

Sermon or Lesson: 1 Timothy 3:1-2 (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: A High Standard To Be A Ministry Overseer

INTRO: Upon what basis do most church people normally select elders, pastors, ministers, or directors to oversee ministries? Is the selection process based primarily on popularity? Or on how nice the sermons or lessons sound? Or how good of a speaker the person is? Or how good looking or well dressed the person is? Or how nice the person is? Or on the friendship the person has with a power person in the church? Or on someone that is known rather than a more qualified new person from the outside? Or on availability? Or on a lack of anyone else adequately qualified? Or on how cheap the pay is?

Let's see what God says the selection of ministry overseers should be based upon.

READ: 1 Timothy 3:1-2, with vv.4-7 for added context

BACKGROUND:

- - God has specific intentions and instructions for how men and women in churches and ministries are to conduct themselves.
- - In previous verses 2:9-15, God has established that in the church, women are to be fully and silently subordinate to the authority of men.
- - Being given the authority and responsibility by God to be the leaders in churches and ministries, men are now charged by God to meet specific qualifications to be those overseeing leaders.

v.1 - READ

[Lesson Question: Develop a fairly in-depth description of God's perspective on people being overseers of ministries.]

SECTION POINT: God wants qualified persons to be overseers of ministries.

- - God considers that leading a ministry is a "noble", " good, valuable, or virtuous" task or work. (Strong's #2570)
- - God wants people to lead ministries.
- - God wants people to desire to lead ministries, but of course taking away someone else's ministry leadership is not acceptable.
- - Therefore, wanting to lead a ministry would involve either waiting for a ministry leadership position to become open, or appropriately starting one's own ministry but without causing a divisive split.
- - When initiated and conducted appropriately, God approves of people starting and leading ministries, presumably because this directly contributes to the building of His Kingdom.

- - A common shortcoming among believers in God's Kingdom is that "the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few". (Matthew 9:37)
- - For building His Kingdom, God is in continuous need of more dedicated workers who become qualified and then willing to do ministry work and lead ministries.
- - To "set [one's] heart on being an overseer" means the person is committed to becoming qualified, trained, and equipped to oversee a ministry.
- - An "overseer" is a supervisor of a ministry, which necessitates that the person has or develops skills to do that ministry work well.
- - If supervising a ministry involves training other people in doing that ministry work, then the overseer must have advanced training, hands-on experience, and corresponding exceptional Spirit-empowered giftedness to do that ministry work with excellence.
- - This process of qualification is what God uses to prepare and "send out workers into his harvest field". (Matthew 9:38)
- - For the higher levels of overseeing or supervision such as pastor, elder, or deacon, unqualified leaders are not approved nor authorized by God to lead in that ministry position, which is evidenced by the long list of qualification requirements in the next verses in 1 Timothy 3:2-13 along with Titus 1:6-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-4.

v.2 - READ

[Lesson Question: Develop a fairly in-depth description of each character quality listed.]

SECTION POINT: God has listed the character qualities that He requires for anyone who wants to oversee a ministry.

- - "So, then, now, or accordingly", here is the list of the necessary qualifications for being an overseer of a ministry. (Strong's #3767)
- - Notice that this listing is not an optional recommendation for qualifications; it is a listing of required, "necessary, and binding" qualifications that the overseer "must" have or be. (Strong's #1163)
- - God does not leave room for nor intend that any of these qualifications be fudged, compromised, minimized, or ignored; a person who is or wants to be an elder / overseer / pastor must meet all of these listed qualifications satisfactorily, otherwise it is not God's will for that person to be or to become an elder / overseer / pastor at that time.

"above reproach"

- - "Now the overseer must be above reproach" - being blameless, giving no grounds or cause warranting a valid accusation, and undeserving of any finding of fault or offense against him. (AMP; AHD - 'reproach')
- - Being above reproach means that he consistently conducts himself appropriately all the time and everywhere.
- - Thereby, an overseer who is above reproach would be someone who readily gains and holds the respect of others around him and who is noticeably worthy of being readily emulated.

"the husband of but one wife"

- - God unequivocally says in this verse that a qualified overseer must have never been divorced and have never remarried.
- - The qualified overseer has been and continues to be faithful to his first and only wife.
- - And by implication, he is a good husband, getting along well with his wife and being a model for how he treats her and their children.

- - Notice in this phrase that God designates the overseer to be a man and not a woman, which corresponds to previous verses 2:11-12 where God states that women are not to exert any authority over men in the church.

- - A proper conclusion then is that God does not approve of nor authorize women to be pastors, elders, leaders, or overseers in any ministry over which they would exert authority over men or teach men.

- - Logically, another proper conclusion though is that women who meet God's qualifications as listed in these Bible passages can be leaders of ministries over children, youth, and other women, as long as there are no men being the subordinate workers under the woman leader. (Titus 2:3-5)

"temperate"

- - To be qualified as an overseer, the person must be "temperate", always "exercising moderation and self-restraint". (AHD - 'temperate')

- - He also is "sober minded", being generally quiet, calm, and subdued. (from Strong's #3524; AHD - 'sober')

- - Furthermore, he is "circumspect", being "heedful of circumstances and potential consequences; demonstrating pragmatism and common sense; practical". (from Strong's #3524; AHD - 'circumspect')

"self-controlled"

- - To be qualified as an overseer, the person must be "self-controlled", always maintaining "control of his emotions, desires, and actions, which includes always keeping his composure, coolness, steadiness, and self-discipline". (AHD)

- - Furthermore, the person must be "sensible", "having a sound mind" characterized by "having, acting with, and exhibiting reasonableness, good sense, and sound judgment". (from Strong's #4998; AHD)

"respectable"

- - To be qualified as an overseer, the person must be "respectable", being "modest, orderly", "socially correct, polite, gentlemanly, nice, proper, well-behaved, and well-mannered". (Strong's #2887; AHD - 'decorous')

- - He earns and deserves respect, approval, and admiration because he always has proper behavior and conduct. (AHD - 'respectable')

"hospitable"

- - To be qualified as an overseer, the person must be "hospitable", being welcoming of, "cordial toward, and fond of guests, with warmth, generosity, and receptiveness". (from Strong's #5382; AHD - 'hospitable')

- - He delights to have visitors, new people, and strange people come in, no matter what they look like or smell like or how quirky they behave.
- - He is not inconvenienced nor regards as burdensome when new people come in, but rather he values their presence and enjoys serving them to make them comfortable and welcomed. (see James 2:2-4)

"able to teach"

- - To be qualified as an overseer, the person must be "able to teach", which given the context certainly primarily involves the ability to properly teach God's Word, the Holy Bible.
 - - Therefore, he must know God's Word (v.1:7), hold sound doctrines (vv.1:3,10), be engaging and interesting while properly presenting God's Word (vv.1:6,8), and be proficient in effectively applying God's Word to the lives of his listeners (v.2:2b), connecting it at their level.
 - - Additionally, he must be able to teach and train people how to do ministry. (Ephesians 4:11-12)
 - - So patience, gentle instruction, and willingness to repeatedly describe and explain things should predominantly characterize his teaching approach.
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BIG IDEA: From His lists of requirements, God has set a high standard for personal character qualities of anyone wanting to be an overseer of a ministry.

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS:

- - All of the leaders over ministries must possess each of these character qualities in order to be regarded by God as approved and qualified to be a ministry overseeing leader.
- - Therefore, the qualification lists in the various Bible passages should be used as checklists when considering and interviewing prospective candidates to be overseers of ministries.

- - For your church or ministry, are these Bible qualification lists extensively used in the selection process of ministry overseers?
- - If not, why not? Is there something you can do to encourage your church or ministry to use these Bible qualification lists in their selection process of ministry overseers?
- - If these Bible qualification lists are being used in your church or ministry, are they applied in a straightforward manner? Or are they selectively applied, which essentially adulterates their meaning?

- - For those of you who are an overseer of a ministry, as you go down all of the Bible lists critically self-evaluating, are there some areas in which you need to make some self-improvements?
- - Or do you instead just whitewash the whole self-evaluation and hastily conclude that you are just fine - no problems - no need for self-improvement?

- - Or do you see that you are disqualified in several areas, in which case you should immediately resign or take a leave-of-absence for awhile until you get these personal deficiencies cleaned up and become qualified? Note: Don't shoot the messenger if you don't like the message, because this is essentially what God is saying here, especially by using the words "the overseer **must be**..." in verse 2.

- - For those of you who are not an overseer of a ministry but perhaps would be open to being one someday, are there any areas in which you need to self-improve so that you will be qualified if or when an overseer position becomes available in the future?

- - How can we expect God to bless, empower, and grow our church or ministry if we ignore or adulterate the requirements He commands to be followed when selecting an overseer of a ministry?

- - All of our ministry overseers must meet all of the qualifications God has set in these Bible passages.

[Additional Lesson Question to ponder (optional, if time allows):

- - What kind of response from God should be expected in churches or ministries where these Bible qualifications are ignored or intentionally violated when selecting an elder or pastor or ministry overseer?

-- For example, when a pastor or elder is selected who has been divorced?

- - - - Or a pastor or elder is selected who is a woman?

- - - - Or a preaching or teaching pastor has little or no formal academic Bible college training in the Bible?

- - - - Or a pastor or elder who has a substantial anger problem?

- - Identify and discuss the additional qualifications listed for overseers or elders in Titus 1:6-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-4.]

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