

Letters For Leaders – 1 Timothy (Part 5)

The four letters we are studying in this series were written by the Apostle Paul, probably while he was in prison toward the end of his ministry. They are unique among all his writings because they are PERSONAL, addressed to individuals in leadership roles rather than to churches as a whole. Also, Paul has had a “mentoring role” in the lives and ministries of each of these young leaders, so he feels at liberty to speak freely. Here more than anywhere else we see Paul being transparent about ministry.

The apostle Paul made discipling the next generation his central focus. In addition to his letters to Philemon (who hosts an “ekklesia” in his home in Colossae) and Titus (who pastors the church on the island of Crete), **ONE-THIRD of the New Testament was either written to Timothy, or from Paul and Timothy** (see the first verse of 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon). So Paul’s lifelong investment in the next generation of Apostolics is reflected even in the very structure of Scripture, and yet we often overlook this principle.

In the first two chapters of 1 Timothy, Paul charges his young protégé to fight for truth and fight against error, specifically dealing with a group of false teachers who were abusing the Old Testament law. He also shares part of his testimony and thanks God for His “exceeding abundant” grace and mercy. Literally Paul is saying, “If God could save ME, God can save ANYBODY.” And Timothy needs to be assured of this, as he pastors the church in the exceeding sinful metropolis of Ephesus!

Notice how Paul’s many trials have affected him throughout his ministry:

- In his first epistle (Galatians 1:1), Paul introduced himself as “**Paul, an apostle**”
- After some suffering (1 Corinthians 15:9), he said that he was “**the least of the apostles**”
- After more suffering (Ephesians 3:8), he felt that he was “**less than the least of all saints**”
- After suffering in prison (1 Timothy 1:15), Paul declared “Christ Jesus came into the world to save **sinners; of whom I am chief**”

Do you see what was happening in his life? **Paul kept getting smaller and Jesus kept getting bigger.** He decreased, Jesus increased.

Because of the battles faced by the church against the world, the flesh and the devil, Paul exhorts that PRAYER should be our FIRST priority, and follows this immediately with his teaching on HOLINESS. Why?

Because praying for God to do what WE want when we won’t do what HE wants is the ultimate hypocrisy!

Paul concludes by affirming the woman’s role in the church. Women are just as qualified for LEADERSHIP as men, but the sexes don’t lead in the same way. **IN CHRIST**, there is neither “male nor female” (Galatians 3:28). But **IN LEADERSHIP**, we need to be aware of our unique strengths and weaknesses, and our different roles and responsibilities. With that established, Paul begins to list qualifications for leaders ...

1 Timothy 3:1-7 This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

The terms "bishop," "pastor," and "elder" are essentially synonymous in the New Testament. All three words simply mean an "overseer" of the church, and refer to mature people with spiritual wisdom and experience (not necessarily “age”). The word "pastor" also has the significance of a "shepherd," one who leads and cares for the flock of God. When you compare the lists of qualifications given to Timothy and Titus, it’s easy to see that Paul is referring to very similar leadership roles – and just as easy to see that these are NOT “political positions” of any kind!

Paul states plainly that DESIRING to lead is not a bad thing; however, the way to achieve that role is not to SCHEME, but to SERVE. In the church, leadership is much more about one’s CHARACTER than one’s COMPETENCE. We need both, but character is much more critical! Here are Paul’s qualifications for someone serving in church leadership ...

BLAMELESS (3:2) - This Greek term means "nothing to take hold upon"; that is, there must be nothing in his life that Satan or the unsaved can take hold of to criticize or attack the church. No man living is sinless, but we must strive to be blameless, or "above reproach."

THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE (3:2) – This is not referring to polygamy, because the New Testament church did not practice that. Rather, it is a higher standard for leaders. A pastor who has been divorced opens himself and the church to criticism. His ability to manage his marriage and home life is an important indicator of his ability to lead the church.

This term also indicates a “one woman man,” in the sense that a leader must not have a history or tendency of “flirting” with other women.

VIGILANT (3:2) - This Greek term could be translated “to be temperate” or “to be watchful.” It literally means “to keep your head in all situations.” A leader can’t be reactionary when he encounters opposition, setbacks, or disappointment; he needs to exercise sensible, rational judgment.

SOBER (3:2) – The Greek word “sophron” can be translated “discreet, or sober minded.” Leaders must have a serious attitude about leadership and ministry. This doesn’t mean they have no sense of humor, or that they are always solemn. Rather, they are careful not to cheapen the ministry or the Gospel message by casual or foolish behavior.

OF GOOD BEHAVIOUR (3:2) – This Greek term means “orderly.” A leader should be organized in his thinking and in his living (as well as in his teaching and preaching!). It is the same word that is translated “modest” in 1 Timothy 2:9, so it has the sense of “modest, becoming, not drawing attention to oneself.” Leaders shouldn’t be “drama queens”!

GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY (3:2) – This Greek term literally means “loving the stranger,” and was especially important in the first century when traveling believers and preachers needed places to stay. Leaders must be “fond of fellowship” – regardless of their personality!

APT TO TEACH (3:2) – Teaching the Word of God is one of the main responsibilities of church leaders. They must be careful students, and hone their communication skills so they can assist others to know and obey the Word. Teaching others is WORK, and there is no place for laziness in church leadership! Who are YOU teaching and discipling?

NOT GIVEN TO WINE (3:3) – This Greek term “paroinos” is from “para” (“NEAR”) and “oinos” (“WINE”). TWO kinds of wine are referred to in the Bible – the non-fermented wine recommended to Timothy for stomach problems (1 Timothy 5:23), and fermented wine that is a “mockery” (Proverbs 20:1, 23:31-32). There is a vast difference between non-alcoholic wine in Bible times and today’s alcohol! Leaders need to avoid even the APPEARANCE of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22), so their lives don’t become an excuse to those they lead. Don’t even be “near wine”!

NO STRIKER (3:3) – Leaders must not be “contentious,” or “looking for a fight.” Hitting back (not just physically, but verbally) when others attack you is a mark of immaturity, and disqualifies someone for leadership.

NOT GREEDY OF FILTHY LUCRE (3:3) – It is possible to use the ministry to make money, if a man has no integrity. (Not that pastors are overpaid in most churches!) Covetous or lazy leaders always have

“financial schemes” going on, and these activities erode their character and hinder their ministry inside and outside the church.

PATIENT (3:3) – This Greek word means “gentle” or “mild.” It is not just talking about patient ACTION, but a patient ATTITUDE. Leaders must be able to deal with people gently, and react to the inevitable criticism that comes their way in the same manner. They are to be mild in character, not harsh or domineering with those they lead.

NOT A BRAWLER (3:3) – Leaders must be peacemakers, not fighters. This doesn’t mean they compromise their convictions, but that they must learn to disagree without being disagreeable. Warren Wiersbe says, “Short tempers do not make for long ministries.”

NOT COVETOUS (3:3) – This word literally means “not fond of silver,” but it has the sense of “not fond of THINGS” (i.e. what silver can buy). A leader can covet MANY things besides money – popularity, fame, influence, advancement, a following, etc. – but this indicates a serious character issue. God doesn’t bless leaders merely to increase their standard of living, or their status in leading – He blesses them so they can increase their standard of GIVING, and their capacity to SERVE.

ONE THAT RULETH WELL HIS OWN HOUSE (3:4) – Not every church leader must be married, but every church leader who is married must LEAD WELL AT HOME. If a man’s own family cannot respect and obey him, then the church is not likely to do so. FOR CHRISTIANS, THE CHURCH AND THE HOME ARE ONE – a leader cannot be one thing at church and another thing at home. The word “ruleth” means “to govern,” and suggests that a leader should be a good “director” or “manager.” And for both our children and God’s children, the way to “rule” is through LOVING DISCIPLINE. If a leader doesn’t know how to do that at home, he will not be able to do it in the church (3:5). **The most important qualification for any church leader is what goes on in his home life!**

NOT A NOVICE (3:6) – This Greek term literally means “one newly planted,” and refers specifically to young Christians. Age alone is not a guarantee of maturity, but it is good for a leader to give himself time for study and growth before he accepts a leadership role (some leaders mature faster than others, of course). Satan enjoys seeing a youthful leader succeed and become proud, because that gives him an open door to tear down INTERNALLY what has been built up EXTERNALLY. Be sure to approach any leadership position with CAUTION and HUMILITY.

A GOOD REPORT OF THEM WHICH ARE WITHOUT (3:7) – Leaders are always held to a higher standard, both inside and outside the church. Especially when it comes to the unsaved, leaders are constantly placed under the microscope. One bad testimony outside the church impacts

the testimony of the entire church in the world's eyes. A leader's life, his word, and his business dealings must always be without reproach.

1 Timothy 3:8-13 Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 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 English word "DEACON" is from the Greek word "DIAKONOS," and simply means "SERVANT." The first deacons were appointed in Acts 6 to assist the Apostles with some of the menial tasks of ministry, so they could concentrate on prayer and the Word. This is an incredibly valuable role in the New Testament church! Even though deacons were initially in "secondary" positions of leadership, some were later put in positions of spiritual authority because they had proved themselves to the church. But no matter what the ROLE, leadership carries RESPONSIBILITIES ...

GRAVE (3:8) – This word points to "seriousness in purpose and self-respect in conduct." Leaders should be worthy of respect and have Christian character that is worth imitating. They should take their responsibilities seriously and not just fill a position.

NOT DOUBLETONGUED (3:8) – A leader is not a gossip! He does not break confidences, and his word is his bond. If he says he will, he will! He speaks honestly – he does not say one thing to one person and something entirely opposite to someone else. You can depend on him.

NOT GIVEN TO MUCH WINE (3:8) – See 1 Timothy 3:3.

NOT GREEDY OF FILTHY LUCRE (3:8) – See 1 Timothy 3:3.

PURE CONSCIENCE (3:9) – Leaders must have integrity ("wholeness"), which is being the same on the inside as they appear on the outside. They must LIVE the Word of God ("the mystery of the faith" – 3:9).

Someone considered for a secondary position of leadership is to "first be proved" (3:10) and then – if they are "found blameless" (3:10), they can then "use the office" (3:10) of a deacon. That is, the church can publicly affirm their leadership. This should never be done too quickly, because only through a time of PROVING is someone's character revealed.

"Even so must their wives ..." (3:11). A leader's spouse is part of their ministry, because ministry begins at HOME. Again Paul stresses that

leaders are to "rule" their homes and children well. **The most important qualification for any church leader is what goes on in his home life!** A leader who leads well will "purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness" (3:13). The word "degree" means "rank," signifying that leaders who do the little things well will find that God "advances" them to greater things, and gives them more spiritual authority in their ministry.

1 Timothy 3:14-16 These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: 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. 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.

Every leader needs to be reminded of exactly what it is they are leading! We have the great honor and privilege of being involved in "the church of the living God" (3:15). The word "church" is from the Greek word "ekklesia" (100X in NT) which means "those called out." If GOD loved the members of the church so much that He would call them out of the world, how much more should WE love those we are leading?

Paul writes to Timothy so he will know how to "behave" (i.e. conduct himself as a leader) in the house of God. The church is unlike any other institution on earth, because it is **"the pillar and ground of the truth"** (3:15). The famous temple of Diana in Ephesus had 127 pillars, but the church is THE pillar of the truth. A pillar is essentially a pedestal to hold something up or display it, and the church is to **DISPLAY TRUTH**. The church is also the ground ("bulwark") of the truth. A bulwark is a fortification built to protect, and the church is to **PROTECT TRUTH**.

A "mystery" in Scripture is not a secret CONCEALED, but a secret REVEALED. **The central doctrine of the Apostolic church is the identity of Jesus Christ, or the ONENESS OF GOD.** Only JESUS fulfills 1 Timothy 3:16, but this verse speaks of Almighty GOD, who was:

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| - Manifest in the flesh | - Justified in the Spirit |
| - Seen of angels | - Preached unto the Gentiles |
| - Believed on in the world | - Received up into glory |

It's just one of Paul's MANY strong declarations of the Oneness of God!

1 Timothy 4:1-5 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every

creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. While he was in Ephesus, Paul had warned the church that false teachers would invade the church (Acts 20:28-31), and now they had arrived. They had departed from the faith (changed their DOCTRINE) and given heed to seducing spirits (changed their LIFESTYLE). As a result, they were now speaking “lies in hypocrisy” (4:2) – they were TALKING about truth but not WALKING in truth. And eventually, they got to the point of NO conviction – “having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (4:2). **Whenever people affirm with their LIPS something they deny with their LIVES, they deaden their conscience a little more.**

The Greek word “APOSTASIA” (“apostasy”) means “rebellion, revolt, defection, departure; a willful turning away from truth” – and that is the word used in 1 Timothy 4:1. An apostate is not just wrong DOCTRINALLY; he is wrong MORALLY. His personal life becomes wrong before his doctrine gets changed. In fact, it is likely that he changes his teachings so that he can continue his sinful living and pacify his conscience. **BELIEVING and BEHAVING always go together.**

Specifically, the false teachers in Ephesus taught that being single was more spiritual than being married (“forbidding to marry”), and that abstaining from certain foods made one more spiritual (“commanding to abstain from meats”). And tragically, becoming “Super Spiritual” is a trap that the devil often uses. **Satan destroys some people by taking them “down and out,” but he destroys many others by taking them “up and out.”** Beware of any “revelation” excusing you from accountability and submission to the church and to your spiritual leadership!

1 Timothy 4:6-11 If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe. These things command and teach.

Paul shifts to an athletic image at this point. Just as an athlete has to eat the RIGHT things, refuse the WRONG things, and EXERCISE regularly, a Christian has to practice spiritual disciplines. BODILY exercise is good, but it must be both CONSISTENT and PROGRESSIVE in order to build up the physical man. GODLY exercise is even better, because it builds up the spiritual man – but the same principles apply. And it is hard work! Paul says that we “labour and suffer reproach” (4:10), and this word

“oneidizo” (taken from Greek athletics) is the root of our English word “agonize.” **It takes a lot of DISCIPLINE to be a DISCIPLE!**
1 Timothy 4:12-16 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

Paul becomes very personal with Timothy in this chapter – “Let no man despise thy youth!” A young leader is especially under scrutiny, and it is important that they are aware of it – not to make them act fearfully, but to motivate them to act wisely. Your younger years either SHAPE you or SCAR you. Your life will either serve as a great EXAMPLE or a horrible WARNING to others, so “be thou an example of the believers!”

IN WORD – implies that our speech should always be honest and kind

IN CONVERSATION – this KJV word means “lifestyle” (walk, not talk)

IN CHARITY – we lead because we love God and love people, period

IN SPIRIT – implies that we must be fervent in life, worship and prayer

IN FAITH – implies not only trust in God, but faithfulness to God

IN PURITY – we must be sexually and morally pure in mind and body

Paul exhorts Timothy to devote himself to the WORD and to developing his GIFT, because when he gives himself wholly to them his “profiting may appear to all” (4:15). When leaders get better, everyone gets better. When leaders grow spiritually, everyone grows spiritually. **No leader can lead others where he has not been himself!**

1 Timothy 4:14 – “neglect not the gift that is in thee”

2 Timothy 1:6 – “stir up the gift of God, which is in thee”

The God who CALLS us to leadership will EQUIP us for leadership! However, we are responsible to cultivate and develop the gifts He gives to us – and the best place to do this is in the local church.

“TAKE HEED UNTO THYSELF, AND UNTO THE DOCTRINE.” If we get how we behave correct, and what we believe correct, we not only save ourselves, but others. The CHURCH is watching you, young leader!

The WORLD is watching you, young leader! And GOD is watching you, young leader! **How you LIVE and how you LEAD are critical.**