

Message #9**I Timothy 3:1**

Is there a difference between a Bible study in a home and a church in a home? If so, what is the difference? What does God expect in His church? What does God demand to have what He classifies as a local church?

One answer to these questions is, unquestionably, organized leadership!

As we come to chapter three of I Timothy, the emphasis of the book changes from what leadership is to do into what leadership is to be. In other words, if a church is to become a pillar and support of the truth of God, it must have leadership that believes the proper things, behaves in the proper way and bends the church in the proper direction.

THE CHURCH THAT WILL BECOME THE PILLAR AND SUPPORT OF THE TRUTH OF GOD IS ONE THAT WILL HAVE BIBLICALLY ORGANIZED LEADERSHIP WHO IS MEETING THE BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP.

Dr. John MacArthur writes: “Nothing is more sorely needed today than a return to biblical leadership principles. Solid leaders are appallingly rare in the contemporary church, on the mission field, and in Christian schools and organizations. A church cannot be more successful than its leaders” (*The Master’s Plan for the Church*, p. 18).

QUESTION #1 – What does it mean that “It is a trustworthy statement?” 3:1a

The original words of the Greek text seem to mean that “This next topic is the character and quality of a good, faithful and reliable statement of the Word of God.” In other words, this is a true and important matter from God’s Word for making the church become a pillar and support of the truth of God, namely, church leadership.

It is possible that some in the church looked down on leadership because of some of the problems (1:6, 19). Paul shows the importance of leadership by this trustworthy statement.

John Calvin makes an interesting observation when he says that the context is critical because Paul had just completed teaching that women were not to be in authority over men. Calvin said that Paul now brings up church leadership at this time because he wanted to stress the point that I don’t want you thinking in view of this that leadership is automatically for every man. The truth is some men are not and should not be leaders. This is a trustworthy statement (John Calvin, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 73).

We may also observe in the statement “It is a trustworthy statement” that the writer assumes certain things about leadership can be known with certainty.

QUESTION #2 – What is a Biblical office?

A Biblical office is a divinely appointed position of leadership that has the responsibility of leading and governing God's church. H. A. Ironside simply said an office was an official position of leadership in the local church (p. 74).

QUESTION #3 – How many offices of leadership have been divinely ordained by God for His local churches?

When many early churches were being organized and developed, there were three offices that were recognized and established: 1) Bishop; 2) Elders; 3) Deacons. According to this structure, the bishop was the pastor, the elders were the presbytery and the deacons were the deacons.

Ignatius, who was the pastor of the church of Antioch, in his letter to the church of Magnesia, who lived and wrote near the end of the first century, writes: "Damas, your godly bishop, your worthy presbyters Bassus and Apollonius and my fellow servant, the deacon Zotion."

In another letter he wrote to the church at Tralles in Asia, he said, "It is essential, therefore, that you continue your current practice and do nothing without the bishop, but be subject to the presbytery as to the apostles of Jesus Christ ... Furthermore, it is necessary that those who are deacons of the 'mysteries' of Jesus Christ please everyone in every respect. For they are not merely 'deacons' of food and drink, but ministers of God's church. Similarly, let everyone respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, just as they should respect the bishop, who is a model of the Father, and the presbyters as God's council and as the band of apostles. Without these no group can be called a church" (J. B. Lightfoot & J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 93 & 98).

Early church history does suggest that some churches did recognize three distinct offices: bishop, elders and deacons. However, when we carefully search the Scriptures, as we have them completed today, we discover what most scholars have generally come to agree on—God's Word has specially designed two offices of leadership for His church, not three.

QUESTION #4 – What are the Biblical offices of church leadership?

Office #1 - The office of bishop (overseer)/elder. **3:1/5:17; Titus 1:5, 7**

Office #2 - The office of deacon. **3:8, 13; Phil. 1:1**

Church history also reveals that many early churches did recognize this twofold structure. For example, in the famous document known as the Didache, which is considered to be a manuscript that contains instruction from the 12 apostles, we read these words: "Therefore appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are humble and not avaricious and true and approved, for they too carry out for you the ministry of the prophets and teachers. You must not, therefore, despise them, for they are your honored men, along with the prophets and teachers" (*Ibid.*, p. 157).

Similarly, in Polycarp's famous letter to the Philippians, he writes: "...be obedient to the presbyters and deacons as to God and Christ" (*Ibid.*, p. 126).

QUESTION #5 – How do we know that the office of overseer/elder is one office and not two?

The word "bishop" is the Greek word episkopos, which refers to one who is a superintendent, a guardian or a manager. This word is sometimes translated overseer (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 174). The word "elder" is the Greek word presbuteros from which we get our English word presb-
tery, which specifically has in mind maturity and age (*Ibid.*, p. 377).

Combined, these words give us an understanding that the office bishop/elder is an office of management in the church of God, which is to be held by those who are spiritually mature and aged in the things of God.

Observation #1 - Paul exhorted Titus to appoint elders in every city on the island of Crete (1:5), and then he called them overseers (1:7).

Observation #2 - Paul called for the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:17), and then referred to them as bishops or overseers (Acts 20:28).

Observation #3 - Paul specifically mentions two offices—overseers and deacons—in his letter to the Philippians and no third office of leadership is a Pauline consideration.

Observation #4 – Paul specifically lists qualifications for two offices—overseers (I Tim. 3:1ff) and deacons (I Tim. 3:8ff) in his letter to Timothy and later refers to elders (I Tim. 5:17), without any mention of qualifications, indicating "overseer/
elder" is one and the same office.

Observation #5 – Paul specifically lists qualifications for one office in Titus, where he specifically lists both words "elders" and "overseers," indicating these both refer to one office (Titus 1:5ff).

Clearly the office of "overseer/elder" is one office and the office of "deacon" is one office.

QUESTION #6 – How does the pastor relate to the office of bishop/elder?

Throughout early church history a pastor was known by four different terms: 1) elder or presbyter; 2) pastor or shepherd; 3) bishop or overseer; 4) minister.

J. Vernon McGee says the pastor was never known in the early church by the title of "reverend" (J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5, p. 441). Actually, it is very Biblically clear that pastor/teacher is a gift to the church, not an office of the church.

There can be no denial that the gift of pastor/teacher was, in the mind of Paul, a very high-ranking gift (Eph. 4:11-12; I Cor. 12:28). There can be no question that even from the earliest glimpses of church structure, the gift of pastor/teacher was a high-ranking one (Acts 13:1). However, it cannot be found that the gift of pastor/teacher is an office in the church.

Perhaps one reason why these two offices are so critical to each local church is because the gift of pastor/teacher is given to the whole church and can be somewhat transitory. The offices are stable even if the gift is transitory.

For example, in Paul's letter to Timothy, he was obviously a gifted apostle, preacher and teacher (I Tim. 2:7). He had taught in Ephesus for three solid years. Now Paul was gone and Timothy was in Ephesus carrying on his teaching ministry (i.e. I Tim. 1:3). One gifted as a pastor/teacher may be led by God to move and use the gift elsewhere, whereas elders and deacons are offices that are stable in the local church.

Typically the pastor/teacher functions as one of the bishop/elders. There is solid Biblical support for this, for Peter, who held the highest ranked gift in the New Testament, that of an apostle (Eph. 4:11/I Cor. 12:28), functioned in the office of bishop/elder (I Pet. 5:1). The same is also true of the Apostle John (II John 1:1/III John 1:1). Many believe Paul refers to this very fact in I Tim. 5:17.

QUESTION #7 – Who should seek the offices of elder or deacon in a church?

Principle #1 - He must be a man who has the desire. **3:1**

The verb “aspire” is present tense and middle voice. What this means is a man who wants to be in the office of elder or deacon must have within himself the continual aspiration of desiring the office.

The word “aspire,” combined with the word “desire” describes a continual, passionate longing that desires to reach after and stretch oneself toward that office (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 332).

Principle #2 - He must be a man who has the qualifications. **3:1ff; Titus 1:5ff**

Too many men don't aspire or desire to accomplish anything significant for God wants men to be godly. God wants men leading His church. God wants men striving to meet the qualifications so that they can lead His church.

God wants leadership in His local church. Being a leader in the church of God is, by God's classification, a “fine work.”

If any church is to become what God wants it to become, it must have leadership that is Biblical and spiritual. As already stated, “A church cannot be more successful than its leaders.” We may also add, “A church cannot be more spiritual than its leaders.”

In one way or another, all who know Jesus Christ are called to live and lead a godly life. Are we aspiring to that objective? Is the continual beat of our heart to live for God and glorify Him? May God help us become all that He wants us to become.