

1 Timothy

Chapter 3

The Big Picture

Having dealt with the issue of gender roles in the church in the prior chapter, Paul now turns to the leadership of the church itself. This passage is one of the two key passages in the New Testament dealing with the qualifications and requirements for church leadership, the other being Titus 1. The call to lead the church, and the standard to which the church leader is held accountable, is a great one. Many men aspire to this position, but few attain it, and even fewer remain faithful to their calling to the end. In the first part of this chapter we find Paul's description of the elder of the church along with his qualifications. Next, he turns to the qualifications for deacons, then deaconesses, and finally to the reason for his instruction, namely that Timothy may know how the church is to operate.

1 *This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*

In this verse we find the second of the faithful sayings in the Pastoral Epistles. This faithful saying concerns church leadership. The call to lead the church is a very high calling, and one that is too often treated lightly by those embarking upon it. God takes very seriously the character and conduct of those who lead his flock, and it behooves us to make sure we know what it is God expects.

This first thing to note about spiritual leadership as it relates to the office of an elder is that it is a noble office and a noble desire. A man who feels called by God to lead the church is one who is embarking upon a good work. We must be careful at this point to distinguish between someone who is ambitious and someone who has a desire. Ambition in every form is wrong, and therefore it is very unlikely that is what Paul has in mind here. Rather, this desire is a desire put there by God, a compelling desire much like that of Jeremiah who tried to keep quiet but the words of God burned inside him until he had to speak.

The second thing to note is that Paul is speaking about the office of one who is a shepherd of God's flock. The New Testament sees this office as that of the bishop (overseer), pastor (shepherd), or elder (referring to spiritual maturity), all three terms referring to the same office. The word used here is *episkopos*, or overseer. This term means "one who stands over" hence one who oversees. The duty of one who is called to be a pastor is that of overseeing the flock of God.

Bishop, Elder, Pastor

Bishop, elder, and pastor are used interchangeably in the NT to refer to the same person. Elder denotes the person spiritual maturity, bishop refers to the office, and pastor (shepherd) refers to what the person does.

Acts 20:28 *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

Exactly what is the good work to which a Pastor is called? It is that of leading, feeding, and caring for the flock of God. It is not the Pastor's flock, rather it is God's flock. In order to see what the work of an elder=pastor=bishop is, we need to take a look at 1 Peter 5:1-4.

The church that Peter wrote to was a suffering church. This letter was written in the waning years of the sixth decade of first century when the first of ten great persecutions was starting to break out against the church. Whenever there is a time of great persecution, there is a need for great leadership. It is this issue to which Peter now turns his attention.

The first question to ask is "What does Peter mean when he refers to the elders?" In the NT we have given to us three groups of officers in the church, the elders, deacons, and deaconesses (1 Timothy 3). The first of these is elder. The term elder (*presbuteroi*) refers to age, maturity, and in the early church came to refer to those who were spiritually mature. It is the title which denotes a persons maturity in spiritual matters and their readiness to lead and feed the flock. Peter is talking to the spiritual leaders of the church.

Note furthermore that Peter addresses the elders (plural) not elder (singular). Throughout the NT the pattern in the church has always been that of a plurality of leadership. The only time the word elder is used in the singular is when it refers to one particular elder. When used in reference to the leadership of the church, it is always plural.

Why a Plurality of Elders?

1. It preserves the church against error - 1 Corinthians 14:29.
2. It preserves against imbalance.
3. It preserves against undue elevation of one man.
4. It preserves against and evil dominance (Diotrophes).
5. It preserves against discontinuity.

In the first four verses of 1 Peter 5, we find the duties of the elder spelled out in detail. Peter identified himself not only as an Apostle, but also as an elder. Thus, when he speaks of the duties of an elder, his is speaking of his own responsibilities to the church of God. In examining his description of the office of an elder, we can group the duties he lists into two basic activities, that of feeding and leading (Acts 20 gives us another duty, that of weeding).

The first task of the elder, and one of the most important, is that of feeding the flock. In fact, the primary ministry and duty of the shepherd is the feeding of the flock. Their main function is not administrative or managerial, but the feeding of the Word of God. Whenever we find Paul exercising his leadership in the church, it is most often that of feeding the church with the Word of God. An elder who leads, but does not feed, is neglecting the primary function of his office. Paul reminds the Ephesian elders of this in Acts 20:27 when he says, "*I have not shunned to declare unto you thje whole counsel of God.*"

The second duty of the shepherd is to lead the flock. The word "oversight" (*episkopeo*) means "to have the big picture" or to "look over." An elder is to look over his flock, protecting them, leading them, and feeding them. Note furthermore that this leading is always in reference to leading them into truth, not running their lives as a demigod. Many abusive situations occur when a pastor takes control of the sheep with no regard for the sheep. Leading the flock is a

solemn responsibility, and in developing this concept Peter lists several components of the character of this oversight.

It Is To Be Done Willingly - 1 Peter 5:2c

1 Peter 5:2c ...not by constraint, but willingly...

Leading and feeding the flock of God is an arduous task at times. One of the great perils of shepherding is falling into the trap of compulsion, feeling that one has to shepherd. Leading and feeding the flock should be a task entered into willingly because we know that it is God's will. This also has the idea of diligence. It is easy for a pastor to get lazy and not do the task, after all, he is accountable only to God. An elder should not have to be forced to shepherd, it should be done willingly on his part.

It Is To Be Done Accountably - 1 Peter 5:2d

1 Peter 5:2d ...not for filthy lucre...

A second great peril is to shepherd in order to gain the rewards and plaudits of others. Many men today have prostituted the calling of elder into something that gets them rich. Instead of seeing themselves as an under-shepherd accountable to the great shepherd, they see themselves as the king in a little kingdom. A true shepherd ministers with an understanding that he is merely serving God, and not some agenda of his own. One who loses sight of this aspect of ministry is disqualified from true spiritual leadership.

It Is To Be Done Eagerly - 1 Peter 5:2e

1 Peter 5:2e ...but of a ready mind;

The idea here is one of eagerness. An elder should be eager to serve God by shepherding the flock. His task is a noble task, and to approach it with an attitude of drudgery or aversion is to violate the attitude God calls for.

It Is To Be Done Humbly As A Servants - 1 Peter 5:3

1 Peter 5:3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage...

Lord over (*katakuriountes*) means to "dominate." An elder is not to dominate the flock, ruling over every aspect of their life. One of the great dangers of spiritual leadership is to allow that leadership to go to one's head. It is easy to enjoy the power and prestige of the position, and forget the solemn call to leadership.

It Is To Be Done As An Example - 1 Peter 5:3b

1 Peter 5:3 ...but being ensamples to the flock.

The greatest leader is the one who leads by example. The qualifications for elder that Paul lists in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are qualifications that make the elder an example to others. One whose life is not an example has no business being a shepherd over God's flock.

The final aspect of the work of the elder is found in Acts 20:29-31, and that aspect is that of weeding. The idea of weeding is that of watching over the flock for any danger that might

jeopardize their spiritual health and well-being. The elder must always be on guard for false teachings that may creep into the church in order to sap its spiritual vitality. Often, members of a church lack spiritual discernment to know what is and is not good for their spiritual growth. The faithful elder is one who watches for anything that may cause spiritual illness, and insure that the flock over which he is a shepherd is protected from such false teachings.

Some Interesting Facts About Sheep

- **The sheep is the only animal in the world that can be totally lost within a few miles of its home. When a sheep is lost, it usually walks around in circles baaing in fear and panic. It has no ability to find food and water when lost.**
- **Sheep are especially vulnerable when purposely led astray. They are innate followers and very easily led astray.**
- **Sheep need to be protected, guided, and provided for. They are extremely vulnerable to harm.**
- **Sheep need clean, pure, non-stagnant water which is at just the right temperature and not moving too rapidly or else they will be afraid of the noise.**
- **Sheep cannot smell water. It must be led to the water. A sheep can die of thirst only a few hundred yards from water.**
- **If they eat their own grazing range, they will eat the stubble and even the dirt before moving on. They also lack the ability to distinguish between good and bad food.**
- **Sheep are very dirty creatures. They secrete a tremendous amount of lanolin which makes them very greasy. Everything in their environment sticks to them, dirt, leaves, grass, etc. They have absolutely no capacity to clean themselves.**
- **Sheep need good food, but cannot be in a place where the ground is wet. Otherwise they will get foot-rot. If they feed on moist, wet, grass they get severe diarrhea, and because they are so dirty, the droppings coagulate and kill the sheep because the normal elimination process is stopped.**
- **Flies also lay eggs in their hides. If left unattended, the maggots will kill the sheep when hatched.**
- **Sheep are completely defenseless. They cannot kick, bite, scratch, jump, or run. They have no defense mechanism. When attacked, they run together thus making them easy targets.**
- **Sheep are very vulnerable to injury. They are so meek that when hurt they will give up and die. They lack a self-preservation instinct. If they fall on their back, they cannot roll to their feet and will die.**
- **Of all the animals in the world, they are the most useful. Every part can be used.**

2 *A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;*

Having defined who the elder is, we now turn to the character of the elder as outlined here by Paul. It is worthy to note that all of the characteristics listed by Paul have to do with ones character and not with ones ability. Too often we choose our spiritual leaders based on a theological degree they may have, some charisma they may possess, or some ability to lead in the social realm. That is not the way God chooses leaders. His choice for a leader is based on the spiritual character one has and not on the natural abilities one possesses.

The first character trait is that of blamelessness. This is the cornerstone character quality of which all the others are built. To be blameless refers to not having any greivous or significant area in which one is guilty of significant sin. This does not refer to perfection, rather to a life that can be a model of virtue to all who see it. If a man has a severe sin in his life, he becomes disqualified from this office because he is no longer blameless. God requires men of integrity to lead the church, and one who has failed to live a life of integrity cannot be an elder of God's flock.

The second character quality, and one which causes men the most trouble today, is that an elder must be the husband of one wife. The Greek text literally reads "a one-woman man." This refers to a man who is utterly and totally devoted to the wife that God has given him and is not one who is looking at every other woman who comes down the street. A man can violate this requirement not only by engaging in physical acts of immorality, but in cultivating a heart of lust or sexual desire outside marriage. A man who reads pornography is just as disqualified from church leadership as one who commits adultery.

The Husband Of One Wife

There are many arguments over what it means to be the husband of one wife. Listed below are some of these arguments and an answer to each.

1. A divorced man is disqualified.

Although it is possible, and even probable, that a divorced man is disqualified by not being blameless, this most certainly is not what this verse is saying. Paul had a word he could have used for divorce, and had he meant a divorced man he could have very clearly said it and saved us a lot of trouble. Also, why would divorce in one's distant past disqualify one as an elder but a murder does not?

2. A man who is remarried is disqualified.

Again, disqualification may occur because one is no longer above reproach, but what if one's first wife died. If he remarries is he now disqualified? I think not.

3. A man who is single is disqualified.

Some say that this means an elder is to be married. The problem with this is that there are many examples in the New Testament where one was a bachelor and unmarried and still held the office of an elder. This prime example of this would be Paul with Titus and Timothy being other possibilities.

The third character quality is that of vigilance. This refers to one who is clear-headed and able to discern clearly truth from error. An elder is confronted on every side by spiritual error and deception. He must be alert to the existence of these threats, and able to clearly deal with

them from a Biblical perspective. A muddle-headed or naive man is not one who is qualified for the office of an elder.

Fourthly, an elder is to be serious. The idea here is that of seeing life seriously and not frivolously. It does not refer to one who is a constant “stick-in-the-mud” or sour about life. Rather, it is one who sees spiritual issues as issues of life and death, and does not allow himself to treat with contempt things of eternal value. Another possible aspect of this is disciplined. A man who cannot discipline himself is not one who should lead the church.

Fifthly, an elder must be given to good behaviour. This refers to one who is able to lead and ordered and non-chaotic life. In the home, an elder is to have control of his family and children. In his personal life, an elder is to be disciplined and ordered. One who cannot order himself or order his family is one who certainly cannot order the church.

Sixthly, an elder is to be hospitable, or literally, a “stranger-lover.” His home should be a place where visitors and strangers are welcome. His demeanor needs to be one of outgoing friendliness to those who are without the church, as how can one draw men to Christ if one removes himself from society. Jesus was known as a friend of sinners. The major criticism leveled against him by the Pharisees is that he hung around with the “wrong crowd.” A man who is cold and distant towards those he does not know is not the man to lead the church.

Seventhly, an elder must be apt to teach. In other words, a man who is an elder needs to have the ability to teach others the Word of God. This means that he knows it himself, and has the ability to communicate that knowledge in an interesting way to others. A man who cannot teach, or a man who does not have a thorough grasp of the Word of God, is a man who should not be an elder.

3 *Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;*

The eighth characteristic of an elder is that he is not to be given to much wine. Note that it does not say he cannot drink wine, rather he is not to be controlled by wine. One who allows himself to be controlled by wine is one who is undisciplined and one who will bring shame on the church and the cause of Christ. We can also take this characteristic and extend it to our day to include drugs and any other debilitating habit. Those who lack self-control in this area cannot be trusted with church leadership.

Ninthly, an elder is one who is not violent. This goes along with the eleventh and twelfth characteristics of patience and not a brawler. An elder must be one who is in control of his temper and does not fly off the handle at the least provocation. Satan will do everything he can to make the man of God lose control, and one who is easily given to outbursts of anger is one who cannot lead the church. It is a travesty to read about Pastors who resort to blows in board meetings with other members of the congregation. A true man of God will allow themselves to be hurt rather than bring shame on the cause of Christ by resorting to physical violence.

The tenth characteristic is that a man who is an elder cannot be greedy of money. This goes along with the thirteenth qualification of not being covetous. Money has been the downfall of many a pastor. Those who seek financial gain are those who will make sure their message and ministry does nothing to offend the influential. Instead of being concerned about the approval of God, these men are concerned about the approval of the wealthy. We have had many examples of this in our own day where famous televangelists show themselves unworthy of the office of an elder since their pursuit is worldly wealth. How can a man with his focus on this world be expected to lead the church of God that is to have a focus on the next?

4 *One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;*

5 *(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)*

The fourteenth character trait listed is that of ruling well his own house. One who aspires to spiritual leadership must have that leadership tested in his home. If his own home is chaotic and a disaster area, he has proven himself unable to lead the church.

Another way to view this qualification is that one who is an elder should exemplify a home life that can be a model for others. How can a man who has insubordinate and disobedient children counsel those in his church who have the same problem? How can a man who has a strained or broken relationship with his spouse counsel others with the same problem? A man who cannot lead those he is closest to, and those he loves the most, cannot lead those who are in his church.

6 *Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.*

The fifteenth characteristic of an elder is that he is to not be a novice, that is, new to the faith. One of the great dangers faced in many churches today is that of making a man an elder before that man has been able to gain the spiritual maturity required for such an office. We take men straight out of Bible college and make them pastors when realistically they are not ready for the task.

When Paul speaks of the condemnation of the devil he is referring to the sin of Satan which was pride. A man who becomes a new believer and in the course of one or two years finds himself with a high level of spiritual leadership is one who is being set up for a fall. He will often see himself as more spiritual than he is, or will have an overinflated view of himself. In both cases, he falls into pride and does great harm to the cause of Christ. A man who is to be an elder is one who must have been a Christian for a long enough time to develop deep spiritual roots.

Some Questions to Ask About a Preacher

How can we identify a false teacher or false prophet? What are the characteristics of one who is not qualified to lead the church? Why not ask these questions?

- 1) Is their emphasis on material or worldly gain and pleasures?**
- 2) Is their lifestyle characterized by covetousness?**
- 3) Are they, or have they, suffered persecution because of their message?**
- 4) Do they use flattering words that make people like them?**
- 5) Do they preach a popular message that makes people feel good?**
- 6) Are they always asking for money or favors?**
- 7) Is their ministry characterized by a love for others to the point of self-sacrifice?**
- 8) Is their ministry centered around pleasing God, or men?**
- 9) Do they exhibit humility or do they seek the praise of men?**
- 10) Is their life characterized by integrity and godly attitudes and actions?**
- 11) Do they live simply or do they live a luxurious lifestyle?**
- 12) Is their focus on the spiritual maturity of their hearers, or on physical wealth?**
- 13) Are they constantly making demands of loyalty or obedience to them from their flock?**

7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Finally, an elder must have a good reputation. He must be seen in the community as a man of integrity and solid character. Why is that? Because the community will form their opinion of God based on the character of the one who represents Him. If a Pastor is seen as a charlatan, greedy, hypocritical, or a liar, then those in the community will not trust Christianity. An elder is God's representative to the church and the community.

This does not mean that the society must necessarily agree with the moral or theological stand taken by the elder. In many cases society will disagree with the moral standards held by the pastor, and in that case a pastor may be at odds with the community. However, even if society disagrees with the stand taken by the Pastor, they can see him as a man of integrity and character. A man who is distrusted by the community is one who cannot do the work of the ministry and one who should not be in spiritual leadership.

8 Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

Having dealt with the character of an elder, Paul now turns to the other office within the church, that of a deacon. As with the case of the elder, we need to first ask about the duties of a deacon. What is it that they do within the church?

Many refer to Acts chapter six in which a situation arose in the local church at Jerusalem concerning the daily ministrations of food to the widows. Apparently many of the Gentile widows in the church were being ignored to the extent that it was causing some problems. Rather than leave their duties of prayer and the ministry of the word, the Apostles told the congregation to choose out seven men full of the Holy Spirit to do this task. As a result, the church chose seven men, presented them to the Apostles for approval, and commissioned them in this task. The word used to refer to these men is deacon.

The Greek word behind deacon is *diakonia*. It originally referred to one who "raised the dust" and by extension came to refer to a servant. It is a genderless word which means it is used in the same form for both men and women. Thus we find Phoebe, a woman, referred to as a "deacon" in Romans 16:1.

From the passage in Acts 6, the usage and meaning of the word, and hints contained in this passage, we can conclude that the office of a deacon is one characterized primarily by service. The fact that there are two offices in the church lead one to understand that there are two fundamental leadership activities. The first office of elder is focused on the ministry of the Word in preaching, teaching, leading, exhortation, and protection. The second office of deacon is primarily concerned with service to those within the congregation. This does not mean that one office is necessarily inferior to the other, but that each has a particular ministry focus. If we were to look at this from the vantage point of spiritual gifts, we would conclude that the office of the elder would include men gifted in the area of preaching, teaching, knowledge of the Word, wisdom, exhortation, and administration. Those men occupying the office of the deacon would be characterized as having the gifts of helps, administration, giving, and encouragement.

However, just because each office is equal in God's sight, in other words a deacon is not spiritually "inferior" to an elder, it does not necessarily mean both have an equal role in

leadership. It is clear from the preceding verses in this chapter, 1 Peter 5, and other passages in the New Testament, that it is the elders who are responsible for the leadership of the church. They are the ones who are to guide the church through the ministry of the word and through personal example. As a result, the office of a deacon would fall necessarily under the direction of the office of the elder.

Spiritual Equality Not Role Equality

One of the mistakes many Christians make in their thinking is to categorize the relative importance of spiritual gifts. From the lists of the gifts in the New Testament, we find at least twenty-eight various enablements. Of these, we can easily categorize them into three basic groups: speaking gifts, serving gifts, and sign gifts.

Although there are various spiritual enablements which are given to a believer, Paul makes it very clear in 1 Corinthians 12 that this does not imply a spiritual pecking order within the Church. Those who have a prominent gift like preaching are not spiritually superior to those who have the gift of helps. As far as God is concerned, all members of the body of Christ are equal and have an equal reward. Those who minister the Word faithfully receive the same reward as a person who never speaks from the pulpit but ministers behind the scenes.

Having said that, however, it is clear that in regards to roles there is a hierarchy within the Church. Those with the gift of prophecy and leadership of necessity need to lead the Church while those with support gifts follow their leading. Although there is spiritual equality in regards to rewards, there is a difference in regards to role.

In introducing the office of the deacon, Paul uses the same word he uses to introduce the office of the elder in verse one, likewise. This is in reference to the same commanding manner in which he instructed women on their proper roles within the church in chapter two. These character qualities of a deacon are not open to debate, but are essential requirements for anyone who finds himself in this office.

The first requirement, reverence, refers to the seriousness with which a deacon exercises their service. They do not serve an earthly king, but a heavenly one. Their service goes beyond mere duty to man as it is to be seen as a duty to God. One who approaches their spiritual service with a cavalier and flippant attitude is not one who is qualified as a deacon.

Secondly, a deacon is to have integrity of speech. The meaning of double-tongued is that of saying one thing to one person, and another thing to someone else. Those who are double-tongued court the favor of the hearer rather than the favor of God. A good word to describe this character trait would be integrity of speech.

Thirdly, a deacon is not to be given to much wine. This is the same qualification as that of the elder in verse three and speaks of one who has self-control. Someone who is a drunkard, drug abuser, or glutton, is one who lacks the necessary discipline to live an ordered and godly life. Spirituality is the result of a life of hard discipline and self-denial. One who indulges the flesh will never reach the level of maturity required for spiritual leadership.

Fourthly, as in the case of the elder, the deacon is not to be a money lover. This speaks of the one whose focus is on earthly riches, power, or prestige. Those that court the favor of men will sacrifice that which is right for that which is convenient. Additionally, one of the characteristics of the spiritual believer is that of giving. Those that love money have a hard time giving to the cause of Christ. As long as the focus and spotlight is on them, they go through the motions, but when the accolades of men die down, so does their commitment.

Another reason this requirement is so crucial to the offices of an elder and deacon is that the leadership of the church are the ones who disbursed the offerings for the work of the ministry. If someone who was greedy for money was given access to the treasury of the church, the temptation to steal would be great. God requires a high level of accountability and integrity for those who handle his treasure. We only need to be reminded of Judas who kept the bag so he could steal what was in it.

9 *Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.*

A fifth requirement of a deacon is that they hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. Whereas the elder is the one who feeds and leads the flock, the deacon is one who understands the truth taught by the elders. They may not be the ones teaching, but they certainly need to be grounded in the truth. The word “faith” here most likely refers to the entire body of revealed truth as found in the Scriptures. Paul uses this term later in 2 Timothy 4:8 where he says, “I have kept the faith.” The truth of God is a divine trust that needs to be held in high esteem.

Furthermore, this holding of the faith needs to be done with a pure conscience. In other words, the moral and spiritual character of one who serves is just as great as one who speaks. We often make a big difference between these two offices in terms of qualifications, but, from this text the qualifications differ only on the manner in which ones spiritual gift is exercised, not in the inner moral character of the one holding the office. The call for a deacon to have a pure conscience means that there is no hidden sin in the life of the deacon that would cause their conscience to convict them of guilt. A man may be able to hide his sin from others, but he cannot hide it from himself.

10 *And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.*

A man may exhibit all of the prior characteristics and yet not be ready for the office of a deacon. Just as the elder is to be a man “above reproach”, so the deacon needs to be tested as to their qualifications for this office. The only way to determine if an elder is above reproach is to first observe their lifestyle over a long period of time. This is more than just reading a resume or taking the word of others, rather it is a close examination. In the same manner a deacon must first be tested by observing their life so that only those who are qualified are made deacons. By the way, the word blameless here has the same meaning as that for the elder. In both cases, no accusation of moral wrongdoing should be able to be successfully leveled against God’s leaders.

Who Does The Testing?

A question comes up at this point, who should do the testing for a deacon. From Acts 6 we find that the ones who made the initial selection of the deacons were the church body. After they had done the selection, the deacons were presented to the Apostles (elders) for the laying on of hands and commissioning. Therefore, the ultimate one who does the selection are those over whom the deacon serves even though the deacon serves under the leadership of the elders. In any case, the testing of the deacon is to be a public testing so everyone can observe their character and qualifications.

11 *Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.*

At this point we are faced with an interesting verse that can be taken one of two ways. The first way is to interpret it is to see it referring to the wives of the deacon. This would imply that a deacon can be disqualified if his wife does not live up to these standards. This is probably the most common interpretation of this verse.

However, a second interpretation is to see this as referring to deaconesses, not deacons. The reason for this is that in the Greek language there is no separate term for “wife”, rather there is only one term which can be translated “wife” or “woman”, that being *gunakos*. Thus, may expositors see Paul now turning to the women who serve in the church as deaconesses.

Although both of these are plausible interpretations, I hold to the second one. The reason for this is that it is interesting that there are qualifications for deacons, but none for elders. If anything, the office of the elder is more sacred, and if a deacon can be disqualified for the conduct of a spouse, most certainly an elder would be disqualified as well. Also, the same word appears here as “even so” that appears as “likewise” for the elder and deacon. Thus, we are led to believe Paul is referring to a third group of people here. However, either way this is interpreted, the qualifications for women in places of servanthood is high.

Paul first states that this woman is to be grave. This matches the statements about elders and deacons being serious or sober. Spiritual leadership and service is a very serious calling and not for those who take it lightly. God holds leaders to a higher standard of conduct and character since they serve as models for others.

Secondly, this woman is to not be a slanderer. This is the plural form of the work *diabolos*, which transliterated is Devil. One can only be reminded of the caricature of women as being gossips and busybodies. One of the great vices that the fairer sex is victim to is that of talking about others. One who is in spiritual service needs to be able to guard her tongue so as to speak evil of no one.

Finally, this woman is to be faithful in all things. This has the idea of ministry with integrity. There should be no way someone can accuse this woman of being unfaithful in the carrying out of her spiritual service. Laziness, sloth, or shoddiness is something to be avoided as one’s work is done to please God and not man.

12 *Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.*

Paul reiterates the requirement for deacon to be the same as that of the elder, and that is he is to be the husband of one wife. Again, this does not refer to a man who is only married once in his life, but rather to a man who is totally devoted to the wife God has given him and is not looking around to others. Also, just as the elder is to have his house in order, so is the deacon to have his home in order. Again, if one cannot manage the affairs of the home, how can one manage the affairs of the church?

13 *For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

The promise given to the deacon is that if he or she serves well in their duties they will receive reward from God. There is great honor in being a deacon in that one has the privilege of serving

God and man. Just as the elder will receive a reward for their service, so the deacon will receive just as great a reward for their service.

14 *These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly:*

The last three verses of this chapter bring us to a transition. In the prior three chapters, Paul has given the church some positive admonition as to how to deal with some of the problems they faced. Now Paul gives the reason for that admonition, and sets Timothy up for the warnings that will come in the last three chapters of the book.

Paul begins this transition by telling Timothy that he hopes to come to him shortly. Timothy had been left in Ephesus to set some things in order in the church, and was finding this to be a difficult task. We do not know what Paul was doing other than he was ministering in the area of Macedonia. Paul hoped to quickly return so that he could assist Timothy in this task, a task which Timothy, no doubt, was having difficulty with if we read 2 Timothy correctly.

15 *But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

Here we find the reason for the writing of this letter to Timothy, and that is that Timothy know how to order the church for the glory of God. This gives us a framework for understanding this entire book. This, for example, answers the question about the role of women in chapter two. Paul is not talking about the home, rather he is talking about the church. Similarly, the requirement for men to pray refers to men in the church. It is the conduct in the church Paul has in mind.

Why is it so important that one knows how to behave in the church. It is because the church is the pillar and support of the truth. If the church is to be characterized by anything, it is to be characterized as a place where the truth is important and where the truth is taught. This place of truth is the church of the living God, not a dead one. There is great seriousness in this statement.

Too often the church becomes a place where truth is not taught, rather we find it teaching the opinions of men. When someone stands up and proclaims the truth, he is seen as divisive and and undesirable. God is a God of truth, and the institution he ordained in Matthew 16 and started at Pentecost is a place where His truth is lived and loved.

16 *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

And just what is the truth for which the church is a foundation. It is found here in this fragment of an early church hymn. We find encapsulated in these six statements a comprehensive summary of the truth of the Gospel message. Interestingly, every one of these statements center around the person and work of Christ. One can be wrong in a lot of areas of theology and still make it to heaven, but one cannot be wrong in the person and work of Christ. To miss the truth there is to miss heaven.

First is that God was manifest in the flesh. This is a great statement regarding the deity of Christ. Christ was not “a god” as believed by the Jehovah Witnesses, or the “offspring” of God as believed by the Mormons. Rather He is God the very God. How this can be is a mystery

beyond our ability to grasp. Isaiah referred to this event when he called the coming Messiah Immanuel, which interpreted is “God with us.”

Secondly, Christ was justified in the spirit. This is not a reference to the Holy Spirit, but is rather a declaration of His sinlessness. The word behind “justified” is the same behind “righteousness.” After over thirty years of public scrutiny, the words of Pilate sum up the only conclusion one could draw about Christ, “I find no fault in this man.”

Christ was not only seen by men, but also seen by angels. This is probably a reference both to fallen and holy angels. Just as men could find no fault in Him, so the angelic hosts could find not fault in him. The only way for the demons to finally have Him crucified was to find two false witnesses to slander him.

Fourthly, Christ was preached, or proclaimed, among the Gentiles. Christ’s ministry was not something hidden from the face of men, but rather was open for all nations to observe. The message of the Gospel was not something that was to be given only to the Jew, but rather it was a global message for all men everywhere.

Not only was Christ proclaimed to the world, but he was believed on as well. This belief is not an intellectual belief only, but rather a saving belief. The message of salvation preached to all men resulted in the conversion of some men to eternal life. Although to many the preaching of the cross is foolishness, to those who are saved it is the power of God to salvation.

Finally, Christ was received up into glory. This refers to the fact that his ministry, death, and resurrection was acceptable to God. Had Christ not risen from the dead, or had he not ascended into heaven, then we would be left in our sins. If the resurrection tells us anything, it tells us that redemption has been accomplished.