Qualifications of Bishops and Deacons

1 Timothy 3, part 1

In order to understand the qualifications, we must first understand the need for bishops and deacons.

Intro: In Romans 12:4-5, Paul describes how the body of Christ has many members and many functions, meaning that we all have the ability to edify the body of Christ and play a part in the ministry. This is still true today, but with these many members and functions there must be organization and leadership to keep the church on the path that Christ set for it. For this reason, God established leadership in the church.

11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-12

These people who would be called to the ministry were not called based on popularity, or by their ability, but they were called by God to edify the body of Christ by training people up for the work of the ministry. The training is key, because ministry isn’t just the minister’s job (Matthew 28:19-20, the Great Commission). We are all called to reach out to the lost world; it’s not just an occupation, it’s a calling for all of us. But in order to do this you have to be trained up, and this falls under the job of the bishops and deacons.

Today, as we look at church leadership, we will be looking at two specific offices in the early church at the time. The bishops, who would be your modern-day pastor, and the deacon, who is not the senior pastor, but serves the pastor by picking up the slack, or taking care of other duties of the pastor so that the pastor can focus on teaching the word and prayer. These two positions go hand-in-hand in order for the church to be organized and function properly. We see this in Acts 6:1-7, where the Apostles put in place men of good reputation to serve so that they are able to focus on the word and prayer. This is actually really important, because if the flock isn’t being fed spiritually, then the body won’t mature and be strengthened. The
deacons/servant leaders also need the pastor, because without the pastor, there is no leadership and vision for why the deacons serve.

In order to be a bishop or a deacon, some requirements that had to be met. These qualifications dealt with personal character, home life, ability to teach others, and experience in ministry. We will start with the bishop.

(v.1)

- “This is a faithful saying” – this is the second faithful saying that Paul has written in this book; the first is in 1:15. It simply means that you can bank on this, something you can trust in.

- “If a man” – Paul is specific about this, that men be the ones to lead in the church, because this is the order that God had set in place based on Genesis.
  - If this man desires this position of bishop it is a good thing, because the work that he will be trying to get into is the business of saving souls. It’s one thing to save someone’s life, but a totally different thing when God uses you to usher someone into everlasting life.
  - This is also a benefit for him personally, because if he wants to be in ministry, he is going to make himself more familiar with the things of God, which just draws him closer to God; but ultimately he must be chosen by God to fulfill this role.

Now we already know what a bishop is; let’s get into the job description of a bishop.

- The word “bishop” means shepherd, overseer, or spiritual director. Could also be an elder. This is a Christian man who is experienced and spiritually mature. Someone who is able to exercise godly care over a local fellowship.
  - The bishop is called to lead the church.

42 But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, “You know that those who are considered
rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”  

Mark 10:42-45 (NKJV)

- The disciples wanted to be great, and as in any culture, that meant being the leader, but Jesus shut them down and laid out his definition of leadership, and that was by serving a servant. The bishop/pastor of a church is to lead the church as a servant leader, not as a dictator who orders people around, and is too good for menial tasks.

- This is the example that is needed today. I have heard it said, “The congregation will always mirror the example of the pastor.” If the pastor is slack in his study of the word, the congregation will be slack in it too; if the pastor has no reverence for the things of God, then neither will the congregation. It also goes the other way. Where the pastor is on fire for the Lord, the congregation will be on fire. Basically, the pastor sets the pace of the church, by his example.

- In order to lead, the bishop has to also take care of himself spiritually. Without fellowship with the Lord, he cannot expect to receive the spiritual guiding of the Lord to lead the church.

- The bishop is called to shepherd the people of God.

**Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the**
church of God[a] which He purchased with His own blood. Acts 20:28

- The Bishop is to care for the people of God, as a shepherd cares for his sheep.
  
  - He is responsible for their safety – He keeps them safe from wolves and false doctrines that try to get in and cheat them of what they have in Jesus. He also goes after the broken and helps the weak.

  - He is responsible for their spiritual growth – The bishop is to feed his people the word, so that they get a regular dose of it and desire more.

  - He must never forget that these sheep are not his. They belong to God, who have been purchased by His blood. So the bishop cannot beat the sheep when he is angry with them, or take advantage of them, because one day God will require an account of how he treated Gods people. (Ezekiel 34)

Now that we are familiar with the job description of the bishop, what qualities does it take to become one?

- Blameless – This means that he is right with God and with man.
  - Right with God – Means that he cannot be entertaining sin in his life.
  - Right with man – He is not committing wrong against others.

- Husband of one wife – has the character of a “one-woman man”
  - Simply put, to be faithful to his bride, by honoring his marriage vows. Prohibiting marital unfaithfulness.

- Temperate - Able to be level-headed
  - Doesn’t let his feelings lead him, but is able to think clearly in any situation.

- Sober-minded – Doesn’t cheapen the gospel by his foolish behavior.
• He is able to think rationally and operate with good sense.

• Good behavior – There is a sense of order in his life.

• Hospitable – loves the stranger
  o This was an important quality for the early church because of the way people would travel back then. They didn’t have Motel Sixes to stay in, and many times it was up to the body of Christ to house traveling Christians. This quality is still important for ministers today.

• Able to teach
  o He must know the word, and be able to teach it to others.

• Not given to drunkenness
  o Not ruled by strong drink, or a drunkard

• Not violent

• Not greedy for money
  o Money is not his motivation.

• Gentle
  o He is patient with people.

• Not quarrelsome
  o Isn’t always looking for an opportunity to argue with someone.

• Not covetous
  o Has a love for people rather than material things, or someone’s ministry.

• Rules his house well
  o If his kids are not submitting to their parent and are disrespectful, then he won’t be able to lead people in the church. This doesn’t mean that his kids have to be perfect – kids will be kids – and sometimes because the house is in order children do rebel. The point is that healthy church leadership starts at home.
- Not a novice
  - Not a new believer or inexperienced, or they will become puffed up with pride, and be humbled like Satan. (Fall from heaven)

- Good testimony
  - People inside and outside the church must be able to see that he lives what he preaches.

Why are these qualifications important for the bishop/pastor? Because the character of the pastor must reflect godly character by how he lives his life.

- And Satan sets traps for the leaders of the church whose lives don’t match up with what they preach
  - 1 Peter 5:8 – Satan knows the heart of man, and knows how to tempt a man away from the Lord. Especially leaders of the church. The snare of the devil is the trap which Satan lays for those whose lives are not consistent with their profession. Once he has caught men in this trap, he holds them up to ridicule, disrespect, and contempt.
  - Unfortunately, Satan is good at his job, and we have seen many pastors fall into this trap, and the result is damage to the sheep. It causes people to throw dirt on the church and the name of Jesus.

Now that we have had a chance to see the qualifications of the bishop, let’s look at the Deacons.

The word “deacon” again means servant. In this case, this isn’t just limited to men; women can also be deacons.

- In Romans 16:1, Paul commends a woman named Phoebe who was serving at the church of Cenchrea (ken-kre-i), and the Greek word used for “servant” in that verse is the same word that is used for deacons in the church. The word simply means servants. In fact, many women have fulfilled this role in the church, from serving with Jesus, to Paul and even today; women have been a key part of the ministry.
The job of the deacon is to free up the pastor so that he can focus on teaching the word and prayer. In Exodus 17:10-13, after the birth of the nation of Israel, they encountered many enemies, and one of them was the Amalekites. In this battle, Moses went up on a hill to signal to Joshua, the general of the Israelite army, and his soldiers who was winning the fight. He signaled them by raising his hands to show them that they were winning. But as the battle progressed, his arms got tired, and Aaron and Hur came alongside Moses, and held his arms up so that the Israelite army wouldn’t lose heart in the battle.

The bishop leads the church and stands before the people to encourage and lead them, and the deacons stand alongside, helping the ministry to continue going forward. Deacons see a need in the church and fill it no matter what it is, because in the end they are servants.

- To become apart of the church leadership as a deacon, there are also a list of qualifications that must be met.

- Reverent
  - Must be respectful and have conduct worthy of it.

- Not double-tongued
  - You can depend on what they say, and trust they won’t twist the story behind your back.

- Not given to much wine

- Not greedy for money
  - This is important, because deacons would handle the offerings that would come into the church, and would need to be above reproach with how they took care of God’s finances.

- Holding the mystery
  - Deacons must understand Christian doctrine and obey it with a pure conscience, meaning that the way they governed the church was always based on the word, and lived out in their lives.
• Be tested
  o As they have been seen to be faithful, they can be trusted with more responsibility.
    ▪ How do they handle small task? How do they conduct themselves?

• Be blameless
  o Right before God and man

• Wives of deacons (not just talking about the wives of deacons but the female deacons)
  o Must be respectful, not speaking evil of someone (gossip), level-headed and faithful in all things.

If a deacon met these qualifications and served well, they would receive good standing in the church, which means they would receive respect and appreciation from the church.

They would also grow in boldness, which probably means that they would gain great confidence in God, because they would see the power of the gospel regularly proven in their ministry.

Notice in the text that the emphasis isn’t on physical ability, but on the character of the individual. Anyone can get up and speak, and anyone can clean a toilet, but God isn’t interested in what we can do for Him, but in the heart behind why we do it. Also, not every bishop/deacon who is called by God in ministry is perfect, and sometimes may not be as qualified as you would expect, like Timothy.

In conclusion, the qualifications for bishops and deacons appear overwhelming, but the thing that we have to realize is that with whatever God calls us to, all the righteous requirements have already been fulfilled in Jesus. Our part is to simply say “yes” to God; this is what’s known as walking in the Spirit. As we yield to the will and work of God’s word in our lives, we take on the character and conduct of Jesus.

The challenge for us today is to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the God we worship, that the world might believe in Him. Again, for the ministry leaders, it’s not about what you can do that makes the difference, but the heart behind it, in the same way our witness to the world isn’t based
on church attendance or being perfect, but based on whether or not God really does have our hearts, because out of that our lives will reflect the conduct and character of Jesus.