

CHARACTER COUNTS

1 Timothy 3.1-16

Part of the reason Paul wrote Timothy was so that “you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3.15).

Leadership is necessary and inevitable

Sometimes when we long for equality, we develop a negative opinion of all leadership. Many in our time treat authority with suspicion. This is partly because of the examples of abusive and selfish leadership.

Should the local church be a place without leaders?

- i. We must recognize that nothing works without some leadership. Ostensibly egalitarian political movements always have leaders. We can think of Orwell’s famous line “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others”.
- ii. Everyone needs to think about how to lead. John Maxwell connects leadership to influence. We all influence others in a direction. All of us will make an impact, the question is what kind of impact. The local church is a great place to develop leadership skills.

For these reasons, Paul says leading in the church is a “noble task” (1 Timothy 3.1). Serving in the church does lead to certain blessings (1 Timothy 3.13).

In King David’s last words, he said “The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me: When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass sprout from the earth” (2 Samuel 23.2-4).

There are two church offices, elders & deacons

There is some flexibility in church polity in the New Testament. That said, God established two offices for local church governance, overseers and deacons (Cf. Philippians 1.1). The word for “overseer” is episkopos, where we get the word “bishop”. There are passages that link the office of “overseer” to “elder” (Titus 1.5-9; Acts 20.17-28). Elsewhere we have reason to connect “elder” to pastoring, allowing the title “pastor” (1 Peter 5.1-5; Acts 20.17-28).

The role of the bishop expanded over time, gathering great influence in the 4th century when Constantine legalized Christianity in Rome.

Elders and deacons are to be present among the people and they are to “manage” the church (1 Timothy 3.4,5,15; 5.17).

The central difference between an elder and a deacon is that elders teach (1 Timothy 3.2). That’s why the office of elder is to be occupied by biblically qualified males (Cf. 1 Timothy 2.12).

Deacons emerged early in the church to serve, allowing the pastors to focus on the ministry of the Word (Acts 6.1f., 1 Peter 4.11). Since it would be odd for Paul to address deacons’ wives and not the elders’ wives, it is likely that Paul was referring to deaconesses in 1 Timothy 3.11 (Cf. Romans 16.1).

Character matters in leadership

If we look at the qualifications for elder and deacon, they are overwhelmingly around character. We can identify the main areas as sex (vv. 2, 12), speech (vv. 2, 11), alcohol (vv. 3, 8), and money (vv. 3, 8). Godly living is essential for leading in the church.

The secular world knows this with sayings like “hire for attitude and train for skill” or “you can go a long way with a good attitude and a strong work ethic”.

If a church appoints leaders for skills without examining their character, we can expect a hard road.

Living under the Lordship of Christ allows us to make a difference.

Key Ideas: God-centered influence makes a difference

Application Questions:

What makes a good leader? How does this connect to 1 Timothy 3?

What character trait is most surprising in these lists? Why did Paul include it?

What are the dangers of placing someone in a leadership position too soon (1 Timothy 3.6,7, 10)?

Why do we tend to value competence over character?

Have you found that serving in the church leads to the results in verse 13?