

QUALIFICATIONS FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

TEXT: I TIMOTHY 3:1-13

INTRODUCTION:

1. In chapter 2, Paul dealt with prayer and public worship. Now in chapter 3 he gives qualifications for the two church officers: bishops (3:1) and deacons (3:8).
2. The word "bishop" has been misused by the Roman Catholic Church and other denominations. According to the Bible, "bishop" means "overseer," the man in charge of a local church, whose responsibility it is to see that things done by others are done properly.
3. In the New Testament, the words "bishop," "elder," and "pastor" are used interchangeably.
4. First Peter 5:2 says this about the duties of an elder: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind."
5. In Acts 20, verses 17 and 28, the words "elders" and "overseers" are used interchangeably.
6. In Titus 1, verses 5 and 7, the words "elders" and "bishops" are used interchangeably.
7. The word "pastor" is used in Ephesians 4:11, where it says God "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (4:11, 12).
8. Since most Baptists prefer the word "pastor," that is the term we will use in our study of I Timothy 3.

I. QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE PASTOR (3:1-7)

1. First of all, we should note that God gives men this "desire" to preach, and it is a "good work" (3:1). We refer to this as God's "call."
2. Paul says in Galatians 1:15, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace."
3. Secondly, we should note that God calls a "man" to this work. He does not call women to preach (3:1, 2, 5; cf. 2:11, 12).
4. "Husband of one wife" – this Scripture has been much debated but one thing is certain – a woman cannot be the "husband of one wife."
5. Some teach that this is a prohibition of polygamy. This view appeals to divorced people and those who allow for divorced preachers and deacons. However, polygamy was outlawed in the Roman Empire in Paul's day. Polygamy was not a problem at that time.

6. There is no evidence that any polygamists were in the churches, and therefore it would seem strange to exclude them from being pastors. A similar expression is found in chapter 5, verse 9, and no one believes this refers to a woman having several husbands. Therefore, to be consistent, polygamy is not the issue in I Timothy 3:2.
7. Some teach that widowers should not remarry. This view does not harmonize with the rest of Scripture and does not make sense.
8. Some say this means that unmarried men cannot serve as pastors. Paul does not say, "the husband of *a* wife," but the "husband of one wife." Paul assumes the pastor will be a married man, but he does not demand it.
9. It is better for a pastor to be married, but there have been exceptional cases where unmarried men have done well in the ministry. Oftentimes they eventually do get married. Spurgeon was single when he first started pastoring. Then he married a lady in his church.
10. Some say "the husband of one wife" means "one wife at a time." D. Edmond Hiebert says the pastor cannot "have been divorced on insufficient grounds" (*I Timothy*).
11. I believe that I Timothy 3:2 teaches that divorced men should not serve as pastors. Polygamy was not a problem in the early churches (it is not mentioned at all in the New Testament), but divorce was a problem and it is still a problem today.
12. While some factors can be considered (for example, some preachers were divorced before they were saved), many people feel that a divorced and remarried pastor is not "blameless" (3:2).
13. "Vigilant" (3:2) means discreet (Scofield Bible margin).
14. "Sober" (3:2) means sober-minded, self-controlled, serious about the things of God.
15. "Of good behaviour" (3:2) means organized, orderly.
16. "Given to hospitality" (3:2) means friendly, has people over at his home, etc.
17. "Apt to teach" (3:2) means he must be a good Bible teacher.
18. "Not given to wine" (3:3) means not a drinker. It is wise for Christians (especially pastors) to abstain from alcohol.
19. "No striker" (3:3) means not pugnacious.
20. "Not greedy of filthy lucre" (3:3) -- too many preachers are only in the ministry for money. This is a big problem with the charismatics (Benny Hinn, Oral Roberts, et al) but it is also a problem with some Baptists as well.

21. "Patient" (3:3) means a pastor must be reasonable. The same word is translated "gentle" in Titus 3:2 -- "To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men."
22. "Not a brawler" (3:3) – I heard about a preacher who actually punches people! According to the Bible, he is not qualified to be a pastor. "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient" (II Timothy 2:24).
23. "Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory" (Matthew 12:18-20).
24. "Not covetous" – The tenth commandment is, "Thou shalt not covet..." (Exodus 20:17).
- "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).
 - Our Lord said covetousness "defiles the man" (Mark 7:20, 23). Covetousness is a sin of the flesh, just like evil thoughts, adultery, fornication, murder, stealing, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolish talking and jesting, maliciousness, envy, contentiousness, deceitfulness, malignity, gossiping, backbiting, hating God, being despiteful, boasting, inventing evil things, and disobeying parents (Mark 7:20-23; Romans 1:29-32; Eph. 5:3, 4).
 - Our Lord said, "Beware of covetousness" (Luke 12:15).
 - Colossians 3:5 says, "covetousness...is idolatry."
 - Money should never be the Number 1 motive or consideration for entering the ministry. Covetous preachers should repent or get out of the ministry.
 - Covetousness is one of the marks of a false teacher (II Peter 2:3).
25. A pastor must be a good family man (I Timothy 3:4). A man that is incapable of governing his own house cannot take care of the church of God (3:5).
26. "Not a novice" (3:6) means he should not be a new convert. The new convert needs time to grow spiritually.

27. "Lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (3:6; cf. Isaiah 14:12-15).
28. "Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (3:7). "Them which are without" refers to unsaved people outside the church.

II. THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR A DEACON (3:8-13)

1. The qualifications for deacons (similar to qualifications for pastors).
2. "Grave" (3:8) means the deacon must be a man of dignity.
3. "Not double-tongued" (3:8) means not two-faced, not a hypocrite.
4. "Not given to much wine" (3:8; cf. comments on 3:3).
5. "Not greedy of filthy lucre" (3:8; cf. comments on 3:3). Judas Iscariot was the first church treasurer. John 12:6 says Judas was a thief.
6. "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (3:9). Deacons must be sound in doctrine, and sound in life.
7. Deacons must be first proved (3:10). It is unwise to appoint a man to this important office who is not ready (cf. 3:6).
8. Both pastor (3:2) and deacon must be "blameless" (3:10).
9. The deacons' wives should also be grave (3:11). They must be serious about the things of God. They must not be "slanderers" (literally, "devils").
10. They must be sober (3:11; cf. 3:2), and "faithful in all things" – faithful to God, her husband, her family, her church, etc.
11. Verse 12 are very similar to verses 2 and 4. Deacons should be happily married men with godly wives.
12. Some interpret the phrase, "the husband of one wife: in verses 12 and 2 to mean, "a one-woman man," or "married to one woman at a time." This is a questionable interpretation, and it seems more likely that it means divorced men should not serve as pastors and deacons (3:12; cf. 3:2, 4, 5).
13. "A good degree" (3:13) means a good standing. They will be respected and trusted (cf. Acts 6:3).
14. Deacons should be good soulwinners. "Great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (3:13) will enable them to win souls.
15. Philip was one of the original deacons (Acts 6), and we can tell from Acts 8, and Acts 21:8 that Philip was a good soulwinner.

CONCLUSION:

1. "Bishop" is singular (3:1-7), and "deacons" is plural (3:8-13), indicating one pastor in charge of a church, assisted by more than one deacon.
2. The word "elder" is sometimes used in the plural. This could indicate a larger church where there was more than one preacher (e.g., both Paul and Barnabas served in the church at Antioch).