

FIRST TIMOTHY CHAPTER THREE

Being the Best That You Can Be

1 Timothy 3:1-2

Today we begin our study of 1 Timothy chapter three, but we would first like to set the mood with a couple of illustrations:

“General Grant was to be entertained at a banquet in the city of Houston, Texas. All that money could do to make the affair a success was done. The most notable men in the Lone Star State were present. After all were seated, the headwaiter approached the place where Grant was seated and was about to pour out the first glass of wine for the guest of the occasion. Quietly and unostentatiously Grant reached forward and turned his glass down. With the true spirit of Southern chivalry, every Texan present, in the same quiet manner, reached forward and turned his glass down, and for once in the history of banqueting in the Southwest a famous dinner was served without a drop of alcoholic liquor being drunk.”¹

—H. L. Smith

“A fatal accident, involving the lives of four young people, took place upon one of the nation’s highways. The evidence that liquor was the culprit was found in the broken whisky bottles among the debris and mangled bodies of the four youthful victims. The father of one of the girls in frenzied anguish over the untimely death of his beautiful daughter threatened to kill the one who had provided the four young people with liquor, but upon going to the cupboard where he kept his supply of choice beverages, he found a note in his daughter’s handwriting, ‘Dad, we’re taking along some of your good liquor—I know you won’t mind.’”

—*Christian Union Herald*²

Far too many Americans like to play their own version of the game, “***Follow the Leader.***” In the first example above, we see the effect one person can have in creating a better life for themselves and their fellow man. In the second, we see the devastating effects the behavior of one can create for themselves and for others. That should be a

¹ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers.* Garland TX: Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

² Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers.* Garland TX: Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

lesson for the modern church and it is a lesson taught frequently in the Bible. Today we will begin to get a lesson of that reality from God's Word.

1 Timothy 3:1-16 NAS:

¹ *It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of **overseer**, it is a fine work he desires to do.*

² *An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,*

³ *not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.*

⁴ *He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity*

⁵ *(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),*

⁶ *and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.*

⁷ *And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

⁸ ***Deacons** likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain,*

⁹ *but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.*

¹⁰ *These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.*

¹¹ *Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.*

¹² *Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.*

¹³ *For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

¹⁴ *I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long;*

¹⁵ *but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.*

¹⁶ *By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.*

In this chapter Paul will show that elders, deacons, and men and women who perform services for the church must be spiritually and morally qualified to perform those tasks. So as Paul begins his message he makes it quite clear that at this time in the history of the Church the willingness of a person to serve as an overseer required sacrifice. Persecution would come from both the Jews and the Gentiles for various reasons. There were also many false teachers who tried to undermine the Word of Christ, and it was necessary for these new churches to have sound doctrinal leadership. So for Paul to give praise and

encouragement to those holding such high office seems quite appropriate.³ It seems to us that things have not changed much in two thousand years. The Church and the people still need the same kind of leadership.

Now in order that you not get confused by several words that mean the same thing, whenever you see/hear the following words, they will mean the same thing:

1. Overseer
2. Elder
3. Presbyter
4. Superintendent

We see further evidence of this in Titus 1:5-9 NAS:

⁵ *For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and **appoint elders** in every city as I directed you,*
⁶ *namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.*
⁷ *For the **overseer** must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,*
⁸ *but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,*
⁹ *holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.*

The willingness of many common people such as these to sacrifice their time, money, comfort, leisure time, and yes, even their lives says a great deal about the faith and dedication of such men and women to the Man, Jesus, whom they knew to be God, and the One who deserved their full dedication. Such dedication and service deserves the respect of all people. Thus Paul could easily make the statement in verse 2 that "if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do."

And in order to be qualified to be an **overseer** one must meet the following standards:

1 Timothy 3:2-7 NAS:

² *An overseer, then, must **be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,***
³ ***not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.***
⁴ *He must be one who **manages his own household well, keeping his children under control** with all dignity*
⁵ *(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),*
⁶ *and **not a new convert**, so that he will not become conceited and fall into*

³ Baker New Testament Commentary, 1 Timothy 3:1, p. 118.

the condemnation incurred by the devil.

⁷ *And **he must have a good reputation with those outside the church**, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

I find it interesting that we find here an emphasis by Paul that an **elder (overseer or pastor)** must not only have a good reputation with those who attend the church, but must also have a good reputation with those who are outside the church. In addition, the **elder's** reputation within the church, as well as the deacon's, emphasizes the person's relationship with their family. Let us look at these qualities individually, starting with the list in verse 2, so we can be sure we understand what Paul is saying here:

1. **“Above Reproach”** means **disapproval or disgrace**. It also implies criticism. An elder or pastor then must be above and beyond doing anything that would be disapproved of by anyone in the church or that would bring disgrace on the church in the eyes of outsiders. In other words, he or she must not do anything that would bring criticism on the church.

You can see the importance and wisdom of this qualification when you consider the media's reaction to pastors and evangelists who are caught in blatant sin of one sort or another. They loudly proclaim “*hypocrite*” while non-Christians say, “*That's why I won't go to church.*” Paul feels so strongly about this subject that he will come back to it as he closes the book.

1 Timothy 6:11-16 NAS:

¹¹ *But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.*

¹² *Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

¹³ *I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate,*

¹⁴ *that you keep the commandment without stain or **reproach** until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

¹⁵ *which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, **the King of kings and Lord of lords,***

¹⁶ *who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.*

2. **“The husband of one wife”** should be self-explanatory. It does not mean that if a man has been widowed and remarries that he is not allowed to be an elder. It simply means the husband and wife are to be devoted to one another and to no one else, for the good of the family. They must be an example to others of faithfulness to their one-and-only marriage partner. Unfaithfulness in the marriage relationship is a sin against which Scripture warns repeatedly. We learn from a number of passages in the Old

Testament that this sin and those related to it (sexual immorality in any form) occurred frequently among the Jews and certainly among the Gentiles. For instance:

Jeremiah 23:10 NLT:

*For the land is full of **adultery**, and **it lies under a curse**. The land itself is in mourning— its wilderness pastures are dried up. For they all do evil and abuse what power they have.*

Galatians 5:19-21 (NLT):

¹⁹ *When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: **sexual immorality**, impurity, lustful pleasures,*

²⁰ *idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division,*

²¹ *envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

You will notice that in this passage in Galatians sexual immorality is at the top of the list and sexual immorality can be the possible cause of all the rest of these sinful acts, or it can be the result of any of these sinful acts. Do not, we repeat, do not get caught up in any of the sinful behaviors in this list. It will only lead to your eventual regret as God withholds His blessings from you, and even possibly creates some type of corrective discipline upon you until you give up such behavior.

That is not often easy to do! If you look at the above list again, many of these sins come in the form of addictions, and if you have, or ever have had, an addiction you know giving it up can seem like an impossibility. Without the right kind of help, on your own you may never be able to give up your addiction. You may give it up for a month, a year, ten years, twenty years or more, and all of a sudden one day that feeling can return, that feeling that you simply cannot do without it for one more minute. There are ways of getting through a time like that and they are all found in God's Word. Basically, however, they break down to **prayer, support groups, and one-on-one counseling.**

A very wise man told me (Ron) something recently that I am certain will stick with me the rest of my life, and when you hear it, we hope it will stay with you as well. Here is what he said:

“Whatever I do in my life, I try to do so that I can be the very best at what I’m doing. If I’m driving a cab, I try to be the best cab driver ever. If I’m volunteering in a hospital, church, or charitable organization, I try to be the best volunteer ever. If I’m a prisoner of war, I try to be the best prisoner of war possible. If I’m a patient in a hospital with a terminal illness, I try to be the best patient possible.”

This wise man is talking about excellence—excellence in whatever he puts his hand to. Over and over throughout Scripture, God calls us to excellence, to doing our best so that He may be glorified.

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NLT):

³¹ *So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

Too many people today strive for perfectionism; they want to be perfect, but that is not what God is calling us to. Perfectionism is concerned about what other people think; whereas excellence puts the emphasis on doing your own best. For Christians, excellence also involves doing your best in order to please God. There is another difference between perfectionism and excellence.

“Edwin Bliss once said, ‘The pursuit of excellence is gratifying and healthy. The pursuit of perfection is frustrating, neurotic, and a terrible waste of time.’”⁴

“Brian Harbour picks up on this theme in Rising Above the Crowd: ‘Success means being the best. Excellence means being your best. Success, to many, means being better than everyone else. Excellence means being better tomorrow than you were yesterday. Success means exceeding the achievements of other people. Excellence means matching your practice with your potential.’”⁵

Paul calls us to excellence when he tells that whatever we do we should “*do it heartily for the glory of God.*” Do you think a person who lived his or her life with such an attitude would become involved in any of the behavioral patterns that appeared in Galatians 5:19-21 that we read a few minutes ago? It is quite unlikely but it is possible. We all remain sinners in the flesh as long as we are alive. But those who live their lives according to the wisdom of God’s Word, those who seek to do everything to the glory of God, are far less likely to give in to such behaviors than the person who instead pursues their own will as if it were their god. A person who lives life as my friend suggests is also less likely to ever even get involved in such behavior, which will eliminate the possibility of developing an addiction to said behaviors.

This is such an important theme that it also appears in the book of Colossians. Listen carefully to what is written there.

Colossians 3:1-25 (NLT):

¹ *Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the*

⁴ Hansel, Tim. *Eating Problems for Breakfast*, Word Publishing, 1988, p. 39.

⁵ Borthwick, Paul. *Leading the Way*, Navpress, 1989, p. 64.

realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand.

² *Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.*

³ *For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.*

⁴ *And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.*

⁵ *So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.*

⁶ *Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming.*

⁷ *You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world.*

⁸ *But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.*

⁹ ***Don't lie to each other,** for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds.*

¹⁰ ***Put on your new nature,** and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.*

¹¹ *In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and **he lives in all of us.***

¹² *Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.*

¹³ *Make allowance for each other's faults, and **forgive anyone who offends you.** Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.*

¹⁴ *Above all, **clothe yourselves with love,** which binds us all together in perfect harmony.*

¹⁵ *And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*

¹⁶ *Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, **fill your lives.** Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. **Sing** psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.*

¹⁷ *And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.*

¹⁸ *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting for those who belong to the Lord.*

¹⁹ *Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.*

²⁰ *Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord.*

²¹ *Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.*

²² *Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything you do. Try to please*

them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Serve them sincerely because of your reverent fear of the Lord.
²³ *Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.*

²⁴ *Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ.*

²⁵ **But if you do what is wrong, you will be paid back for the wrong you have done.**

Did you notice the illustration or comparison to putting on clothes? Do you put on one outfit on top of another? No, you take off one suit of clothes before you put on another. So Paul is saying, “Put off the garments of your old behavior and put on the garments of the new behavior.” Remember, when you receive Christ as your Savior, you “*become a brand new person inside*” (2 Corinthians 5:17, TLB). So you should put on the clothes of the brand new person. That will lead you in the direction of pursuing excellence.

Now the next characteristic a church leader is to have is to be:

3. **“Temperate,”** which means the absence or avoidance of extravagant living. While the word may bring to your mind thoughts of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, it has a much wider application than that. “*Temperate*” refers to exercising moderation in all things. Putting that in easy-to-understand contemporary English, we could say an elder does not overindulge in any kind of living. Christians are not to go to extremes in anything, be it alcohol, sports, cars, chocolate, food, TV, or anything else.

1 Thessalonians 5:4-11 (NASB):

⁴ *But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;*

⁵ *for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness;*

⁶ *so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.*

⁷ *For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.*

⁸ *But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.*

⁹ *For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

¹⁰ *who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.*

¹¹ *Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.*

Until next week, let us leave you with this closing thought:

WHATEVER YOU DO, DO IT AS IF YOU WANT TO BE THE BEST THERE IS AT DOING IT! DO IT AS IF YOU WERE DOING IT FOR THE LORD HIMSELF—

BECAUSE YOU ARE!