the Word of God. We need more Bible, not less.

And pillars hold up the building. They present the building to the outside world, giving an outward face to things. They are still structural, but they also give an element of beauty, don't they. Think of Roman columns, holding up an amazing entrance to a hospital or library. We not only have an underground foundation, but an above group pillar of truth.

What is the truth?

The truth answers these questions:

How can I know what is true?

How can I be right with God?

How can I change?

The answers are: Scripture, Justification and Sanctification.

What is the mystery? *Christ was revealed in a human body and vindicated by the Spirit, He was seen by angels and announced to the nations. He was believed in throughout the world and taken to heaven in glory.*

The mystery is the supernatural revelation of Christ. Jesus' birth, incarnation and his resurrection by the Holy Spirit, which proved, vindicated he was who he said he was.

The mystery is the witness of Christ. The angels have known about and known Jesus for a long, long time and they absolutely love him. Imagine the reception he got from them after he ascended into heaven. They must have been astounded at how awesome he was and is. But the witness wasn't only to angels. He was announced to the nations. Not only angels. Not only Jews. But all nations. The farthest away, even the Gentiles, even us in a land they didn't know of have heard the gospel.

The mystery is the reception of Christ. This man in the middle of nowhere has become the savior of the world. Throughout the world people call on the name of this person. He is reigning in heaven in glory as the king of the universe.

We are a family who believes and lives by these things. Are you in this family?

Our family has rules of conduct. There is a holy behavior expected here. There is much more, but thus far in 1 Timothy we've read about uncontentious prayer, modest dress, church order, godly elders and deacons, and evangelism to the nations. How are you living? Do you need to repent of the way you've been acting? Now is the time. He forgives sinners. Set yourself back on the path of walking with him and in his ways.

Our family has a confession. We live by the truth, by the Bible. We have a Savior. This Savior makes the conduct possible. How are you thinking? Are you confused about Jesus? How is your heart? Is it captured by him? Now is the time to believe the gospel, to grab hold of it. This is the best mystery to believe in. To search out. To understand. It's worth it.

² Hughes, 91