

Church Officers and Government

Continuing Paul's Instructions to the Church

1Tim 3:1 **The saying is trustworthy:** If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

² Therefore **an overseer** must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

³ not a **drunkard**, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,

⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

⁸ **Deacons** likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, **not addicted to much wine**, not greedy for dishonest gain.

⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

¹¹ **Their wives** likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

(1 Timothy 3:1-13)

Government and the Church

There have been few things as **divisive** since the Reformation as church **government**. Granted, we have just come out of chapter 2 with its talk about the **atonement** and **women's roles in the church**, both incredibly divisive topics as well. But unlike those, which while complicated, I believe the Scripture speaks much more clearly to, church government on the whole is something that I believe the Scripture leaves at least to some degree, more open. Not everything about it, but some things. Now, the topic in the passage before us is not strictly speaking about church government. Rather, it is about **offices** that must be *in* a church's government. These offices are not open for discussion, because they are commanded by Scripture. However, you can't really understand the discussion of elders and deacons without first having some kind of appreciation for the larger subject of government.

We are all familiar with the idea of **state government**. There have been many forms of state government over the centuries. There have been tyrannical **dictatorships**—the rule of the many by a single usually insane person who took it by force; **monarchies**—the rule of the many by a royal family; **oligarchies**—the rule of the many by a few elites;

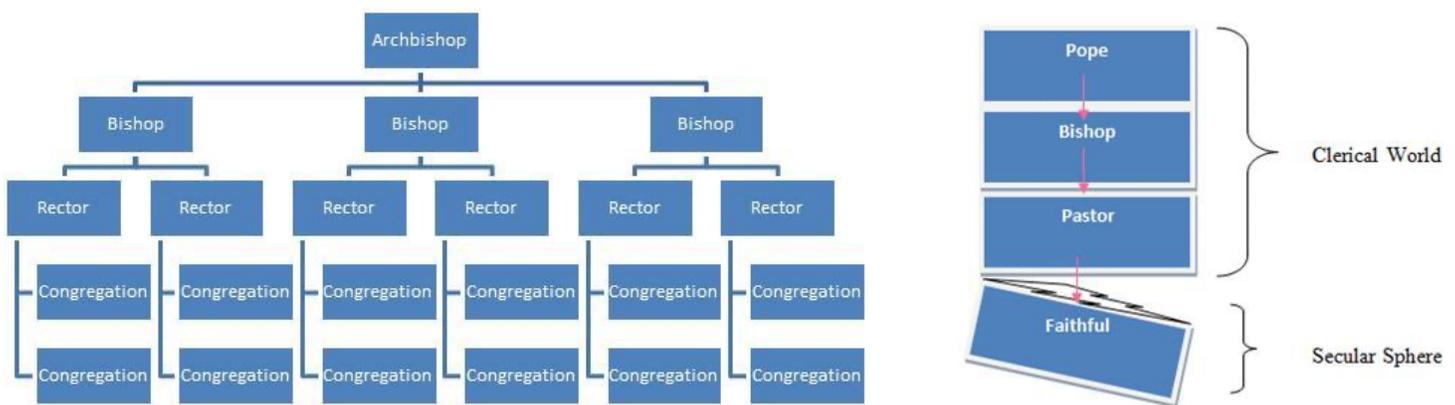
republics—the governing of the many by elected representatives; democracies—the rule of the many by majority vote, also known as tyranny; and even loose anarchies—the rule of the many but barely.

It is interesting that church government has loosely followed several of these models, and perhaps all of them. Taylor writes, “Episcopal church government is analogous to a monarchy, congregational church government is analogous to a pure democracy, and presbyterian church government is analogous to a representative republic.”¹ Sadly, the tyrannical dictatorship is sometimes to be found in churches run by one person, the oligarchy is sometimes found in churches run by committee, and the virtual anarchy is sometimes found where church is a pure business and there is no (spiritual) leadership at all.

Because some might not know, it is appropriate to say a few brief words on what some of these are. Episcopalian government is the simplest form to understand and essentially what Rome, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican/Episcopalian, and some branches of Lutherans all use, though they are by no stretch of the imagination identical. The term comes from our passage in 1Tim 3:2 (cf.

¹ L. Roy Taylor, “Presbyterianism,” in *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government*, Counterpoints, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), kindle.

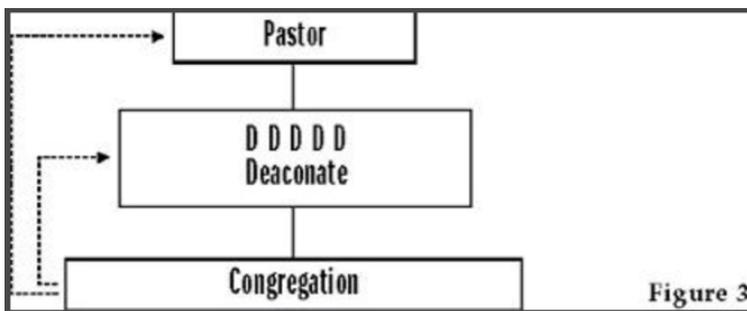
Acts 20:28; Php 1:1; Tit 1:7; 1Pet 2:25), where Paul gives instructions to the *episkopos*, variously translated as the “overseer” (ESV), “bishop” (KJV), “presiding elder” (NJB). The LXX uses it for Eleazar the son of Aaron (Num 4:16 LXX), and also of some Levites who had oversight over the rest (2Chr 34:12; Neh 11:22). This is your classic hierarchical form of government, with one person at the end of the day being over all the others (Rome: Pope; Orthodox: Ecumenical Patriarch; Anglican: Queen of England. It needs to be added that the Pope is supreme whereas in the other two, the head is not).² The local churches have very little autonomy or independence over themselves.



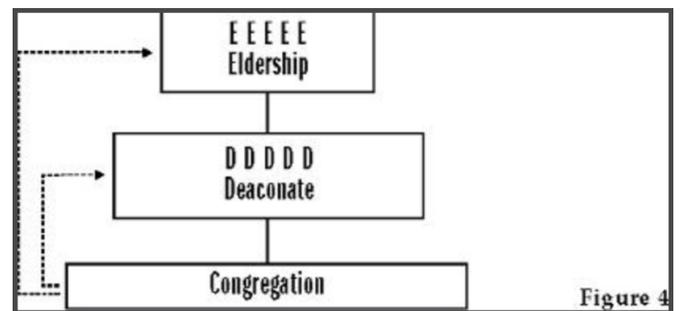
Congregationalism is the most diverse form of government. You can have top-down congregationalism, which is led by elders, but the congregation still has ultimate

² These blue charts come from “Different Church Governments,” *Central-ifugao.com*, https://www.central-ifugao.com/en/_6401.

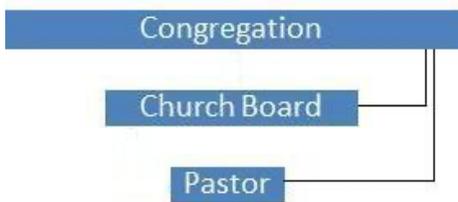
say on some matters, or bottom-up congregationalism which is fully overseen by the congregation and the pastor is basically an employee, or various mixtures of the two, or a total free-for-all.³ The **ties that binds** all congregationalism together are 1. Their **independence** from other churches, but this does not exclude them from cooperating or even coming together for such things as synods and councils; 2. At some level a congregational rather than. hierarchical authority. The idea of congregationalism comes from all over the NT, where each individual church is counted as equal and independent church with no one church or bishop having special power over the others.



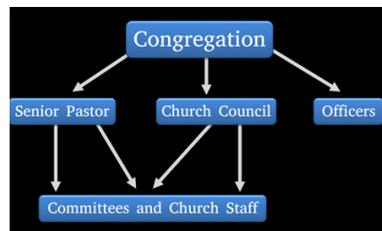
Single Pastor/Elder Congregationalism



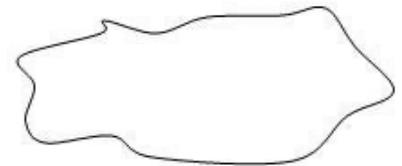
Plurality of Elders Congregationalism



(Inverted)
Congregation over Everything



Congregationalism
w/ Multiple Boards



Free Church Govt. System

³ Top two charts from *4 Views* book. Bottom right and left from (see n. 2). Bottom middle from James M. Rochford, "Church Polity," *Evidence Unseen*, <https://www.evidenceunseen.com/theology/ecclesiology/church-polity/>.

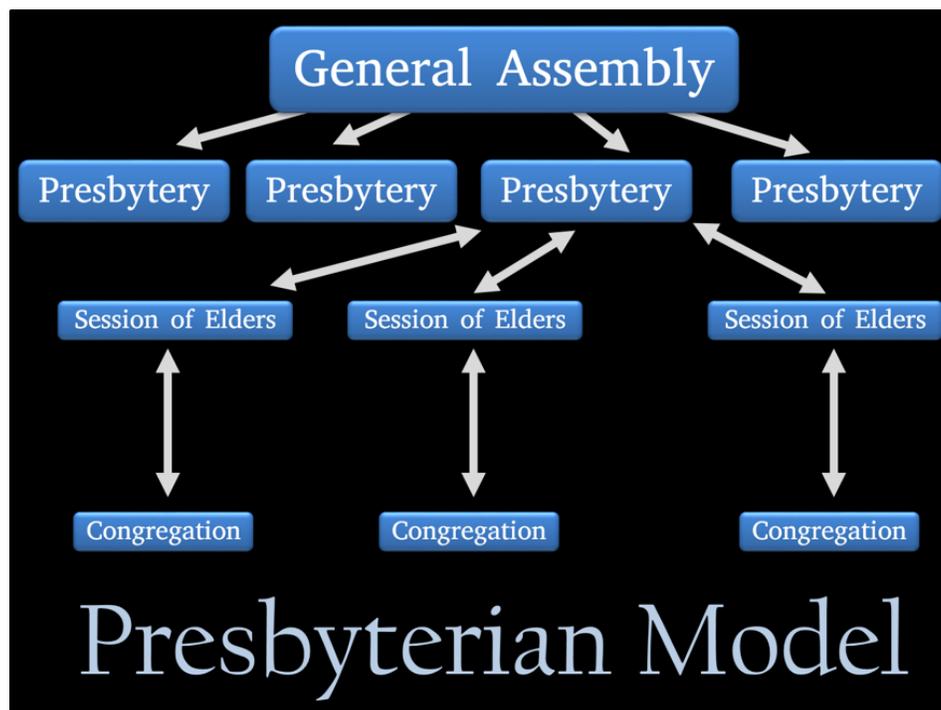
Some forms of congregationalism are “elder led” churches and this tempers what would otherwise be a pure democracy. We heard that the word *episkopos* can be translated as “elder.” The idea also comes from places **1Tim 4:14**. Here, Paul tells Timothy not to neglect the gift given when the “council of elders” laid hands on him. The term is variously translated as “elder” (ESV), “presbytery” (KJV), or “priesthood” (DRA, this is the English translation of the Vulgates *presbyterii*). The Greek word is *presbuterion*, and from it we get a third kind of church government: Presbyterianism.

Presbyterianism is most properly *a form of government* and not a form of theology. Their theology is Reformed; their government is Presbyterian. Unlike *episkopos*, which is found **only four times** in the NT, this word is used **several dozen times**. It is used well **over 200 times** in the LXX, where it almost always refers to the **elders of the tribes**. The closest it seems to come to a **cultic** sense is Exodus 24 when the 70 elders are allowed to go up on Mt. Sinai, the prototypical tabernacle and eat with God like priests.⁴ Though they were not Levites, per se, they were led by

⁴ See possibly **Psalm 107:32**, “**Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.**”

Aaron and his sons, and this model ended up becoming the model for the infamous **Sanhedrin**, of which Saul/Paul from the tribe of Benjamin, highly trained in the OT, **was possibly a member** (compare **Acts 6:12** and **15** to **7:58**).

Presbyterianism attempts to be a **middle-road** between top-down episcopalianism and (usually) bottom-up congregationalism. Like congregationalism, presbyterianism has some local autonomy. Like some forms of congregationalism, Presbyterian churches are led by elders. But like episcopalianism, it has some top-down structure. That top-down is not, however, run by one but by many at various level: a general assembly, presbyteries, and sessions.



As we've seen, the idea of **government** is shared by **all people**. As such, it belongs to **the common realm** of things God gave to everyone. Our Confession of Faith in fact states the following about government, “**There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed**” (LBC 1.6). “**Circumstances**” is technical language that refers to parts of worship and government that are not commanded by God. *That* government is commanded is obvious from the basic fact that churches are to have elders and deacons, per our text today. But does it speak directly to *what* kind of government?

This is where **I diverge** to some degree from many of my friends whom I find walking up to the microphone in the various aisles of this discussion with very dogmatic opinions. The *4 Views on Church Government* book by Zondervan, which includes Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Single-Elder Congregationalism, and Plural-Elder Congregationalism (written by Sam Waldron) is a good example of how rigid

people can be on this question. Some simply believe their way is THE way to do church government. This is exacerbated in the book by the three views that believe theirs is the correct Biblical view, with only the Episcopalian really arguing for his view on the basis of tradition rather than Scripture.

But my thought is, **if God gave government to mankind in general apart from special revelation**, and if our various forms of church government very much **parallel** secular forms of government, and if we are fighting over which form of government is “truly” biblical, then perhaps the problem is that God understands that different forms of government do some things well, some things poorly, and no things neutrally. In other words, maybe he allows us some flexibility on this question so that not everyone who disagrees with my point of view is “sinning” on this matter.

For example, a **top-down episcopalian** government works very well in terms of having power to influence, generating tons of money, being able to disperse that money to help the poor, pay salaries, buy churches, pay for missions, and so on. It also **takes a long time to corrupt**, because it is so slow moving and powerful. It’s like trying to turn a beached whale. However, a serious weakness of this

government is that once it gets corrupt, it is down-right impossible to reform, as the Reformation itself and now so many corrupt Protestants who continued with that basic structure demonstrate (think of that whale again). **Presbyterianism** is a bit easier to corrupt, but also easier to reform, because it is not completely centralized. They also have powerful means at their disposal to do missions and so on. Meanwhile, **Congregationalism** is a case-by-case question. One church can be easily corrupted, but another as easily reformed. Unless they become their own megachurch (which is the way this has tended), they have much less means at their disposal, and yet they are also much closer, theoretically speaking, to the people.

Another interesting thing to me about these forms of government is how within each structure, you always have the competing forms showing their faces. For example, what is a local **monastery** if not an attempt to become more congregational and local and grassroots while still having to be under the auspices of Rome? Or, what about the local congregational church where a tyrant “pastor” comes in and basically creates **a little Rome** with himself as Pope over those people? My point is, I’m not so interested in the form of government, because I think God uses them all, they all

do some things well, and they all have some significant potential weaknesses. I happen to believe that congregationalism that desires to work and fellowship with other churches, is most desirable, and that's one of the reasons I'm a Baptist.

However, I've been in Baptist churches where their form of congregationalism was downright unbiblical. Yes, each of these *forms* of government can in fact be quite unbiblical. This idea that one Bishop (i.e. the Pope) rules over all the church is sacrilege, secular politics, and worldly power that has no place in Christ's church, for he alone is the Chief Shepherd. At the same time, I've had to work in churches where everything was moved forward only by democratic vote, where the church was run by "board" members who volunteered for their positions, where little to no spiritual direction was even capable of being given, and where even outright disobedience to Scripture (in the form of women leading, ala [2Tim 2:9-15](#)) was present.

Somehow, somewhere, and some point in the past, it became popular to have boards and treasurers and directors and CEOs running churches rather than elders and deacons. I've seen grown men throw tantrums when the idea of changing from those to elders and deacons was proposed.

For the life of me, I've never understood this. And this is really what we want to look at today. Before us, as we begin 1Tim 3, are **two offices** that the Apostle tells young Timothy to guard. As such, they are explicitly commanded and are not optional for churches to have only if they feel like it. These offices are the way Christ has decided to carry out the form of church government that the local church uses. On this point, I have little tolerance for disobedience.

1 Timothy 3:1-13—Structure and Context

To **rightly give order** or to bring God's proper order to the church, the Apostle discusses elders and deacons. This discussion comes **on the heels** of his talk about men and women's proper roles in the church, and as such, it must not be divorced from that. Indeed, his is continuing to talk about what **Christ's church must look like**, as he summarizes at the end of our chapter (which is its own unit), **"If I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth"** (1Tim 3:15).⁵

⁵ Jeon (see n. 6) notices some interesting linguistic parallels in this verse with the earlier part of the chapter, including "know," "how," "household," "living God" (15 with vs. 5). **I'll save this for the next sermon.**

Today we will look at **1 Timothy 3:1-13**. While there are three more verses in the chapter, it is very clear that these thirteen verses form their own tightly woven unit. I find the way it is written particularly fascinating. It is divided into two halves with an introduction:

1. Introduction (3:1)
2. Overseers/Elders (3:2-7)
3. Deacons (3:8-13)

But this is not the fascinating part. The whole unit is very clearly chiasmic:

- A. Office, good work (3:1)
- B. Qualifications of Bishop: blameless, the husband of one wife, Not given to wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; his children, etc. (3:2-5)
- C. Fall, devil (3:6)
- D. Moreover he must have good report of them which are without (3:7a)
- C'. Fall, devil (3:7b)
- B'. Qualifications of Deacons: not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; blameless, the husbands of one wife, ruling their children, etc. (3:8-12)
- A'. Office, good degree (3:13)⁶

The reason this interests me so much is that while spend almost all their time on the qualifications for elders and deacons, the center of the passage is actually having a good

⁶ Using the KJV, this is a shortened version of DPR, "1 Timothy 3:1-13," Biblical Chiasm Exchange (Jan 16, 2015), <https://www.chiasmusexchange.com/2015/01/16/1-timothy-3/>. Very similar is Christine Smith, "1 Timothy 3," *A Little Perspective* (Sept 27, 2016), <https://www.alittleperspective.com/1-timothy-3-2016/>. Jeon sees an ABBA (1-5; 6; 7; 8-16), with many small chiasms in between. See Paul S. Jeon, *1 Timothy: A Charge to God's Missional Household Vol. 2* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Pub., 2017), 3-4ff (with the following discussion).

report with those outside. This is sandwiched by falling into the snare of the devil if he does not. This is not what is usually focused on, and in fact I've seen this, the center of the structure, be cast aside as virtually unimportant far too many times. But if it is the center, then it means it is the most important part of the entire unit.

Internal Calling: Elders and Deacons (3:1, 13)

The passage begins with the second of four (five if you count one in Titus) “trustworthy/faithful sayings” in the letters to Timothy. The first was, “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1Tim 1:15). The second is now, “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (3:1). This is the introduction to the passage and is clearly a new, but related thought as Paul continues his instructions about the churches.

In it, the Apostle tells Timothy to convey to his congregation that the offices of the church are something that any officer **must personally desire**. Literally, they “stretch oneself out” for it. They aspire to it. They have their heart set on it. Far too many churches make a grave

mistake here at the very beginning. They don't listen to the trustworthy saying! They go out and **recruit people**, people who have no desire at all to be an officer, simply because they need the office filled. If you have people in a church office who do not want to be there, then you are already in trouble. For, church leadership must be something that **comes from within first and foremost**. Why? Because it is not easy or glorious work. It can be a hard, thankless job.

Yet, **the Lord sets it in some men's hearts to aspire to these offices**. We refer to this as **the *internal calling from the Holy Spirit***. This is a deep personal knowledge that this is what God wants me to do. And so, Timothy is being told to tell his congregation that this kind of aspiration is something the men, any of the men, should be thinking about in the quietness of their hearts as they pray and seek God.

He goes so far as to call this a “**noble task**.” The ESV's translation does not allow you to see in English the parallel in **vs. 13**. The word “noble” is literally *kalos* or “**good**.” This word is found in **vs. 13** where the ESV translates it as “*good*” *standing*. As such, the good standing is parallel with the good task or work. The point is, and will become, to be an officer of the church is a good thing with wonderful spiritual

benefits for those able to carry out the task as God desires, but only if they want it.

But what is it that they are aspiring to in **vs. 1**? It is the “**office of overseer.**” Again, there is a direct parallel in **vs. 13**. It is, as the KJV puts it, the “**office of deacon.**” While the term “office” is not in the Greek, it is a helpful English word that conveys the corresponding, complementary offices and sections of this part of the letter. So what are these two offices?

As we saw earlier, the word “**overseer**” is the word *episkopēs*, which we have seen is translated as **bishop**, **overseer**, and **presiding elder**. We also saw that word *presbuterion* in **1Tim 4:14** (also **5:17**) where besides **presbytery** and **priesthood**, it was translated as “**elder.**” While high church types see these as different offices, this is not the way our Confession sees it. It teaches us, “**A particular church, gathered and completely organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members; and the officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the church (so called and gathered), for the peculiar administration of ordinances, and execution of power or duty, which he intrusts them with, or calls them**

to, to be continued to the end of the world, are *bishops or elders, and deacons*” (LBC 26.8).

The Confession, I believe rightly, cites *Acts 20:17, 28* where the two words are used interchangeably. And I think that’s what’s also going on in 1 Timothy. If we think of them as synonyms, we get different nuances of the office. *Bishop* conveys a sense of authority. *Elder* conveys a sense of age and wisdom. *Presbyter* conveys a duty of office and plurality. *Priest* conveys a sense of intercession, however this one has probably been the most abused in church history, especially in light of the priesthood of all believers. Another synonym is *pastor*, which conveys a sense of personal relationship as a shepherd to the sheep. Each of these terms helps us understand in different ways what the office entails.

Of what *specific duties* does this office consist? The Confession only discusses the “*peculiar administration of the ordinances*” (that is, preaching, the Lord’s Supper, and baptism), “*and execution of power or duty.*” Essentially, it is *overseeing the spiritual needs of the congregation*. I’ll say more about this as we move through the list in a moment.

The other office is that of *deacon*. *Diakonos* literally means “*servant.*” Now, both elders and deacons are servants

in some sense. Neither are lord's or bosses or kings. But that this is a clearly different office from elder is seen in Acts when the Apostles said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables." "Serve" is the verbal form: *diakoneō*. As we will see, deacons have some parallel spiritual qualifications, but as it has been traditionally understood, their role is essentially overseeing the physical needs of the church. Benjamin Keach, a very significant person in the writing of the LBC 1689, puts it well,

The work of deacons is to serve tables, that is, to oversee provisions for the Lord's Table, the minister's table, and the tables of the poor. They should a) provide bread and wine for the Lord's Table; b) see that every member contributes to the maintenance of the ministry according to their ability and their own voluntary subscription or obligation; c) see that each member do give weekly to the poor as God has blessed him; and d) visit the poor and know their condition as much as in them lies—that none, especially the aged widows, be neglected (Act 6:1-10; 5:7-10; 1Co 16:2; Act 6:1).⁷

With that as an introduction to the two offices, let's move into the specifics.

⁷ Benjamin Keach, *The Glory of a True Church* (Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, 2018), 6. <https://www.chapellibrary.org/book/goat/glory-of-a-true-church-keachbenjamin>.

External Calling: Qualifications (3:2-13)

Qualifications of Elders (3:2-7)

One of the most important truths of the offices of the church is that the officers **must desire the job**. This, as I've said, is what we call **the internal calling**. However, equally as important, and often just as neglected, is what we call **the external calling**. It is necessary but not sufficient to walk the office. The man must also be qualified. Specifically, the officer of the church must be **recognized as qualified by the congregation** according to the regulations put forward in Scripture.

The way this is determined is through **the lists** given in the NT regarding these offices. 1 Timothy 3 is perhaps the best known of these lists (and the only one that mentions deacons). It gives roughly **fifteen** things for **elders** and, depending upon how you look at it, **nine or eleven** for **deacons**. Of these, **four or five are nearly identical** in both lists and others overlap. The reason for this, I believe, is literary. That is, the Apostle is helping you to see that the qualifications are in many ways the same.

These lists are **not exhaustive** but are models. We can see this by dividing them into **kinds**. One way of doing this is by separating them into items relation to God, to others, to self, and to family (see chart).⁸ In this way, the totality of the character of the man is being viewed.

76. Functional Qualifications of Elders and Deacons

<p style="text-align: center;">Relation to God</p> <p>Holding firmly to scriptural truths 1 Timothy 3:9; Titus 1:9</p> <p>Upright and holy Titus 1:8</p> <p>Able to teach 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Tested 1 Timothy 3:10</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Relation to Others</p> <p>Sincere 1 Timothy 3:8</p> <p>Respectable 1 Timothy 3:2, 8</p> <p>Hospitable 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8</p> <p>Not quarrelsome 1 Timothy 3:3</p> <p>Above reproach 1 Timothy 3:2, 9; Titus 1:6</p> <p>Not a new convert 1 Timothy 3:6</p> <p>Loving what is good Titus 1:8</p> <p>Not violent but gentle 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7</p> <p>Good reputation with outsiders 1 Timothy 3:7</p> <p>Not overbearing Titus 1:7</p> <p>Not a pursuer of dishonest gain 1 Timothy 3:8; Titus 1:7</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Relation to Self</p> <p>Disciplined Titus 1:8</p> <p>Temperate 1 Timothy 3:2, 8; Titus 1:7</p> <p>Not a lover of money 1 Timothy 3:3</p> <p>Self-controlled 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8</p> <p>Not quick-tempered Titus 1:7</p> <p>Not given to drunkenness 1 Timothy 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Relation to Family</p> <p>Having one wife 1 Timothy 3:2, 12</p> <p>Managing family well 1 Timothy 3:4, 12; Titus 1:6</p> <p>Having obedient children 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12; Titus 1:6</p>
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Another way of looking at them is **positive vs. negative** traits. “**Husband of one wife**” and “**managing children and households**” are examples of positive traits that are the same in both lists. “**Not a drunkard**” and “**not a lover of money**” are examples of negatives that are the same in both lists.” However, we can also look at the **moral qualifications** in the lists. Generally speaking, whatever moral qualification you find in one list would also apply to the other, even if it

⁸ This helpful chart is in **H. Wayne House**, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 119.

doesn't mention it. And, of course, even if it isn't mentioned explicitly, basically morality extends beyond these lists. It isn't like so long as your elder meets this list, he can be a professional thief on the side because it isn't mentioned. Moral qualifications can be compared with duties specific to the office. For example, "able to teach" is a qualification mentioned for elders that isn't for deacons, while "tested" is mentioned for deacons but not for elders. Why? Because you don't want a deacon being brought into the furnace of serving if they have absolutely no track-record. Likewise, you don't want an elder who can't teach if one of their primary jobs is teaching.⁹

75. The Offices of Elder and Deacon—Qualifications and Duties

Qualifications						
Elders	Hospitable 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8	Able to teach 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9	Not violent but gentle 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7	Not a lover of money 1 Timothy 3:3	Not quarrelsome 1 Timothy 3:3	Not a recent convert 1 Timothy 3:6
Self-controlled 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8	Having a good reputation with outsiders 1 Timothy 3:7	Not overbearing Titus 1:7	Not quick-tempered Titus 1:7	Loving what is good Titus 1:8	Upright and holy Titus 1:8	Disciplined Titus 1:8
Deacons and Elders	Above reproach (blameless) 1 Timothy 3:2, 9; Titus 1:6	Having one wife 1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6	Temperate 1 Timothy 3:2, 8; Titus 1:7	Respectable 1 Timothy 3:2, 8	Not given to drunkenness 1 Timothy 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7	Able to manage his family well 1 Timothy 3:4, 12; Titus 1:6
Having obedient children 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12; Titus 1:6	Not a pursuer of dishonest gain 1 Timothy 3:8; Titus 1:7	Holding firmly to the deep truths 1 Timothy 3:9; Titus 1:9	Deacons	Sincere 1 Timothy 3:8	Tested 1 Timothy 3:10	
Duties						
Elders	Administrative—to rule the church 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:7	Pastoral—to shepherd the church 1 Peter 5:2; Jude 12	Educational—to teach the church Ephesians 4:12-13; 1 Timothy 3:2	Officiative—to lead in the functions of the church James 5:14	Representative—to represent the church Acts 20:17; 1 Timothy 5:17	
Deacons	To help the poor Acts 6:1-6	To relieve the elders Acts 6:1-4				

⁹ Chart in House, 118.

Let's go through these lists. "*Above reproach*" (2) is the first qualification. Notice, this is something **known to the public**. It isn't that the man is morally perfect. Rather, it is that there is nothing in his public life that brings shame and disgrace upon the church.

"*Husband of one wife*" (2) is **by far the most discussed**. What does this mean? Does it mean that **he must be married**? We have zero evidence that Timothy was married, and yet he is clearly an elder. More, the office of elder becomes the normal office of the church after temporary office of Apostle (one personally chosen by the incarnate Christ) passes away. We know that Paul was not married during his ministry, for he tells the Corinthians as much (1Co 7:8). That's even more interesting, because it is quite possible that he was married, as many have speculated that he must have been a member of the Sanhedrin, and all those members had to be married. Does it mean that **he can't be divorced**, that he was only ever married to one woman? This can't possibly be what it means, otherwise, divorce comes close to an unforgiveable sin. That doesn't mean that divorce and remarriage should not be considered when putting forward an elder (or deacon), because it could very well be a disqualification. Does it mean **he isn't a polygamist**? The

phrase is literally, “a one (*mias*) woman *gunaikos*) man (*andra*).” This is a possibility, especially in that culture. In my mind, and especially because of the way the previous chapter just ended, the most important thing here is that **it means the elder is a man**. It is very clear that this is **not a woman married to a husband**, and Paul easily could have said that had he wanted to. Other than what we said last week about that passage, this is perhaps the biggest biblical reason why the church has always had only men in this role, until feminism took off in the modern world.

Next, he is “*sober-minded*” (2).¹⁰ Because he mentions alcohol later, this word is probably being used **metaphorically** for temperate in the sense that his conduct is free from excess. To him, everything isn’t a joke. He is able to think soberly about spiritual and moral matters.

He is “*self-controlled*” or better, “**sensible**” or “**prudent**” (2). This refers to having a sound or healthy mind which gives you the ability to curb desires and impulses that bring you out of control. I think of monks in a monastery cloistering themselves from temptation, a thought which

¹⁰ In some of these, I’m using Daniel C. Arichea and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 67ff.

does come from a sound mind, except these elders do not have the luxury of walling themselves off from the world.

They are “*respectable*” or “*dignified*.” This is the same word that was used in **2:9** to describe the way that women are to dress. To put it another way, women are not the only ones who must behave that way. All the church must aspire to this, but the elder is to be well-behaved and well-ordered in his life as a way of life. Notice that these are more life-style traits than anything, and so long as you aren’t looking through some Fundamentalist legalistic perfectionism prism, they are not really all that hard to see from others if the man has them or doesn’t.

“*Hospitable*” (**2**), is next. Again, while this and quite frankly the other virtues in this list are things all Christians are commanded to grow in, it is important that the elders not be stand-offish. They are to be welcoming, warm, and friendly to all. A man that is not like this cannot carry out the function of elder properly.

In his mini-chiasm of **vv. 1-5**, Paul Jeon, who breaks down the passage a little differently than I do, sees “*able to teach*” (**2**) as **the center of the majority of this list.**¹¹ This

¹¹ See Jeon, 5. In some ways, his chiasm, which puts the final two qualifications at the center of the chiasm, splits the list apart, which I’m not fond of, though I understand why he did it. They way others (that I have followed in this sermon) have done it rather shows that the final

makes a lot of sense, especially when you notice that most of the other virtues or vices around the list are moral in nature. This one is not, so it stands out. Being able or not able to teach is not a moral quality. It is, however, an **imperative** for the elders who must open God's word and preach and teach it to others. Being a great administrator/CEO/Marketing Director is not the qualification for a pastor/elder that a church is to look for. That's more of a deacon qualification. How many churches couldn't care less about this most central of the qualifications, because all they want to do is get more people in the doors?

The **next four** are all negative (note the change from positives to teaching to negatives). He is "*not a drunkard*" (3). This one always make me laugh when I'm told that communion in the old days was grape juice. How exactly did anyone get drunk if wine was really just .0001% alcohol? The point is **not that he must be a teetotaler**, but that his lifestyle is not one of drunkenness. Anyone who has known a drunk knows what this means. His life is out of control from wine and spirits.

The next one is where I'm not sure if there are actually fifteen or sixteen items in this list. He is "*not violent but gentle*"

qualification for the elder becomes the center of the passage. In this way, it does not split the elders' qualifications apart the way Jeon has.

(3). Is this one or two? I say it is two sides of the same coin and so one. How can an elder lead if he *is always beating the sheep*? How many sermons are exactly full of this? The sheep are always beaten into submission from sermons or personal interactions with the shepherd!

The proverb says, “*A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit*” (Prov 15:4). This serves as a nice transition to him being “*not quarrelsome*” (1Tim 3:3). We’ve seen how *words and doctrines* were a big deal in Ephesus. The physically violent man is almost always also *verbally* violent. Too many Christians (Reformed or not) are quarrelsome, and that includes pastors. One wonders sometimes why some things on this list are pointed out while others are often left unnoticed. Maybe it’s because hypocrites love to point out the things they think they are not like, while keeping silent on the ones they are.

He must not be “*a lover of money*” (3). This is *not Paul’s rubber stamp on paying the pastor like a pauper*, as too many people I used to know who lived through the Great Depression once believed. I remembered one of them, a man I deeply loved, standing up in a congregational democracy without elders in a church meeting I was at, protesting the budget, specifically my salary. He saw that the church gave

me a parsonage free of charge worth \$10,000 a year and were paying me a salary of \$15,000 a year (not enough for a family in that area at that time to live on, and clearly much much less than he was retired on). But he protested that he was under the impression that these were reversed and couldn't believe they would want to pay a youth pastor that kind of money! He wanted it changed. As crazy as that day was, it is clear that 30 years later, **many pastors are addicted to money** and luxury and ease. I guess we are men of our times, just like everyone else. The salaries some of these celebrity pastors get for just one appearance at a mega-conference are pretty mind-blowing. And it makes me wonder, yet again, if such a qualification is being taken seriously by pastors. Money corrupts and the love of money deeply corrupts.

If we assume for sake of argument that the elder is married, we next learn that he must “*manage his own household well*” (4). “Well” is the word “**good**” that we’ve seen before. Paul adds the important reason why in **vs. 5**. “*For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?*”

We could probably think of all kinds of examples of what this would mean, but Paul seems to have in mind his

own specific. “*With all dignity keeping his children submissive*” (4). There’s that word “**submission**” again. His children must be submissive. What if they leave the house when older and become atheists? He doesn’t have in mind older children, who are responsible for their own actions, though that kind of turn of events may or may not be a sign of something going on in the home that is a red flag. Now, while many fathers have households completely out of control and submissive children are not to be found, there is an **opposite reaction** of total controlled submissiveness of children, no matter what. These kinds of men break their children’s wills. This is the opposite of what is being called for. This is a submission of children that comes through **dignity and respectability**, that is both to outsiders and to the children. Do the children view the father’s authority as a loving father who would do anything for his child or as prisoners think of prison guards? This is not beating them into submission, but loving them and through law and grace. It’s the same thing we talked about with women and men.

The **last two items** both have explanations, and both explanations move us into the realm of the supernatural. In fact, both deal directly with the devil. “*He must not be a recent convert*” (6). Why? “*Or he may become puffed up with*

conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.” Second, and like it (the word “moreover”), “He must be well thought of by outsiders” (7). Why? “So that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.” Ryken makes a great observation here,

When the church makes a poor choice of elders, there is always the danger of their falling into devilish behavior. Like Satan, an elder may become proud. Then, like Satan, he would be subject to God’s curse on the arrogant and rebellious. Or an elder may fall into a trap set by Satan. Like an unwary bird, he may wander into the fowler’s snare.

These warnings lead us to an obvious conclusion: Satan is out to get the elders of the church. This is basic military strategy.¹²

In other words, the church must be very careful about making sure they are taking these qualifications seriously when they consider officers.

This point is highlighted by the structure. Because the word “devil” appears twice, if this whole list of elders and deacons is chiasmic, it means that **the center is this last**

¹² Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Daniel M. Doriani, and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 120.

qualification for the elder. He must be thought well by outsiders. Too many people fail to recognize this point. The qualifications in this list are **things that others can easily see**. This includes not only others in your church, but in *other churches*, not only other Christians, but *unbelievers* as well. How many pastors have zero credibility in the eyes of the world and yet insist that they are still qualified for ministry?

I was watching some news coming out of Australia this week and one bold reporter (in short supply right now) questioned the current Prime Minister of some part of the country. He was given a text message conversation from two of his “friends,” both in politics, one whom he even endorsed, and these messages described him as, “**A horrible horrible person.**” “**I do not trust him. He is more concerned with politics than people.**” “**A fraud**” and “**a complete psycho.**” Yes, people can easily see when vice rather than virtue, sin rather than sanctification is gripping someone’s life. Yes, these qualifications matter, because the church matters to our Lord. He died for her, and he desires that she be led by elders who are truly converted, who care about the sheep, and who want only to honor their Lord in the office.

Qualifications of Deacons (3:8-13)

Moving on to qualifications for deacons, we see that this list is of the same importance through the word “likewise” (8). Deacons must be “dignified” or serious (8). Again, how they are viewed by others is up front. Do they have good character, are they worthy of respect, are they honorable?

The next three are all negative. They are not to be “double-tongued” (8). That is, do they say one thing in public and another in private? Are they insincere, untrustworthy? Do they indulge in gossip, spread slander, lie about others? They must not be “addicted to much wine” (8). We’ve seen this one with elders as well. They must not be “greedy for dishonest gain” (8). This was also a qualification for elder but is perhaps more important for those who deal directly with the money. It’s interesting to think about Judas in this regard, as he was able to cover his deceit to all of the disciples for over three years. Jesus knew the man. Does he not give that kind of insight to his church through the Spirit?

“They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (9). This one moves to the heart of the matter. Are they Christians? Do they believe the Faith once for all entrusted to the saints? Are they quick to affirm it? Does their lifestyle bear this out? In other words, the church is not hiring some

guy to “do the books.” Deacons love Christ and his sheep and desire the office because they want to serve them both.

“*Let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless*” (10). This qualification enjoins the church to give tasks to the man desiring the office to see if he will follow through or if he is full of hot air. Here we see room for some kind of apprenticeship, coming along-side a prospective deacon to see test him. This is wisdom at work in the Apostle’s mind.

As with seemingly everything we’ve talked about with women in this letter thus far, vs. 11 has been hotly debated. “*Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.*” The ESV takes the generic word for a woman and translates it as “*wives.*” This is most likely because the next verse says that “*Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well*” (12). We’ve seen virtually this exact qualification for elders.

The debate has been, does vs. 11 address the *wives of deacons*? If so, why didn’t he address the wives of elders? Or, is he actually addressing *female deacons*, and as such “wives” is a bad translation? Should it be, “*The women [deacons] likewise must be dignified...*” Feminists and egalitarians

point out **Romans 16:1** in this regard. “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (*diakonos*) of the church at Cenchreae.” Was Phoebe an ordained deacon? They say she was. However, Junias in that same list was an “apostle” and this is almost certainly being used in the generic sense as a “messenger” rather than one of the “twelve.” Is “deacon” being used in the more generic sense of a servant rather than officer of the church?

We do not have incontrovertible evidence that Phoebe was an ordained deacon. We also know that when the church ordained the original deacons, they chose “men” (**Acts 6:3**). Thus, I side with the view that deacons, like elders, should be men. However, I’m not as dogmatic about this point as I am with elders for this reason. Taking care of **physical needs** is not the same as overseeing **spiritual needs**. In my understanding of the Scripture, the deacon’s office does not necessitate being able to teach or preach, though the elders may certainly allow that if the gift and need are present, just as they may if they are considering elders in the future. And clearly, women do in fact do diaconal work, that is serving functions, in every church and always have since the beginning.

At the same time, I'm also a student of human nature, and I know that the tendency in men is to slack off, and the tendency in women is to pick up the work (often in total frustration), and I think this is something God understands infinitely better than we do, and therefore he has men in the deaconate, who can then help the rest of the men and women serve one another, precisely so that our sinful inclinations will not end up overwhelming and undermining proper church order, as it has in so many churches where these things are not appreciated.

Paul concludes, “For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (13). The Lord knows that in many instances, being a deacon can be very hard, physically unrewarding work. So, he provides a promise. Those who serve out of desire and with the congregation's approval, will be and are rewarded by the Lord. It is his personal guarantee that he sees what they do for the sake of his kingdom, and he blesses them appropriately with good standing among the people and great confidence that he is real and that their faith is not in vain.

Christ: The Suffering Servant and Chief-Overseer

This wouldn't be much of a sermon if all we did was look at church government and offices. There needs to be something more. That something, it seems to me, must be the Gospel. I've given you a lot of law—lists and guidelines for elders and government. But too many take these lists and either throw them out the window like good little **antinomians**, or come at them from such a **legalistic**, intolerant, perfectionistic perspective that no fallen human being could possibly be qualified to serve in the church.

That's precisely where **the Gospel** comes in. As those who become dictators of the church, be it today's Big Pope or any thousand numbers of little popes seem to forget, as liberals in Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational forms of government have clearly forgotten, and as we are all **prone to wander** from remembering, **this isn't man's church**. It isn't the congregation's church (it isn't a country club). It isn't the elder's church. It isn't the pastor's church. It is Christ's church. He founded it. He preserves it. It belongs to him. He died for it. He leads it.

Therefore, we always must bear in mind, especially as we are considering officers of the church, that all **deaconservants will fall short**. They are not perfect. However,

there was a Suffering *Servant*, as Isaiah called him (the LXX usually uses *doulos* rather than *diakonos*). And this Suffering Servant **shed his blood for his church**, dying for her and her officers, that all of their sins might be forgiven, and that grace might be extended where they are weak and fall short. All deacons look to the Great Deacon, the Lord Jesus, knowing that they are mere **under-servants**, who have been saved by his grace. In fact, that is why they want to serve!

More, Peter calls him Christ the **Chief-Shepherd** (*archipoimen*; **1Pet 5:4**), a word that is directly parallel with elders (*presbuteros*; **5:1**). Elders are mere **under-shepherds**, taking care of the local church knowing that there is only one Bishop over all the church, the Lord Jesus himself. While all forms of church government at one time or another have recognized this truth, it seems to me that many in every form of government have **forgotten this**, and it leads to disaster. From Popes and Cardinals, to Presbyters and elders, to entire congregations, the church has been turned into a political power-house, a rotary-club, a social-justice organization, a twelve-steps recovery program, a health and wealth prosperity den, a place of personal power and tyranny, or a rock concert.

Jesus picked these offices for his church because he fulfilled them himself first. In doing so, he not only set the standard, but gives the grace to any man who faithfully heeds the trustworthy saying and any church that faithfully and gracefully attends to these lists, that as they seek to honor him, he will through them, increase his church that his glory might cover the earth through it, as the waters cover the sea. And as people see how a church can actually emulate the Lord, as his body on earth, they will be inevitably and irresistibly drawn to her by the grace of God in Christ.

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