

1 Timothy

#5 - 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13



OVERVIEW – 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13

Having given specific instructions on the attitudes and activities men and women are to focus on in public worship gatherings and the community of God's household in 2:1-15, Paul turns his attention to the roles of 'overseer' and 'deacon' in 3:1-13. It is vital to remember that God's goodness entails his orderliness and therefore desire for his household to reflect the same beautiful and good order (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:33). This order includes the roles of 'overseers' and 'deacons.'

Overseers (vv 1-7)

The first thing Paul states about the role of an overseer is that anyone who aspires to such a task desires to perform a noble work (v 1). The work itself is noble and therefore requires certain standards and expectations for those who would desire to carry it out; expectations in relation to attitudes, activities and reputation; in personal, family and public spheres (vv 2-4). Paul's logic is spelled out in v 5: the church is God's household; therefore, one's familial household is a training ground for oversight in God's church. We are reminded that when it comes to church God considers it primarily in familial terms, not corporate, business or institutional terms. To say the church is God's household is to say the church is God's family, with an order of roles designated by God to support the teaching of sound doctrine and therefore the overall spiritual health of the church community (see vv 14-15; cf. e.g., Ephesians 4:11-16). The overseer must not be 'a recent convert'; for without the tests of knowledge, attitude and lifestyle a person may be more vulnerable to grievous sin and its consequences (v 6). They must also have a good reputation among people outside the church community (v 7).

It's worth noting too that such measures are by no means a guarantee of security or certainty when it comes to leadership in God's household, but nevertheless carry biblical wisdom for the appointment of overseers in the church. A reminder that when a person 'signs up' for such a role they place themselves squarely in Satan's sights – so they need our prayers!

Deacons (vv 8-13)

Paul then turns his attention to 'deacons,' literally, 'servants.'¹ Standards and expectations of these servants (male or female, note discussion below) in God's household share similarities to overseers in areas of familial fidelity and reputation with people outside the church community (vv 8, 12). Although, one key difference is that these servants do not ordinarily carry the responsibility of teaching that 'overseers' do (cf. v 3). But they must hold on to 'the deep truths (lit. 'the [revealed] mystery') of the faith with a clear conscience' (v 9). This evidently requires a level of knowledge, humility and living trust in the Lord Jesus developed and tested through daily communion with God in the Word and prayer. Although it is unclear in what way they are to be 'tested' it would in the least include external observation of these characteristics from those who in turn possess an interest and keen attention to the person's life (v 10).

Interpreters have differed on whether Paul, in v 11, refers to wives of male deacons, female deacons or women in general. However, it appears most likely that Paul refers to female deacons based on three observations: (1) Paul's use of the phrase 'in the same way,' up until this point has been his way of moving from one 'office' or role to another (cf. v 8), so we would understand him to be moving from male deacons to female deacons in v 11, then back to male deacons again in v 12 by way of summary; (2) there was no specifically female equivalent to 'deacon' in those days, as the example of Phoebe shows (she also is a *diakonos* in Roman 16:1-2), therefore Paul's more generic term for 'women' makes sense here; (3) It would appear unusual for Paul to highlight expectations for wives of deacons and not wives of overseers (although one could argue he's looking to cover both in v 11).

Paul then rounds off his standards and expectations for servants in God's household with a positive consequence of their role and function rightly performed (v 13); a wonderful indicator and example the positive impacts spiritually healthy servant-leaders can have, for their own sake, for the sake of God's household and the spread of the gospel.

¹ The English translation 'deacon' is derived from the Greek word *diakonos* meaning *servant*; to be differentiated from the Greek term *doulos* meaning slave but often translated *servant* in NIV.

GETTING STARTED

1. When have you witnessed leadership exercised in a way that benefitted the group or organisation? What factors do you think contributed to this?

INTO THE TEXT

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7

2. Why do you think Paul considers his statement in verse 1 'trustworthy'? (Compare with 1 Timothy 1:15; 4:8-9)
3. Do you think we value the characteristics listed in verses 2-4, as a church? How is this evident in our community life?
4. Does the list in verses 2-7 encourage or intimidate you (or maybe both)? Why?

Read 1 Timothy 3:8-13

5. What are the differences between the list of expectations for 'deacons' and the list for 'overseers'? How do you account for these differences?
6. See verse 10: 'They must first be tested.' From what we can deduce of the context, what do you think this looks like?
7. What are the positive impacts of a tested 'deacon' whose life and ministry bears up under such testing (v 13)? How do you think this would invariably impact the life of the church more broadly?
8. Reflecting on the character lists for 'overseers' and 'deacons,' what part do you think reputation ought to play in appointing such roles of leadership in the church?

TAKEAWAY

9. Who do you think falls into the categories of 'overseer' and 'deacon' in the life of our church community? Spend time praying for them by name, and specifically that their lives would (continue to) reflect such good standards and expectations, and that God would protect them from the evil one, so that the gospel would be protected and passed on to following generations.
10. Do you aspire to the work of 'overseer' in God's household? Why/why not? Would the Christian leaders in your life encourage you in this direction?