

# Biblical Leadership in the Pastoral Epistles

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Someone once said, “Sitting in a garage doesn’t make you a car or a mechanic.” This is especially true of leadership in the church. A comparison of many people’s experience with pastors and elders, and the requirements in the Pastorals, betrays a serious lack of coherence. Just because someone holds the office of elder doesn’t mean they are an elder.

There is a renewed interest in leadership. In fact, it is commonplace to hear about “training leaders” when we are accustomed to hearing about “training pastors.” Part of this is a welcomed shift. So often seminaries spend the bulk of their time filling students’ heads with data and then telling them they are ready to lead communities. We used to call it “biblical and theological training,” and now call it “ministry training”; the problem is that what was being taught, and how it was taught, has not changed. So I welcome the renewed emphasis on leadership issues, while at the same time valuing the necessary biblical and theological training that future church leaders require.

The bulk of the explicit teaching on church leadership in the New Testament comes from the Pastorals, especially 1 Tim 3. When joined with 1 Tim 5 and Titus 1, we gain a clear understanding of what Paul expected to see in the churches in Ephesus and Crete. It is our task in this chapter to walk through the discussions in the Pastorals, and then make some connections with the modern church.<sup>1</sup>

## Original Setting<sup>2</sup>

It is critical to understand the background of our passages if we are to understand the specific instructions, especially the *ad hoc* nature of the lists related to biblical eldership.

### The *Kind* of Leader in the Pastorals

Gordon Fee was the first in our generation to emphasize that the Pastorals are *ad hoc* in their teaching. In other words, they are not a church manual written in isolation from real life experiences. Paul is addressing real issues in a very real church; and when he lists the qualities of a biblical leader, he

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<sup>1</sup> If you are interested in a deeper exploration into these topics please see my full commentary on the Pastoral Epistles. William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 149-212, 302-323, 384-393.

<sup>2</sup> There is no question that historically, in first century Ephesus, the elders were men, so I will be using male pronouns throughout the chapter.

is thinking of the excesses of the false teachers in Ephesus. They were uncontrolled (*akratē*, 2 Tim 3:3); Paul says an elder must be self-controlled (*sōfrōn*). Elders were sleeping with the widows (2 Tim 3:6); Paul says an elder must be faithful in marriage (1 Tim 3).<sup>3</sup>

Paul had spent three years in Ephesus during his third missionary journey, a longer time than any other church (of which we are aware). When returning to Jerusalem, he met with the Ephesian elders in Miletus and gave them a stern and troubling prophecy. “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and *from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them*” (Acts 20:28-30, ESV).

God had apparently revealed to Paul that the Ephesian church was headed for conflict, and not conflict from without but conflict from within. In a healthy church, conflict should arise from without; in fact, it must. We are salt and light (Matt 5:13-14); in order to do our work we must be different from the world. Salt cannot preserve meat if it is not different from meat. Light cannot shine into the darkness of the world if it is itself dark. The church must be inherently different from the world; to some the aroma of life, and to others the stench of death. This is a good thing.

But this is not what was going to happen in Ephesus; the conflict was to come from within. There would be fierce wolves not sparing the flock, even though the church of God was obtained with Jesus’ blood. Those wolves were “men” (*andres*), and from what we can tell the false teachers in Ephesus were male. They were going to speak “twisted things,” which fits with Paul’s later descriptions to Timothy that they were in fact the elders of the church.

While Paul is prophesying specifically about Ephesus, life’s experiences has taught me that what happened historically is paradigmatic for much of what is happening in today’s church, and the solution for today is the same as it was then: appoint leaders who have the character (“above reproach”), calling (“able to teach”), and competencies (“manage his own household well”) to lead, and do so according to the processes outlined in scripture.

We cannot view the qualities as a checklist. True, they do govern the selection of leaders. If the candidate was a drunkard like the false teachers, he could not be selected as an elder. But if this were a checklist, then neither Paul nor Timothy could be elders in the Ephesian church since they were not

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<sup>3</sup> For the full chart in the commentary, see William D. Mounce, “Biblical Basis for Leadership,” last modified December 23, 2015, accessed December 24, 2015, <https://www.biblicaltraining.org//biblicalbasisforleadership>.

married. A person who had only one child could not be an elder, since elders must manage their “children” (plural) well. And if the lists were checklists, it would be difficult to understand why the lists are not identical.

Rather, Paul is describing the *kind* of person who should be considered for leadership. If married, is he faithful? If a person is single, this requirement does not go away. The question should be asked, how does he treat members of the opposite sex? Is he faithful in those relationships? If he has children, has he shown his managerial skill in the home? If he does not have children, has he shown in some other venue his management skills with people? The lists are *ad hoc* – meaning they were written for a particular purpose within a specific historical context.

### **The Duties of a Leader in the Pastorals**

Secondly, while the lists do not enumerate the duties of church leaders, we can get some idea of their tasks by reading between the lines. The first group are the overseers (*episkopoi*), who Paul elsewhere calls the “elders” (*presbyteros*). He says they are to “manage” the church, which agrees with sentiments expressed elsewhere that the elders were to “shepherd the flock” (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2). The one requirement of elders not shared by deacons is that they be able to teach (*didaktikos*, 1 Tim 3:2); the church is led by its teachers.

The second group of church leaders are the deacons (*diakonos*), a word meaning that they were involved in the day-to-day serving of the church. This does not mean the elders did not serve nor that the deacons do not lead. It does mean that each group had a specific emphasis, but the final, authoritative word did belong to the elders.

While the nouns “elder” and “deacon” are not used in Acts 6, the division between apostles (devoted to prayer and teaching) and the Hellenistic Christians (caring for the widows) creates a helpful picture. It also explains why an established church like Ephesus needed both elders and deacons while the new churches of Asia Minor (Acts 14:23) and Crete (Titus 1:5) only needed elders; only as the church outgrew the ability for one group to lead do we see the need for deacons.

On a practical level, this two-fold structure calls into question much of the modern day churches. There is no place in the New Testament for a “Governing Board” over the elders. There is no place for a church structure of deacons but not elders. There is no place for a “nominating committee” that controls the selection of elders. There is no place for a church without an authority structure. And it calls into question the practice of treating deacons as a stepping stone to elder, or as trustees without a spiritual component.

## The Standards of a Leader in the Pastorals

In the commentaries it is often argued that the qualifications for church leaders is so low, no better than secular norms, that Paul could not have written them.<sup>4</sup> After having pastored for six years, I changed my mind on what I wrote in the commentary. The fact of the matter is that the requirements are surprisingly high. Even though Paul does not enumerate any “spiritual” qualities, it is my experience, and the experience of many pastors, that very few people actually qualify for leadership. L. T. Johnson comments, “‘It is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy’ (1 Cor 4:2). Fidelity to one spouse, sobriety, and hospitality may seem trivial virtues to those who identify authentic faith with momentary conversion or a single spasm of heroism. But to those who have lived longer and who recognize how the administration of a community can erode even the strongest of characters and the best of intentions, finding a leader who truly is a lover of peace and not a lover of money can be downright exciting.”<sup>5</sup>

## Importance of Leadership

We will now turn to 1 Tim. 3:1 as the foundation for our exegesis of leadership in the Pastoral Epistles.

### The Nobility of Leadership

Paul begins by saying, “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” He is not saying the desire is noble, but that the task is noble. The normal challenges of leadership, combined with the special issues of leadership in Ephesus and the false teachers, would have made many people shy away from the task. And leadership is hard work. I am reminded of the person trying to recruit a new elder with the encouragement, “It is easy; just meet once a month and make a few decisions.” He knew little to nothing of the true task of leadership.

Practically speaking, there are two sides to this coin. Beware of the person lusting after power, who cannot find anyone to recommend him and so he recommends himself. Beware also of the good person who does not desire to be a leader; there are good people who are poor leaders. The office of elder is a good work, and candidates should understand the task and feel called to that specific ministry.

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<sup>4</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 160.

<sup>5</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, Knox Preaching Guides (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 148-149.

## The Necessity of Leadership

Because of the importance of the office, it is “therefore” (*oun*) necessary that the elder be a certain type of person. “It is necessary” (*dei*). This requirement is repeated in v 7. Interestingly, vv 1-6 are one sentence in Greek, and v 7 begins a new sentence that carries into the discussion of deacons. Both sentences begin on the same note: “it is necessary.”

I am reminded of the man who told me having requirements for leadership was legalistic and all we needed was good men capable of making decisions. I say to that: to violate the clear, unambiguous teaching of Scripture is dangerous, and to appoint elders that do not meet Paul’s qualifications is sin.

If there is anything I say that resonates with you the reader, it should be this: Paul is explicitly clear that due to the importance of leading God’s house, the elder must absolutely, unequivocally, be a certain type of person. Paul did not brook opposition to his decisions in the early church, and I doubt he would brook opposition to his assessment in today’s church.

## Exegesis of Leadership

In the remainder of this chapter, I will work my way through 1 Tim 3:1-8, pulling in data from 3:8-13, 1 Tim 5:17-25, and Titus 1:5-9. The numbers below refer to the relative order of qualities enumerated in 1 Tim 3:1-8.<sup>6</sup>

The qualities break down into three categories: *character* (above reproach); *calling* (Bible knowledge and ability to teach), and *competencies* (proven managerial ability with people). In addition to these three categories, Paul also speaks to the process of leadership appointment. Character is virtually untouched in modern seminary education. The second category, “calling,” is often disproportionately high within the current approach to ministry training, and the third aspect Paul highlights is often addressed in a single homiletics class, but, sadly, very little else in the area of leadership skills is required of those who will eventually lead.

## The Character for Leadership

### 1. Above reproach (*anepilēptos*)

This is Paul’s summary concern for all elders; in their character they are to be above reproach. Not

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<sup>6</sup> William D. Mounce, “The Spiritual Call of Eldership,” Pastor’s Position Paper, last modified March 5, 2011, accessed December 21, 2015, <http://doxa.billmounce.com/Eldership.pdf>.

perfect, but above reproach. An interpretive translation would follow “above reproach” with a colon because what follows for several verses is a description of what “above reproach” means. A person who is above reproach is faithful in marriage. A person who is above reproach is a clear thinker. The same instruction occurs in Titus. Seeing the destruction of the church wrought by the false teachers, it is easy to see why this stands as the head quality.

## 2. Faithful in marriage (*mias gynaikos andra*)

This is one of the great exegetical conundrums in the New Testament, word for word translated “one woman man” (or, “one wife husband”), with the emphasis on the “one” due to its forward placement in the phrase. For some unknown reason, Paul chose an expression that has not surfaced anywhere else in extant, Greek literature. It is therefore difficult to know what it actually means, and it is a call for honesty and humility. I have heard too many times that an elder cannot have been divorced because, it is claimed, this is what Paul says. It may be what he means, but it is not what he says. What is clear is that the womanizing false teachers were bringing the church under reproach and this had to stop. This requirement is repeated for deacons and again for elders in Titus 1, and also for widows (but in reverse, a “one man woman”).

It certainly cannot mean the elder must be married, or Paul and Timothy could not be elders and it would contradict Paul’s preference for celibacy.

Some believe it is a prohibition against polygamy, putting the emphasis on “one” (i.e., one at a time). But although polygamy was practiced among the Jews, there is no evidence it was practiced among Christians, and there is no evidence at all for polyandry (applied to the widows).

Some hold that it means “not divorced,” and others that it means “not remarried,” but a decision here is made primarily based on one’s view of the whole topic of divorce and remarriage and not on the exegetical facts of this specific verse.<sup>7</sup> Most recent commentaries and translations have moved rightly to the idea of faithfulness in marriage, hence the NIV’s “faithful to his wife.” This might allow a person to be an elder who was divorced in the distant past and has since shown himself to be faithful. It would also remove from leadership anyone who is addicted to pornography, or who is physically or verbally abusive. In modern English we have a slang expression, a “one woman kind of guy” (or some such variation). While there is no evidence that historically *mias gynaikos andra*, was slang, the expression

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the whole topic of divorce and remarriage see Paul E. Engle and Mark L. Strauss, eds. *Remarriage after Divorce in Today's Church: Three Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

does get at Paul's statement.

I have a friend who does group counseling for sexual addictions. He focuses on pornographic addiction in the elder board; he says that you can't face the issue of pornography in the church until you face the issue in the leadership. Unfortunately, he has many counseling groups full of pastors and elders.

### 3. Clear thinker (*nēfalios*)

*nēfalios* is also translated "sober-minded," "temperate," and is a quality required of deacon's wives as well. It speaks of a sobriety of judgment with a nuance of self-control. This is the person not controlled by his passions but able to make decisions. He listens to the issues, in humility considers the opinions of others, and then has the courage to make his own decision. It removes from leadership the person who simply votes with his friends on the elder board.

### 4. Self-controlled (*sōfrōn*)

This quality is related to "disciplined" (*enkratē*) in Titus; it is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23) and a cardinal virtue in Stoicism. It carries the nuance of (sexual) decency. This is the person who is in charge of his attitudes and actions, not tossed to and fro by the winds of emotions and appetites. This is the person who responds instead of reacting.

### 5. Dignified (*kosmios, semnos*)

*kosmios* occurs in all three lists. It is the head term in Paul's requirements for deacons and is also required of the deacon's wife. It describes the person who is worthy of respect, decent. It describes how he carries himself. It removes from leadership the person controlled by his passions and emotions, screaming instead of talking.

### 6. Hospitable (*filoxenos*)

An elder must gladly welcome people into his home. We understand that hospitality was especially important in Paul's culture, but even today table fellowship is seen as almost intimate. The NLT translates, "He must enjoy having guests in his home." Granted, there are conditions under which this is not possible — poverty, a season of busyness. But it does exclude from leadership those who are not oriented toward people, who do not value personal relationships, who prefer the power of leadership over knowing the people. Elders must be people-oriented.

## 8. Temperate in drink (*mē paroinon*)<sup>8</sup>

Characteristic 7 applies to the elders calling, so I will discuss it below. Apparently the false teachers were ascetics when it came to food (1 Tim 4:3), but drunkards when it came to drink; the requirement that a leader not be a drunkard occurs in all three lists (1 Tim 3:3, 8; Titus 2:3). All the translations work to make it clear that Paul is not prohibiting social drinking (e.g., “not addicted to much wine,” NIV), but excessive drinking. Etymologically, it pictures a person who spends too much time in the company of liquor (*para + oinos*). It reminds us of Isaiah’s ridicule of people whose pride lies in their ability to drink: “Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink” (5:22).

## 9-10. Not violent but gracious (*plēktēs, epieikēs*)

Both here and in Titus mention of the drunkard is followed by the requirement not to be violent, perhaps thinking of what we might call an “angry drunk.” This removes from leadership anyone who is a violent person, a brawler, bully; it is the opposite of being gracious, gentle, the type of person who embodies the Beatitudes of not insisting on his rights but willing to rise above personal injury and injustice as an act of love.

## Humble (*mē authada*)

Related is the requirement in Titus that an elder be humble, not stubborn and arrogant but willing to listen. This is the person who expresses himself clearly, even passionately, but without anger.

## Slow to anger (*mē ogilos*)

In Titus we also read that an elder must not be quick tempered. This flows naturally from the quality of humility.

## 11. Not quarrelsome (*amachos*)

Returning to the list in 1 Tim 3, we read that the elder must not be quarrelsome. This is the person who is willing to discuss topics that matter, even passionately, but is also a peace seeker. The term refers to serious bickering, even physical combat, and was an oft repeated quality of the false teachers.

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<sup>8</sup> Characteristic “seven” in this list belongs to a different category and so we have skipped over it here in our exegesis for the sake of keeping to the topic at hand.

## 12. Not a lover of money (*afilargyros*)

An elder must not be greedy for dishonest gain (*aischrokerdnēs*), which excludes the false teachers who were teaching for the sake of financial gain (1 Tim 6:5; Titus 1:11). The requirement occurs in all three lists, showing the depths of the problem in Ephesus.

## 13. Not a gossip or slanderer (*mē dilogos*)

Moving to the requirements of deacons, we meet a fascinating word. It is extremely rare, which means we have to look at its etymology. It is a compound of twice (*dis*) – said (*logos*). It is natural to want to define it more clearly. Perhaps it refers to a gossip, or saying one thing to a person but meaning another, or saying one thing to one person but another thing to another person. But the temptation to become too specific should be resisted; this is the person who lacks integrity, whose words cannot be trusted. It removes from leadership the person who votes one way in a board meeting but claims the opposite when speaking to others. It is the person who is not rigorously honest.

## 14. Loving what is good (*filagathon*)

It is not enough to simply be passive, to stay away from evil. An elder must actively, aggressively, apply Phil 4:8 to all that he sees and thinks and says. “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

## 15. Just (*dikaion*)

Church leaders must pursue both personal and social justice. This means they seek for conflict resolution at a personal level. It also means they seek reconciliation in whatever context they live and work.

## 16. Holy (*hosios*)

This is perhaps the most important quality when you compare Paul’s instructions to the state of the Ephesian and modern church. “Holy” means wholly dedicated to God. It means the elder hasn’t compartmentalized his life, giving some of it to God (the “holy”) but keeping back some for himself (the “profane” or “secular”). As long as we live in the tension between the “now” and the “not yet,” between the “promise” and the “fulfillment,” no one will ever be experientially holy. But it is the goal toward which we strive, living a life that is wholly pleasing the the Lord. And it must be the trajectory of the

elder's life.

As an example we need to look no further than the elder's sexual life. The statistics today are frightening as to the number of people calling themselves Christians who are sex addicts, whether it be pornography, affairs, or molestation, and unfortunately many of them are living out what was done to them as children. But whatever be the reasons, the elder's life must be characterized by an ever increasing movement from one degree of glory to the next.

## 17. Spiritually mature

The next quality of an elder is that he be spiritually mature. "He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil" (ESV). This is similar to the charge that deacons first be tested. "And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless" (ESV).

The practical question is, how mature, and how can you determine a person's maturity level? At the end of this chapter I will address the issue of a position paper and it is there that your church will need to decide things like the number of years. But experience has taught me that you do not know a person's character until you give them power. LeaderSource is a ministry training pastors especially in China, and they have what is called the four dynamics of growth: relational, instructional, spiritual, experiential. You see a person's spiritual maturity when you build a *relationship* with him, *instruct* him (as in this chapter), focus on *spiritual* realities (and not talking just about football or church), and especially when the person is placed into a moderated experience where they *experience* some power and responsibility with the possibility of failing.

## 18. Reputation

Related to #15 is the requirement that the elder have a good reputation outside the church. "He must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil" (ESV). "Of the devil" (*tou diabolou*) is probably a subjective genitive; Paul sees the devil as actively laying snares for Christians (cf. 1 Pet 5:8), and when he is successful the elder's reputation is destroyed. This also corresponds to the general concern that an elder be "above reproach."

## The Call of Leadership

The second set of characteristics required of elders is that they must be "able to teach" (*didaktikon*). The church is led by its teachers. This is their calling from the Lord.

Paul enlarges on this in his discussion with Titus 1:9. “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (ESV). From these two passages we see four aspects to the elder’s calling as a teacher.

1. The elder must *know* the Bible, or as Paul calls it in the Pastorals, the “teaching” (*didaskalia*). This does not mean that the elder must have a Ph.D. or that he be able to teach the minutia of scholarship. But it does mean that the elder must know how to read the Bible intelligently, lead Bible studies, and I believe know the church’s statement of faith.

2. The elder must be emotionally *committed* to the Bible, holding “firm to the trustworthy word” as he has been taught. It is not enough to know it; he must be fully committed to it in all aspects of his life. It is somewhat like Paul’s admonition that deacons “must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim 3:9).

3. The elder must be *able* to teach. This does not mean he must be able to stand in front of large crowds and teach for hours, but it does mean he has to have the basic skills of putting a talk together for a Bible study or perhaps a new member’s class in church.

4. Like Jude, he must be willing to fight for the faith, to *rebuke* those who contradict the teaching of Scripture. This means the elder must have some awareness of what is being taught in secular society, what are the current attacks on the Bible and the faith, and how to respond.<sup>9</sup>

The translation “able to teach” leaves the door open for someone to be able to teach but not actually teaching. This same idea may be reflected in 1 Tim 5:17, which may hold out the possibility of non-teaching elders. “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (NIV). Elders currently involved in teaching should have double honor, both the respect of the church and also a stipend, but those not teaching should not be paid. This may reflect the practical exigencies of a working class where there are times when elders do not have the time to teach. However, “especially” (*malista*) can be translated, “that is.” In other words, elders are those who labor in preaching and teaching. In this case, all elders teach. Given the structure of the first century church — house churches with perhaps 20 people per house — it seems doubtful that a person qualified to elder would not be teaching.

As mentioned above, the vast majority of a typical seminary’s education is to fulfill this requirement, and yet it is significant that the vast majority of Paul’s instruction has to do with character, not calling.

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<sup>9</sup> Two great resources available for assisting with this charge are Darrell Bock’s podcast, [www.dts.edu/thetable](http://www.dts.edu/thetable), and Liberty University’s Center for Apologetics and Cultural Engagement, <http://www.liberty.edu/ace/>. Both of these sources seek to solicit the expertise of leaders from around the world to discuss issues of cultural engagement.

The difference in proportion is significant. I am personally thankful for my seminary education; I doubt there was ever a sermon I preached that did not in some way come out of those years in school. And yet much of the challenges in the modern American church has to do with character, the same issue raised by Paul.

The practical question of how do you raise up qualified elders is indeed a daunting task, especially when it comes to being able to teach. My personal recommendation is that the lead pastor prioritize his life to first and foremost love God, then love his spouse and children, commit himself to sermon preparation, and fourthly to raise up the next generation of leaders. He should view the elders as his small group. Of course, this leaves little time for visitation and all the other tasks that so often improperly fall on pastors like mowing and cleaning. But the cure to this problem is to adopt a biblical ecclesiology, which is a different topic.

### **The Competencies for Leaders**

The third major category of qualities has to do with the elder's competencies. I could have included teaching abilities here, but since the distinguishing factor between elders and deacons is the ability to teach, I thought it warranted its own category.

The core competency that Paul enumerates is that the elder be a proven manager of people. "He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)" (NIV). Likewise for deacons, they "must manage his children and his household well." This requirement occurs in all three lists.

While any qualified elder will grow through "on the job training," his managerial ability must be to some degree visible before appointment. And note that it is a manager of people; the ability to manage a business does not necessarily equate with being a qualified manager of people. There are many successful businesses in which the workers are abused and give no evidence of their boss being a qualified manager of people.

Under this heading of "Competencies" I place the requirements concerning the elder's wife and children. The elder's family could have been a fourth category, but the family shows the elder's managerial ability and so I have included them here.

1 Tim 3:11 contains one of the most difficult exegetical decisions in all the Pastorals, and to my mind it is really a fifty-fifty situation. (1) If *gynaikas*, is translated "wives," then Paul has moved into a discussion of the elder's family, both his wife (v 11) and his children (v 12). "Their wives likewise must be

dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things” (ESV). (2) If *gynaikas* is translated “women,” then Paul is listing some of the qualities of female deacons. “In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect” (NIV). The word “deaconess” in Greek was not invented until the fourth century, and so it comes as no surprise to have a deaconess referred to with *gynē*. I opted for “wives,”<sup>10</sup> but the issues are so difficult that I would not base any major church policy on v 11. A decision here has no effect on the issue of women in church leadership; Paul is discussing deacons, not elders.

There is a similarly difficult decision when it comes to children. The NIV translates 1 Tim 3:4 as, “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect (*meta pasēs semnotētos*).” The NIV sees the prepositional phrase modifying the father. The NRSV sees *meta pasēs semnotētos* modifying the children: “He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way.” I opted for the former.<sup>11</sup>

A more difficult decision is in Titus 1:6. “His children are believers (*pista*) and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination” (ESV). However, *pista* can refer to the quality of being faithful, not specifically in connection with the Christian faith but rather speaking of their character in general. While in the commentary and during my time on the translation team for the ESV I opted for the former, since then I have changed my mind. The missionary journey in Crete was relatively recent, and I doubt if enough time had passed for fathers and their children to have become believers (hence, “faithful children,” HCSB, NET).

Having said this, if a man has children who are not walking with the Lord, he can hardly be a role model for the younger fathers in the church. And even if a man has most of his children living as Christians, if he has even one child who has wandered away from the faith, I suspect his time is much better spent nurturing the father-child relationship than trying to lead the church.

## The Process for Leadership Appointment

There is one more set of instructions in the Pastorals relative to our topic, and that is the process by which an elder is appointed. We have already seen that an elder must be mature in the faith and that the deacons must first be tested (a requirement I would also apply to elders). But in 1 Tim 5 we have more explicit instructions.

The first concerns charges brought against an elder. “Do not admit a charge against an elder except

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<sup>10</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 202-205.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear” (5:19-20, ESV). Paul invokes the familiar requirement from Deuteronomy that all charges must come with multiple witnesses. For the elder who does not repent (assuming the charges are corroborated and found to be true), he is to be publicly rebuked before the church (or the elders) so that the rest (of the elders) may be fearful in reference to their own sin.

The second set of instructions talk about the solemnity of the process. “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.... The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden” (vv 22, 24-25, ESV). The process of identifying, vetting, and training future elders is a time intensive, exhausting process. It is easy to see why Paul was concerned that someone too quickly be appointed to leadership. Some sins take time to surface, as do some good works; Timothy must be patient in the process. If he is not patient and does not wait for hidden sins to be revealed, Timothy himself will share in the culpability of the future sins of the elders. Rather, he must respect the process and appoint only the right people to leadership, and in so doing he will not “take part in the sins of others” but will keep himself “pure.”

This is a serious if not frightening charge. When church leaders appoint future leaders in a hasty manner, and if those future leaders have sin in their closet, then the appointing leaders are to some degree responsible for the sins that will come crawling out of the closet over time. If nothing else, this should greatly encourage us to adopt a biblical and systematic leadership training program in our churches.<sup>12</sup>

Paul says the Ephesian elders should “pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). If only we knew how the Holy Spirit made people overseers (“elders”), but the process is never clarified in Scripture, and so it is up to each church to make the determination.

## Conclusion

There is so much more that could be said, and I would refer you to my commentary for more details, but I would like to conclude with three observations. First, every church leader must be involved in leadership training, raising up the next generation of leaders. The task is too important to ignore, and too difficult for any one person. I believe the church must once again accept the responsibility of

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<sup>12</sup> One such process I am developing can be found at [www.biblicaltraining.org/leadership](http://www.biblicaltraining.org/leadership).

training its own leaders and not assume seminaries will do the work. Second, I encourage every church to write their own “Elder Position” paper. An example that I wrote is available online for those who are interested.<sup>13</sup> Most of Paul’s teaching is clear and requires little commentary, but some of his instructions are open to interpretation. Do an elder’s children have to be believers? All of them? Most of them? What if the elder became a Christians after his children left the home? There are many practical questions each church needs to answer for itself. But once done, the Elder Position paper becomes the guide by which new elders are elected. Lastly, I want pastors to imagine how glorious it would be to have a board of elders who actually did meet Paul’s qualifications! I suspect it would be heaven. Remember the injunction with which I began. The church is God’s house, bought with the precious blood of his son. Therefore, it is necessary that its leaders be of a certain caliber — above reproach, qualified teachers, with their managerial skills proven in how they love and care for their families. To do otherwise is to run contrary to the clear, unambiguous teaching of the apostle Paul, and *that* would not be wise.

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<sup>13</sup>See Mounce, “The Spiritual Call of Eldership.”