

Study 8: 1st Timothy Chapter 3

Introduction

The instructions regarding elders must be read in the context of setting the disorderly in order, and the fact that the church did have elders. Paul's instructions in this chapter very much concentrate on the qualifications of the elders, rather than their function.

Body of the Study

Instructions for elders

Instructions for deacons

Instructions for deacons wives

Instructions to Timothy

A hymn of praise

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *Think through the characteristics for elders and deacons that are described in this chapter. What reasons can you think of which would have a practical basis for each of the qualifications that Paul has outlined? (We will come back to this when we look at the form and function of the eldership).*
- *Read the notes as a review of the study*
- *Read chapter 4 in preparation for the next study.*

Notes for study 8: 1st Timothy Chapter 3

The instructions regarding bishops (elders) in this chapter must be read in the context of the letter itself (setting the disorderly in order), and the fact that the church did have elders, some of who were going to lead some disciples away after them (Acts 20:30). Therefore this chapter has an important distinction to other qualifications, in that it is about setting the existing disorderly elders in order. Paul's instructions in this chapter very much concentrate on the qualifications of the elders, rather than their function.

Instructions for elders

Paul does not use the three words to describe elders here, however we have already noted those during the study of Titus (study 2). He uses the word *episkopos* (bishop) twice, which describes how the elder ought to act (oversees). Paul hits at the problem straight away – since the elders were not acting the way that they ought to!!! The NKJV has “...*If a man desires the position (office KJV) of a bishop, he desires a good work...*” (1:3:1), whilst the NIV says “...*If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task...*”. It is clear from the description that it is a role to which a person is *appointed*, and that it involves *work* – the *task* of doing something.

Some of these qualifications are mandatory, and Paul uses the word *dei* (“it is necessary”, “must”, “it is imperative”) to describe them. We will note the qualifications here, and in a later study we will look at the form, and the function of the leadership, and the requirements of the qualifications in further detail.

- Blameless
- The husband of one wife
- Temperate
- Sober-minded
- Of good behaviour
- Hospitable
- Able to teach
- Not given to wine
- Not violent
- Not greedy for money
- Gentle
- Not quarrelsome
- Not covetous
- Rules his own house well
- Has his children in submission with all reverence
- Not a novice
- Must have a good testimony with those who are outside

These requirements fall into four general areas:

1. Obedience and commitment in his christian lifestyle (1:3:2-3)
2. Demonstrated leadership by leading his own family (1:3:4-5)
3. Experience in his christian walk with God (1:3:6)
4. He has the respect of those outside of the church (1:3:7)

Like the requirements in Titus, the picture is of a mature family man, who has leaned from experience “...*for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?...*” (1:3:5 NKJV).

Instructions for deacons

The word deacon (*diakonos* Gk 1249) means *a servant*. It is clear from the context that Paul has in mind those servants who have been appointed to, or given a specific role as servants.

Whilst the NKJV has the qualifier for their qualifications “must be”, the word is in italics, and is supplied. However, the qualifications of deacons are “...likewise...” to that of the elders:

- Reverent
- Not double-tongued
- Not given to much wine
- Not greedy for money
- Holding the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience
- Let them first be proved, then serve as deacons, having been found blameless
- The husbands of one wife
- Ruling their children and households well

Paul uses a present tense as he describes a reward for those who serve the office of deacons well, showing that the benefits are received now, rather than being a heavenly reward. “...*those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith...*” (1:3:13 NKJV). The rewards are twofold:

1. A good reputation
2. A confidence before God that results from growing mature in the faith

Instructions for deacons wives

It is important that the wives of the deacons also have the appropriate qualifications. This of course, implies that the deacons must be married. There has been some question as to whether the woman described here is the wife of the deacon, or whether she is a woman who serves as a deacon (servant) as Phoebe was for the church at Cenchrea (Rom 16:1) – the NASB reads in the latter way, as does the ASB and Amplified bible.

As with the qualifications of the deacons, “...*must be...*” is in *italics*, and is supplied, as *dei* is absent from the text. [We should be mindful however that the Greek scholars who translated the text into English thought the words “must be” should be included to enable us to understand the context of the verse, and that is why that have supplied it].

The characteristics required of the women are:

- Worthy of respect (reverent)
- Not malicious talkers (slanderers)
- Temperate
- Trustworthy in everything (faithful)

By having the right characteristics, the deacon’s wife can help and support him in his work.

Instructions to Timothy

Paul outlines the reason that he is writing the letter. He is “...*hoping to come shortly, but if I am delayed, I am writing to you so that you might know how to conduct yourself in the church, which is God’s household...*” (my paraphrase of 1:3:14-15).

Timothy was to set things in order, particularly relating to behaviour and conduct in the church. The church is here described as “...*the house of God...*” (1:3:15), but this is not a reference to a building, but rather the dwelling place of *God in us*. The church is also described as “...*the pillar and the ground of the truth...*” (1:3:15) which describes its function in supporting the truth. [Not the pillow and the ground, upon which one may wish to lay and go to sleep!!!].

A hymn of praise

Paul now inserts a hymn of praise, which he uses as a bridge between the requirements of the exemplary lives of christians (as he has dealt with up to now), and the falling away of some (as he will deal with in the remainder of the letter).

The hymn has 6 lines, and some writers have divided it into 2 stanzas of 3 lines each, whilst others have divided it into 3 stanzas of 2 lines each.

“...The mystery of godliness is great...” (1:3:16 NIV). Godliness has the definite article = “the godliness” and is therefore a synonym for the christian religion. In the hymn, Paul sums up two parts of the life of Christ

1. His physical life as a man:
 - He was manifested in the flesh (became a man, born of a woman)
 - Vindicated in the spirit (declared righteous in the sphere of His spiritual nature – declared to be the Son of God)
 - Seen by angels (worshipped by them Heb 1:6)
2. His victory over sin is manifested in the church
 - Preached among the nations (responsibility to preach the word)
 - Believed on in the world (responsibility to obey the word preached)
 - Received up in glory (God’s brightness, majesty, and presence in Jesus)

Preaching Christ means preaching his life, death, resurrection, and ascension as the glorified Lord.