

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (5-8-1979 Strandtown Baptist Church)

1 Timothy 3:1-13

Additional Bible reading: Titus 1:1-9

Introduction

In chapter 3 Paul deals with the offices in the church. It is a very important passage about leadership in the New Testament church. If leaders would lead others aright, they must themselves be led aright.

The office of overseer or elder

If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task (1 Timothy 3:1). Note that Paul does not condemn aspiration to an office in the church. The Greek word for “overseer” (or “superintendent”, or “bishop” in A.V.) is *επισκοπος*. It means having oversight over some higher power or authority. Modern scholars are almost unanimous in holding that what Paul calls bishop or overseer in this passage, and elder in other letters, are one and the same person. The qualifications are the same. **From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church** (Acts 20:17), “elder” being an office derived from the Jewish Synagogue. He told them, **Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood** (Acts 20:20). Peter also wrote to the elders: **To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers** (1 Peter 5:1,2). The Greek word is the same. The emergence of one leading elder to become, in the second century, a monarchical bishop was a development of the process.

The elders were officially and formally set apart with ordination. They were to undergo a period of testing. Some were paid for their work. They were liable to censure. They had double roles of administration and instruction. They were to live blameless lives, above criticism. A Christian leader is to aim to offer the world a life of such purity and nobility that he leaves no loophole even for criticism of himself.

He was to be the husband of one wife, a loyal husband, and preserving marriage in all its purity. He was to be temperate, and not to overindulge in wine. In the ancient world wine was continually used because water supply was inadequate or dangerous. He was to be careful he did not indulge so much that his Christian vigilance or conduct was soiled. Every part of his nature was to be under control, and his behaviour orderly and honest. This inner control should be reflected in a life of outer beauty. He was to be hospitable, gladly welcoming strangers into his home. And he should have the ability to teach, though not necessarily publicly.

He should not be greedy for money. He should be patient. He should not stand on his own rights but stay quiet when accused of things. He should be able to rule his own house well. A man who cannot make a Christian home cannot make a Christian church. If he cannot lead and teach his own children, he will be incapable of doing so in the church. It must be recognized that after time children grow up and go their own

way and are beyond the control of their parents. But while they are their parent's responsibility, they must be under their authority.

The elder should not be a recent convert, or a novice. And he should have a good reputation among men in the ordinary day-to-day tasks of life. Nothing can hurt a church more than members who are one thing on a Sunday, and another thing the rest of the week. A young woman was once asked under whose preaching she was converted. She replied, "It was nobody's preaching, but it was my mother's practicing."

These are tremendous standards for leadership in the church of God.

The office of deacon

The function of a deacon is more in practical service. Very probably, the seven appointed to look after the widows (Acts 6) were the first deacons. They looked after the business side, and yet they were also required to be men full of the Holy Spirit as well as wisdom. The Greek *διακονος* is sometimes translated "servant" (John 2:5) or "minister" (Romans 13:4 A.V.). But in Philippians 1:1, and here in 1 Timothy 3:8, the word refers to the special office in the church.

Most of the qualities required by elders are required by deacons too, but several are peculiar to deacons. The A.V. speaks of deacons being "grave", i.e. serious-minded, and not flippant. They should beware of empty levity or shallow jocularity. It matches ill with the responsibilities of the deacon's office.

The deacon must be sincere, not double-tongued, not speaking with two voices, saying one thing to one person, and another thing to someone else. John Bunyan's Pilgrim met several such characters in the town of Deceit: Mr. Facing-both-ways, Mr. Fair-speech and Mr. Two-tongues. Deacons must be straight forward, and non-hypocritical. **They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus** (1 Timothy 3:9,13).

Wives or women

The A.V. speaks of "their wives" in v.11, but the "their" is in italics for it has been supplied by the translators. It reveals a prejudice of the A.V. translators against women having diaconal roles. The N.I.V. also translates "their wives", but supplies a footnote that this could mean deaconesses. The R.S.V. speaks of "the women". The Greek simply has *γυναικας*, which could mean wives or women.

The Greek grammar implies Paul is speaking in v.11 of a new class, parallel to deacons – not the wives of deacons, nor all adult female members of the church, but women who render a special service in the church. Note this is not a third office, but that the order of deaconesses has authority equal to deacons. This viewpoint seems the most likely interpretation. After all, nothing is specified about the wives of elders, so why would the wives of deacons be singled out? Also, Phoebe was most likely a deaconess in Romans 16:1.

About the conduct of deaconesses, Paul requires them to be **women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything** (1 Timothy 3:11). Women are in more danger of gossip than men, especially in Paul's day when they were restricted to a very narrow sphere, and had few things to talk about. Admittedly this may be less true of women today.

There is danger in any Christian work of gossip, and of confidences being passed on. Sadly there are churches where confidences discussed in the deacons' meeting have become common knowledge in the church via a deacon's wife. This is something all need to be aware of – not just deaconesses.

Conclusion

Although these descriptions and qualifications are assigned to those in leadership within the church, let's not forget that they describe the best Christian character for all. Every church member does well to aspire to these qualities, even if they do not aspire to the office. Our usefulness is increased – or decreased – by how we live our lives. This is what consecration means in practice.