

# **Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:1-13**

## **By L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.**

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, March 13, 2011**, is from **1 Timothy 3:1-13**. This commentary also includes some scripture references that will help you understand the **mystery** Paul wrote about in **1 Timothy 3:9**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the *Bible Lesson Commentary*. The [International Bible Lessons](http://internationalbiblelessons.org) can be read at <http://internationalbiblelessons.org>. At the request of readers, the [Bible Lesson Forum](http://biblelessonforum.com) (<http://biblelessonforum.com>) *Bible Lesson Commentary* now includes the scripture text from the New American Standard Bible—Updated (**NASU**) and the King James Version (**KJV**), in addition to the New Revised Standard Version (**NRSV**).

### **1 Timothy 3:1-13 – NRSV**

**3:1 The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task.**

The title “bishop” is sometimes understood to mean “overseer,” “elder,” or “leader.” Paul indicated that it is okay to aspire to church leadership responsibility, and churches have a variety of leaders; such as, pastors, evangelists, elders, and deacons. Wanting to serve the Lord in a leadership role should be a noble aspiration to serve others, and not a means of private gain or self-centered authority over others; as Jesus declared, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35).

**2 Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher,**

Prior to selection, a church leader must have a demonstrated history of serving the Lord Jesus Christ and the church with good character traits and wise decision making. The person may have made mistakes in the past, but how these mistakes were handled is important for the church to consider. They may give some indication of what to expect in the future. If the church knows that the prospective leader is practicing sin or is not ready to serve as a humble leader; then, if selected, the leader will probably fail. An apt teacher will teach by both word and example, though perhaps most effectively by teaching only one person at a time in the beginning.

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

A leader must demonstrate self-control and not use any chemicals that will interfere with sound decision making, the needed influence of the Holy Spirit to reach their heart and mind, their study of the Scriptures, and the intelligence (or

wisdom) to give advice and counsel. A person can become known as habitually violent or prone to violence and quarreling; such a person needs to have demonstrated mastery over these faults before being chosen as a church leader. A lover of money may misuse church funds or lead for selfish reasons or take financial advantage of people in the church; such as, the manipulation of the elderly and widows to acquire special gifts or money.

**4 He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way —**

A leader must have demonstrated the ability to manage small things (projects? groups?) and inspired confidence before elevation to managing larger things, projects, people, the church of Jesus Christ. The church is the family of God, and if a person cannot manage their own smaller household well, they probably will not have the skills needed to lead the household of God. The church leader needs special skills, spiritual discernment, faithfulness to Christ and the Scriptures, and wisdom for true Christian believers to remain respectful of and follow their guidance.

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

A father usually sees his children more often than he sees those in his church, so he should have the ability and authority to discover their needs and problems and help them solve them. He also needs to get along well with his wife, or he may be so distracted solving problems at home that he will not have time for leading his church. Leadership skills are often developed first in the home, and good leadership in the home is of first importance before one seeks a church leadership position. What Paul says is best for all families and church families involved.

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

A long time church member may not be converted or truly believe the good news of Jesus Christ; such people seldom make effective church leaders. Likewise, a recent convert may not have the experience or humility needed to truly serve others. Being conceited often leads to thinking ones ideas are the best or only good ideas, and if these ideas are not accepted then a conceited person may wrongly conclude that others in the church are wrong or not spiritual or rebellious, and this can lead to poor results. The devil will use arrogant and conceited people to disrupt a church, leading to condemnation and failure.

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

If those outside the church know that the church has elevated to leadership someone they know as a notorious sinner, or a cheat in business and personal affairs, or a person who cannot control himself, then this will bring disgrace to

the church and the leader, for all will know that he is not qualified and the church makes poor choices. The devil can manipulate such unqualified leaders.

**8 Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money;**

Some deacons demonstrate the ability and moral character to serve as elders or overseers, and they should manifest the moral qualities that Paul described in this verse before being chosen as deacons. They should demonstrate sincere and conscientious commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and His work, His people, and His church. They should not lie or be hypocrites. They should show that they have self-control and are Holy Spirit led, and not allow themselves to be controlled by love of drink, drugs, or money.

**9 they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.**

Some truths are above human comprehension and the ability of unaided human reason to understand completely. Some truths are part of the mystery of the faith, Jesus Christ himself, who is the way, the truth, and the life. [Read some of the scriptures that teach more about “the mystery of the faith” below this commentary.] The facts included in “the mystery of the faith” must be believed by all church leaders because they are central to the Christian faith and way of life. The deacon’s conscience must not accuse him of practicing sin, because he has committed himself to serving the Lord.

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

A test will show what a person lacks, what a person has mastered, and where a person excels. Just as elders and overseers must be proven faithful before being selected as leaders, so deacons must have proven themselves faithful prior to being selected. To be blameless does not mean never having sinned, for then no one would qualify. Before selecting someone to serve as a deacon the church needs to know how the person has handled their mistakes and sins as a Christian. Have they followed the scriptures’ teachings when they have done something for which they are to blame? Have they repented for their sins, sought forgiveness, and resolved to live better in the future the Lord being their Helper? Are they just, gracious, and merciful toward others?

**11 Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things.**

Christian women need to have the same high moral standards as Christian men. Women are especially commended when they do not make derogatory and ungracious statements about others, but extend grace and love toward others—seeking their best. Women are also commended when they prove faithful to keeping their promises and other commitments.

**12 Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well;**

Some teach that the deacon [or elder] is not to have more than one wife at the time of selection. Others teach that a divorced person cannot be a deacon; while others teach that a divorced and remarried person is disqualified. If married, or if married with children, the deacon does need to have demonstrated their leadership ability in their family before being selected to serve as a deacon in the larger family of God. The verse is not usually interpreted to mean a deacon must have been married and raised children. Rather, the prospective deacon [or elder] must have demonstrated abilities consistent with caring for a family.

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

Deacons who serve well deserve recognition. Experience as deacons proves, on many occasions, the value of the Christian faith and the family of God in peoples' lives. Tried and tested experience as a deacon can lead to greater boldness in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, because the deacon knows the difference faith in Christ and the Scriptures makes from personal experience.

**1 Timothy 3:1-13 – NASU Text**

“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.

8 Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, 9 but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. 11 Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

### **1 Timothy 3:1-13 – KJV Text**

“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; 3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; 4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; 5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) 6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

8 Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; 9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. 10 And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. 11 Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. 12 Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

### **Some Scripture texts to help you understand the “Mystery”**

[Note: You may also want to do a concordance search on “mystery” “mysteries,” “secret,” and “secrets”]

### **1 Corinthians 15:51-52**

Listen, I will tell you a **mystery!** We will not all die, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

### **Ephesians 3:5-6**

In former generations this **mystery** was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: 6 that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

### **Colossians 1:25-27**

I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, 26 the **mystery** that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. 27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this **mystery**, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

### **Colossians 2:2-3**

I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's **mystery**, that is, Christ himself, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

### **1 Timothy 3:9**

9 they must hold fast to the **mystery** of the faith with a clear conscience.

### **1 Timothy 3:16**

Without any doubt, the **mystery** of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.

### **Revelation 10:6-7**

“There will be no more delay, 7 but in the days when the seventh angel is to blow his trumpet, the **mystery** of God will be fulfilled, as he announced to his servants the prophets.”

[Feel free to leave your comments, conclusions, suggestions, and thoughts as a Comment on the [Bible Lesson Forum](#). We can learn from one another.]

### **Five Questions for Discussion**

1. What qualities do you look for today when you select your leaders? In what ways should church leaders be different from leaders in other areas? In what ways should they be similar?
2. What makes church leadership “a noble task”? How can knowing this fact influence a leader?
3. What should disqualify someone from being an elder or a deacon? What can a church do if an elder or deacon begins acting dishonorably or contrary to the Bible’s teachings?
4. If an elder in the church is also an elected government official, how might that make a difference in the way they make decisions in government?
5. In what ways might a person be tested prior to being selected as a church leader? Why did Paul say this testing was important?

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