

Introduction

We just had a presidential election, and there was a tremendous difference between the two candidates and their views about government. One candidate stood for a large, socialistic government, and very liberal policies. The other candidate stood for more conservative values, lower taxes, a smaller government, and protecting the rights of citizens. If someone said to you that government really doesn't matter, the majority of people in both parties would strongly disagree. They think that government does matter, and they were zealous about helping their candidate win the election.

When it comes to church government, most people do not know much about church government. Recently, I spoke in a church that had left their denomination over doctrinal issues. Their former denomination has an episcopalian style of government. While they were familiar with how their church had operated, they did not know it was considered an episcopalian style of government. They did not know about congregational forms, presbyterian forms, or other forms of church government. They were unfamiliar with what the Bible teaches about the form of government that the apostles set up in the churches in the New Testament. This church group was not unique; most people in the church do not know much, and simply don't have much interest.

In Alexander Strauch's book, *Biblical Eldership*, he wrote, "For many people, the issue of church government is as irrelevant an issue as the color of the church pews... The average church member's disinterest in how the church is governed needs to be challenged.... Some of the worst havoc wrought to the Christian faith has been a direct result of unscriptural forms of church structure."¹

For example, many people in the church have it ingrained in their minds that only an ordained clergyman is qualified to lead worship, administer the Lord's Supper, baptize, or preach. A special class of believers, ordained clergymen, immersed that wielded power and authority arose because of unbiblical forms of government. A Biblically-based church government does matter; and our passage in 1 Timothy 3 is a very important passage to help us understand more about how God wants His church to be governed. Paul's primary reason for writing this letter was to let Timothy and all of us know "how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." The establishment of a biblical church government consisting of qualified elders is essential, which is why Paul covered this important topic in his letter about how to conduct ourselves in God's house.

(1 Ti 3:15) "but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."

This morning we will be covering 1 Timothy 3:1-7, which is about the office of overseer. First, we will clarify the office of overseer. We need to understand the term overseer, because much of the confusion, misunderstanding, and false teaching stems from not understanding what an overseer is. We will also look at the other terms in Scripture that also refer to this same office. Second, we will look at the calling of an overseer. Third, we will look at the character of an overseer. Fourth, we will look at the capabilities of an overseer. Let's read our text.

¹¹ *Biblical Eldership*, Alexander Strauch, page 101.

The Office of Overseer

1. Clarification of the office of overseer
2. Calling of an overseer
3. Character of an overseer
4. Capabilities of an overseer

(1 Ti 3:1–7) “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*. {2} An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, {3} not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. {4} *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity {5} (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), {6} *and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. {7} And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

1. Clarification of the office of overseer (1 Ti 3:1)

Paul begins by saying, “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.” This passage is about the office of overseer. What is an overseer? The KJV translates this as bishop. What is an overseer or bishop? What is the difference between a pastor, shepherd, overseer, bishop, or elder? These are good questions. In various denominations, all these terms refer to different offices. I want to take a few minutes to look at these terms, because that will help us to see clearly and to answer all these questions.

(1 Ti 3:1) “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*.”

The Greek word for overseer is episkopos. Epi means over and skopos means to see. Episkopos is correctly translated as overseer. The term, bishop, comes from Old English, and it came from this Greek word, episkopos. Bishop and overseer are one and the same.

In Acts 20, Paul was at Miletus and was meeting with the Ephesian **elders**. He was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem so that he could be there for Pentecost. Therefore, he elected not to go to Ephesus, but to simply meet with the **elders**. In verse 28, he told the elders to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made them **overseers** (episkopos), to shepherd the church of God. It is clear that the elders in Ephesus were called overseers in this passage. Many have made a clear distinction between overseers and elders. They believe that bishops or overseers are the head or lead pastor, and the elders are underneath the overseer. Others have falsely taught that the bishop or overseer is over a group of churches. This is not backed up by the Scriptures. In this passage, Paul is meeting with the elders, and he also calls them overseers. Overseers and elders are used interchangeably. They are not two different offices.

(Ac 20:16-28) "For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. {17} And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.... {28} ‘Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.’”

This view of overseers or bishops being over the elders was introduced at the end of the first century by a man named Ignatius, who was the second bishop of Antioch in Syria. He introduced a three-tier system of government because he “faced deep concerns about false teachers and their impact on the doctrine and unity in the churches.”² In his system, he redefined the term episkopos to refer only to the primary leader of “the elders.” In other words, the presbytery or body of elders reported directly to a single bishop. On a third level, the deacons in local churches basically reported to the elders and assisted them as well as the bishop with their ministries. As this change took place, the “bishop” in a believing community began to take on more and more authority, particularly because of Ignatius’ teachings. Unfortunately, this system set the stage for some of the serious leadership abuses that have haunted Christianity for centuries.

In Acts 20, Paul was meeting with the elders, who are also called overseers. The Greek word that is translated as elder is presbuteros (Strong’s G4245), which comes from presbus, which means an old man. In 1 Timothy 4:14, the word presbytery is used. Presbyterion (Strong’s G4244) is the plural form of presbuteros, and refers to a board or group of elders. The apostles always set up a plurality of elders in each church. The group of elders had laid hands on Timothy and prophesied over him, imparting a spiritual gift to him. Paul tells Timothy not to neglect this spiritual gift.

(1 Ti 4:14) "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery."

Another passage that uses these two words in referring to the same office is in Titus 1:5-8. Paul charged Titus with appointing elders in every city as he directed, and then he gave him the qualifications for elders. The list is nearly identical to the list for overseers in our passage in 1 Timothy. In verse seven when Paul is speaking about being above reproach, he says, “for the overseer (episkopos) must be above reproach. Again, it is very clear that the elder and the overseer are one and the same office. They are not two different levels of leadership. The elders and overseers are one and the same.

(Tt 1:5-7) "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint **elders** (presbuteros) in every city as I directed you, {6} namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. {7} For the **overseer** (episkopos) must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain."

A third term is also important to understand, and that is pastor. The Greek word is poimen, and it means a shepherd. It is used 18 times in the New Testament, but Ephesians 4:11 is the only time it is translated as pastor. All the other references are translated as shepherd.

(Eph 4:11) "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,"

The verb form of poimen is poimano (G4165), and it is used 12 times in Scripture. In Acts 20:28, Paul tells the elders, or overseers to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock. It is shepherds that watch over a flock. He goes on to say that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers, and that they are to shepherd (poimano) the church of God. In this verse we find all

² Elders and Leaders, Gene Getz, page 224

three terms that refer to the same office. These are elders or overseers and they are to pastor or shepherd the flock.

(Ac 20:28) "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

One final passage that is good to look at is found in 1 Peter 5:1-4. Peter exhorts the elders (presbuteros) to shepherd (poimano) the flock, exercising oversight (episkopeo). All three words are used in this passage. Again, it is very clear that the elder, overseer, and pastor are all the same office.

(1 Pe 5:1-2) "Therefore, I exhort the elders (presbuteros) among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, {2} shepherd (poimano) the flock of God among you, exercising oversight (episkopeo) not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;"

Looking at the three different words give us a fuller understanding about what pastoring is all about. It is like looking at different sides of a diamond. The term elder (presbuteros) means an older person. It refers to the spiritual maturity and character of the office. Pastor or shepherd (poimano) refers again to the function of the elders. Pastors feed, lead, protect, and care for the sheep. The KJV uses the word feed the flock instead of shepherd the flock. Overseer or bishop (episkopeo), speaks more about the work that the elder does. Elders oversee the flock and manage the affairs of the church.

(1 Pe 5:2 KJV) "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;"

The office of overseer is not a reward, or status symbol. Paul wrote to Timothy and said that if anyone desires to be an elder, it is a fine WORK he desires to do. An elder is not a position, but is a special work that God calls some to do. The office of overseer is an office established to manage the household of God. It is a job of leading, feeding and caring for the flock of God. It is a call to lay your life down for the church.

(1 Ti 3:1) "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do."

2. Calling of an overseer (1 Ti 3:1)

The second thing we will look at is the calling of an overseer. Paul begins by saying that "if any man aspires to the office of overseer..." The Greek word for aspires is orego (Strong's G3713), which means to stretch out, reach after, or yearn for. Someone who has the calling of God on his life has this inward yearning or desire to pastor. God puts this desire in the heart of those He is calling to that office. Pastoring is very hard work, and if someone is not really called to do that work, it will become evident and the person will leave the ministry. It is important to identify the calling of God before putting someone into that office.

(1 Ti 3:1) "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do."

A few years ago, at a church that I was planting, I gave everyone on the leadership team a questionnaire to fill out. I included a question asking them if they had a desire or aspiration to be an elder. I was trying to help identify the specific callings of everyone on the leadership team. If anyone had a desire to be an overseer, I wanted to recognize that desire and help the person fulfill the calling on his life. If someone does not have a desire to pastor the flock, that is a pretty good indication that they are not called to be a pastor at this time. If someone had given me that same question when I first graduated from university, I would have said that I did not aspire to be an elder. That did not mean that God did not have plans for me to be an elder; it just means that I was not aware of those plans, and at that time in my life, I did not aspire to the office of overseer. Over time, the desire in my heart grew, and in God's timing, after receiving much training, I was ordained as an overseer.

In 1 Peter 5, Peter gives three exhortations to elders. First, he exhorts them to shepherd the flock, and to exercise oversight. He exhorts them to exercise oversight not for sordid gain, but with eagerness. The Greek word for eagerness is *prothumos* (Strong's G4290), which means with passion. *Pro* means towards or before, and *thumos* means to breathe hard. In the negative sense, it is sometimes translated as anger because someone who gets angry is worked up and breathing hard. Elders are to be passionate, excited, and eager to pastor. They should aspire to elder before being called, and they should continue to desire. The Schaeffer Institute conducted a survey of pastors and they found that 57% of them would leave the ministry if they had a better place to go work. This shows that many pastors today lack that passion and desire. We need to raise up men who aspire to the office and are passionate about it, not pastors who are only doing it because they can't do anything else.

(1 Pe 5:1–3) “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, {2} shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; {3} nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”

The desire to be an elder is one of about five signs that a man is called to be an elder. We see a second sign in Acts 20:28, where we see that the Holy Spirit made these elders in Ephesus overseers. We see a third way in Titus 1:5, where Paul instructed Titus, who was an apostle on his team, to ordain elders in every church. The recognition of a calling by an apostle was an important sign. In 1 Timothy 4:14, the presbytery laid hands on Timothy. The laying on of hands was done to impart gifts, and also to ordain men. In 1 Timothy 5, Paul told Timothy not to lay hands on anyone quickly, and he was speaking about ordaining someone too quickly. The presbytery should recognize the call on someone's life, which is a fourth indication.

(Ac 20:28) “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

(Tt 1:5) “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,”

(1 Ti 4:14) “Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.”

A fifth sign of the call to be an overseer is the recognition of the congregation. Jesus said the sheep will not follow a stranger. A man that is called to shepherd the flock should already be shepherding without the title. The congregation should recognize that call and their willingness to listen and follow him is another good indication.

(Jn 10:5) “A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

3. **Character of an overseer (1 Ti 3:2-7)**

Calling is not enough; pastors must also have the character to shepherd God’s people. The text says that a man must be above reproach. There are three different areas that a man must be above reproach. Notice in verse two that he must be above reproach. Paul then speaks about being the husband of one wife. In verse four he speaks about managing his household, and keeping his children under control. A man must be above reproach in his family life. In verse two, Paul begins giving different areas of a man’s character. A man must be above reproach in his character. In verse seven, Paul says that he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he does not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. He must be above reproach to those outside the church. These are the three areas that a man must be above reproach.

There are two different Greek words used in this passage for reproach. In verse two, the Greek word is *anepileptos* (Strong’s G423), which means not arrested. It literally means someone that has not be seized, caught, or taken a hold of. The implication is a person who has been charged with a crime, and arrested, and held captive. A man who is an elder is one that is not charged with any known crimes, offenses, or things that could discredit him or the church. He is above reproach. In verse seven, Paul uses a different Greek word, *oneidismos* (Strong’s G3680). This word means that an elder cannot be defamed, taunted, chided, or reproached. There is nothing in his life that the enemy can revile him about. An overseer must not be someone who has hands on him because of a crime, and he must not have things in his life that someone could grab hold of.

A. Character Above Reproach in his Family Life.

There are three areas that Paul mentions that he must be above reproach. First, he must be above reproach in his family life. Paul says that he must be the husband of one wife. He must manage his own household well, and he must keep his children under control with all dignity.

(1 Ti 3:2-5) "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife...{4} He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity {5} (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)."

He must be a faithful and committed husband. The husband of one wife has stirred quite a controversy in many churches. There are many who say if a man has been divorced, he can never be an elder. While I do think that there is clearly a higher standard for elders, I would align myself with those who say that this is talking about the man’s relationship with his wife. I find it hard to think that a man like Paul, who had the blood of Stephen and others on his hands, can be an elder and an apostle, while a man whose wife left him cannot be an elder. I agree with the camp that says this is talking about a man whose commitment is to his wife. His eyes are not on other women. He is a faithful husband. He has moral purity.

He must be a good manager of his house. It says he must manage his household well. Paul asks a great question. If a man cannot take care of his own household, how can he take care of the household of God. Managing your household encompasses many areas, but most importantly, the people in the household. An overseer must keep his children under control with all dignity.

This passage has caused one group of churches to force many of their pastors to step down. One pastor in Virginia was forced to step down because his children toilet-papered a tree. This particular pastor had written an excellent book on rearing children, but was forced to leave a large church because of this one incident. All of us have the ability and tendency to sin. I sin. My children also sin. The passage does not say that if a child of a pastor sins that he is unqualified. It says that he keeps them under control with all dignity, or gravity. What a church should be upset about is if a pastor is like Eli, who did not rebuke his sons for living in sin. A pastor should lovingly discipline and correct his children. A man should teach his children respectful behavior.

B. Character Above Reproach in his Personal Life

He must also be above reproach in the area of his personal character. Paul gives nine specific character qualities that the man must possess and be an example to the church. He must be temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, not addicted to wine, pugnacious, gentle, uncontentious, and free from the love of money.

(1 Ti 3:2-3) "An overseer, then, must be ...temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, {3} not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money."

Temperate means cool tempered, calm or stable. It means that he is even keeled. He is cool tempered. He is stable and steadfast. He does not get rattled easily. The dictionary says that a temperate man is not an extremist. You need a calm person at the helm of a ship in a storm. Anyone can be the captain in calm seas, but you need a temperate man in place for the rough seas.

People used to come from all over the world every month to sit under my father's teachings about supervising drilling operations. He taught the importance of having a calm man running the operation. Having a screamer in charge just rattles everybody. A person who is calm has a calming effect on everyone. The church is no different, and it can be a difficult operation to supervise. Churches need to have calm or temperate men managing the affairs of the church.

Next, an overseer needs to be prudent. Prudent means wise, cautious, or careful. A prudent man is discerning and not easily deceived or led astray. The Greek word is *sophron*, which means sober in mind. A prudent man is alert and prayerful. He stops and looks both ways before pulling into an intersection. In Proverbs 1:4 Solomon tells us that one of the purposes of Proverbs is to give prudence to the naive. Elders need a good dose of Proverbs in their minds.

(1 Ti 3:2) "An overseer, then, must be ...temperate, **prudent**, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,"

(Pr 1:4) "To give prudence to the naive, to the youth knowledge and discretion,"

Respectable means someone who you can respect. The Greek word is kosmios, which means to adorn. We get our English word cosmetics from it. The lives of a leader need to adorn the message of the gospel.

(1 Ti 3:2) "An overseer, then, must be ...temperate, prudent, **respectable**, hospitable, able to teach,"

Hospitable means to show hospitality to strangers. Someone who is hospitable loves to have people over to his house for meals or to stay. The Greek word is philoxenos, which literally means lover of strangers. Hebrews 13:2 says that we should not neglect to show hospitality to strangers. This is really at the heart of what hospitality is all about. Many people are willing to have their family or a friend over, but how many are willing to open up their homes to strangers. An elder is one who shows hospitality to everyone.

(1 Ti 3:2) "An overseer, then, must be ...temperate, prudent, respectable, **hospitable**, able to teach,"

(He 13:2) "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."

There is a tendency today for pastors to build privacy walls around their lives. They build protective walls around their lives so that they will not be hurt by people. God says that an elder needs to invite strangers into his life and home. He needs to tear down the walls and be with the people. Overseers need to be models of hospitality, because God wants a church full of people who show hospitality.

Karen and I used to have a different family over for lunch on Sunday every week. We were cooking for ten plus people anyway, what was a few extra? There is something very special about sharing meals with one another. We developed some very special relationships with people, and also had the opportunity to minister to many people through hospitality.

Overseers need to model hospitality, but the church needs to follow the example. In Romans 12:13, Paul writes that we all need to practice hospitality. In Hebrews 13:2, we are commanded not to neglect showing hospitality to strangers. There is an added benefit given there, that through hospitality some have entertained angels without knowing it. Learn to practice hospitality on a regular basis, and you may entertain a messenger from God.

(Ro 12:13) "contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality."

(He 13:2) "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."

Overseers must not be addicted to wine. This is pretty self-explanatory. Scripture does not preclude Christians from drinking wine; it just warns against the excess.

(1 Ti 3:3) "**not addicted to wine** or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money."

Next, an overseer must not be pugnacious, which means quarrelsome. The Greek word is plektes, which means a striker, which is how the KJV translates it. In 2 Timothy 2:24, Paul says that the

Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged. We are to be peace-makers, not those who sow strife. We are to be patient and gently people who can turn away strife and help people come to repentance.

(1 Ti 3:3) "not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money."

(2 Ti 2:24) "And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,"

Elder must also be gentle. Gentle means forbearing, equitable, fair, or reasonable. The KJV translates this as patient. The Greek word used here is epieikes, which means forbearing, equitable, fair, or reasonable. Jesus said for us to learn from Him, for He is gentle and humble. Without a gentle spirit, people will not be as receptive to your message. It is essential for elders to have the character quality of gentleness, particularly when someone needs to be corrected. This needs to be done in a spirit of gentleness.

(1 Ti 3:3) "not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money."

(Mt 11:29) "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

(Ga 6:1) "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted."

Next, an overseer must be a peaceable man. The Greek word is amachos (Strong's G269), which means not a brawler or contentious. Uncontentious means one who avoids quarrels, strife and arguments. Solomon tells us that strife is like letting out water, and that we must abandon the quarrel before it breaks out. Elders need to quickly recognize things that will lead to strife and contention, and diffuse these situations, so that quarrels do not break out.

(1 Ti 3:3) "not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money."

(Pr 17:14) "The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out."

Next, an overseer must be free from the love of money. This means that he is not worldly minded. He is not driven by money. In the church at large, some people in ministry have built kingdoms. They have airplanes, boats, extravagant estates, and the things that money can buy. A minister must have his heart set on the kingdom of God, not the things that are on the earth. John tells us not to love the world, nor the things in the world. He goes on to say that if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. A pastor needs to be full of the love of the Father, not the love of the world.

(1 Ti 3:3) "not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money."

(1 Jn 2:15-17) "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. {16} For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. {17} And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever."

He also says that the man should not be a new convert. The Greek word is neophutos (Strong's G3504), which means a new plant or new sprout. Paul says that the danger is that he will become conceited and fall into condemnation. In Paul's list to Titus, he did not include this requirement, since he had used the term elder, which meant spiritually mature. In this passage, he used the term overseer, and spiritual maturity is not inherently implied, so he specifically addressed this requirement. Overseers need to be spiritually mature, not new converts.

(1 Ti 3:6) "*and not a new convert*, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil."

C. Character Above Reproach with Outsiders

The third area that an overseer needs is to be above reproach with the outside world. Paul says that he must have a good reputation, so that he won't fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. The Greek word that is used for reputation is marturia (Strong's G3141), which means witness, testimony, or report. We get our English word martyr from it. A martyr is one who is willing to give witness of something to the point of death. The Lord does not want any shame or dishonor coming to his house, and an elder who has a bad reputation or witness outside the church can bring much dishonor to God's house.

(1 Ti 3:7) "And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

4. Capabilities of an Overseer

There are two areas that are specifically named. First, he must be capable of managing God's house. Second, he must be capable to teaching God's word. We will look at both of these areas.

A. Capable of Teaching

The NASB says an overseer must be able to teach. The KJV says that a man must be apt to teach. The actual Greek word is didaktikos (Strong's G1317), which means instructive. The root word is dao, which means to teach. Literally, an overseer is instructive. He has a heart to instruct people. He has the knowledge and word ministry skills to instruct people. This does not mean that he teaches all the time, but he must be apt or able to teach. The primary difference in the qualifications given for deacons and for elders is the ability to teach the word of God.

(1 Ti 3:2) "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, *able to teach*,"

A leader must not only be able to teach the word of God, he must be able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. He must know sound doctrine. He must be able to discern truth and error. He must be able to bring correction when false doctrine is being taught. This is a very difficult thing to do. On the island of Crete, there were not pastors in place, so Paul

told Titus to ordain pastors in every city. He went on to say that there were many rebellious men, empty talkers, and deceivers who needed to be silenced because they were upsetting whole families with their teaching. Pastors need to be able to teach sound doctrine, and bring correction to those who are teaching false doctrine.

(Tt 1:9-11) “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. {10} For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, {11} who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not *teach* for the sake of sordid gain.”

An elder that I know at a church that we used to be part of is a precious man and an excellent elder. He cares for people. He is a man with a heart for the Lord and for the Lord’s flock. He and his wife are always meeting with people, counseling people, and caring for them. He leads a men’s Bible study on Saturday mornings. He is able to teach. He meditates on the word and has rich insights. He has a solid Biblical foundation. However, teaching is not his primary gifting. He is a good leader and is full of wisdom. He is able to teach, but that is not his primary gifting or calling. Is he an elder? Absolutely!

B. Capable of Managing God’s Household

Next, an overseer must be able to manage. He must be able to manage his own household well. If he is not able to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God, which is God’s household. The Greek words that is used for manage is *proistemi* (G4291), which means to stand before, preside, or to rule. The KJV translates it as rule. It is very difficult to stand before or preside, if you are not organized, have a plan, and are prepared. Proper preparation brings calmness, peace, and success. One of the marks of good leadership is proper preparation.

(1 Ti 3:4-5) "He must be one who manages (*proistemi*) his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity {5} (but if a man does not know how to manage (*proistemi*) his own household, how will he take care (*epimeleomai*) of the church of God?);"

(1 Co 14:33, 40) "for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.... {40} But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner."

Management at home is a great indicator of whether a man will be able to manage other people. Management is primarily about people. A good manager must be a good people person. He must know how to relate to different people. He needs to know how to motivate and communicate with people. He needs to know how to correct people. But management of God’s household also includes many other things.

Management also includes the management of the finances. In the church of Jerusalem, the money was laid at the feet of the apostles, who were the leaders of the church at that time. Elders had not been established yet, so the apostles managed the finances. Throughout Scripture, laying at the feet means placing under their authority. When a king was defeated, the victorious king would place his foot on the king, showing that he now had authority over him and all that he had.

(Ac 4:34-35) “For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales {35} and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.”

Management includes planning, administration, supervision, decision making, and communication. A few years ago, I heard a pastor tell me that He was not to make any plans for His church. He was simply to trust the Lord. This pastor did not understand that planning does not have anything to do with trusting the Lord. Trusting simply means that you are believing God to do certain things. You can trust God to provide for you daily, or you can trust in your own resources. Whether you plan or are negligent in planning, you can trust in God or your own flesh. You can trust God to fulfill His promises or live with unbelief; it does not involve planning. God has given us the responsibility of planning. We can trust God to help us accomplish the plans we make, or we can trust in our own resources to accomplish our plans.

Conclusion and Applications

The office of overseer is a fine work for those that have been called and are qualified to do it. Elders should be passionate about caring for and feeding the flock. Elders are to be examples to the flock and to model godly behavior to everyone. They need to be above reproach in their family life, managing their children with dignity, and be a devoted, faithful husband. They need to be above reproach in their character, and they need to be above reproach with those outside the church.

Closing Prayer

Father God, thank You for Your instructions about the office of overseer. Thank You for the examples that we have of the early church and how our churches are to operate. The government of Your church is important, and You have given very clear instructions about how you want it to be organized and run. The church is Your family and Your household, and You want your family to be well-taken care of. You have set a high bar for those that aspire to be an elder and oversee Your household. Help us to build our lives and our church on Your word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Why are many people indifferent about church government?
- Why does our culture place a priority on finding young pastors while the Scriptures emphasize the spiritual maturity and character of pastors?
- Why is the character of an elder so important to the office?
- Of the many character qualities mentioned, which one stands out to you?
- The term PK, or preacher's kid, has negative connotations in our culture. The Scriptures say that an elder must keep his children under control with all dignity. Why is there such a difference?
- In Schaeffer's research, 71% of pastors stated they are burned out, and 90% of them said they are worn out. What is God's solution to this problem?

Introduction (1 Ti 3:15, 3:1-7)

1. **Clarification of the office of overseer** (1 Ti 3:1, Ac 20:16-28, 1 Ti 4:14, Tt 1:5-7, Eph 4:11, 1 Pe 5:1-2)

2. **Calling of an overseer** (1 Ti 3:1, 1 Pe 5:1-3, Ac 20:28, Tt 1:5, 1 Ti 4:14, Jn 10:5)

3. **Character of an overseer** (1 Ti 3:2-7)

A. Character Above Reproach in his Family Life (1 Ti 3:2-5)

B. Character Above Reproach in his Personal Life (1 Ti 3:2-3, Pr 1:4, He 13:2, Ro 12:13, 2 Ti 2:24, Mt 11:29, Pr 17:14, 1 Jn 2:15-17)

C. Character Above Reproach with Outsiders (1 Ti 3:7)

4. **Capabilities of an Overseer**

A. Capable of Teaching (1 Ti 3:2, Tt 1:9-11)

B. Capable of Managing God's Household (1 Ti 3:4-5, Ac 4:34-35, 1 Co 14:33, 40)

Conclusion and Applications