

SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 4



"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."

CHARACTER OF A BISHOP

Scripture Text: 1 Timothy 3:1-7

A bishop or elder must be a true Christian in every way— toward his home, the church, and the world.

Are elders chosen or are they placed? Both. In all of God's work in the world, there is an inner current between God and man, a mutual working, a spiritual unity. God places certain abilities in a person. He has a desire to use that ability for good. He yields his life to God. He prays for spiritual gifts, always submissive to God's will. God gives; the man exercises and develops. God calls and places. Just how He works it all, we cannot tell, but there is a divine harmony in it which is beautiful to see. It brings true success in God's work and joy to the worker (**1 Corinthians 12:18**).

MEMORY VERSE: *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine.—1 Timothy 5:17*

DAILY READINGS:

- Mon.—**Ezekiel 33:1-16** Responsibility of a pastor.
- Tue.—**Acts 20:17-38** Paul counsels the elders.
- Wed.—**Ephesians 4:7-16** Gifts for perfecting the church.
- Thu.—**1 Thessalonians 2:1-12** In trust with the Gospel.
- Fri.—**1 Peter 5** An elder and his flock.

Devotional Reading: **Titus 1:1-9** To ordain elders.

Desiring Spiritual Gifts

1 Timothy 3:1 If a man desire the office of a bishop— this is a rightful desire. **Covet earnestly the best gifts**—gifts of the Spirit to fit one for service. Desire spiritual gifts (**1 Corinthians 12:31; 1 Corinthians 14:1**). Elder designates the rank or position. Originally meaning older, it is used to mean leading or superior. Bishop and pastor denote the functions. Bishop means overseer or superintendent. Pastor means one who feeds the flock, a shepherd. The same men are called elders and bishops in **Titus 1:5, 7**. Pastors are used in **Ephesians 4:11**. **He desireth a good work**. It is good to lead, teach, and bring to Christ, feed spiritually, protect, comfort, encourage, and build up the flock of God. There is a great need for more to desire this work. It is good both in what it accomplishes and in the rewards it brings to the doer. But every privilege brings its responsibilities.

Are all elders who are called elders? Many are trying to fill the position that are neither qualified nor called of God. What is wrong? They were appointed or elected by man rather than by God. We cannot make one an elder or bishop by electing him. God must both call and place him. We are told to desire, even **covet**, spiritual gifts and office, preferring that of prophecy. Our Scripture lists the requirements for being a bishop or elder. For clarity, let us number them in order and divide them according to the phase of life covered.

Personal Character

1 Timothy 3:2-3 (1) **A bishop then must be blameless**—a clear connection with God, justified, righteous, holy, one against whom no blame can be rightly laid. (2) **The husband of one wife**— one at a time, not a bigamist. An elder is not required to be married. Paul was not. However, he was not a settled pastor except for limited times, rather an apostle and evangelist. Yet, does not Christian marriage make a good pastor a better one

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by improving his effectiveness and providing him a help mate? (3) **Vigilant**—watchful, attentive to duty and to the needs of the people. (4) **Sober**—of sound mind, wise in judgment, serious-minded, self-controlled. (5) **Of good behavior**—of orderly, right, courteous, and refined conduct. Silliness, rudeness, and inconsiderateness have no place in the work of God. (6) **Given to hospitality**—inclined to receive and entertain those away from home or in need. See **Hebrews 13:1-3**. (7) **Apt to teach**—both able and willing to communicate his knowledge to others, having clear understanding of the truths of God, and the ability to make them clear to others. He will use his ability both in preaching and in teaching publicly and privately. This necessitates constant study and prayer. He strives to master the Bible. (8) **Not given to wine**—a total abstainer from intoxicating beverages, and also, from tobacco and drugs. (9) **No striker**—not disposed to defend himself or his doctrine by force, not desiring to harm or destroy those who oppose him, no persecutor. (10) **Patient**—meeting suffering, hardness, or injustices with calmness, persevering in right, letting love overrule. (11) **Not a brawler**—quiet, peaceable, not contentious, not quarrelsome, not making noisy disturbance. (12) **Not covetous**—not desiring gain for himself, not desiring the things of others. (13) **Not greedy of filthy lucre**—unselfish, not preaching for money, not loving money for its own sake, no ill-gotten gains, not desiring money more than spiritual things.

Family Life

1 Timothy 3:4-5 (14) **One that ruleth well his own house**—takes the leadership of his family as a husband and father should. He does it **well**, is neither a slave driver nor indifferent. **Having his children in subjection**—requiring obedience from them, directing their actions, and knowing where they are and what they are doing. He will teach his children to be good examples, polite, and respectful of others and not be unruly. (15) **With all gravity**—with seriousness, thoughtfulness. He thinks of the children's needs physically, mentally, and spiritually. Because he loves them, he is careful to do his best to supply them. This is required because his home is a man's first responsibility, and if he **know not how to rule his own house**, neither can he care for the Church of God. The ability required is the same for both.

Experience

1 Timothy 3:6 (16) **Not a novice**—not a beginner or newly converted or inexperienced. How can one who does not yet know the way, lead others? How can one who has not yet learned, teach others? When he shows himself worthy and has enough experience to walk ahead of his people, let him lead them. A novice raised to leadership is in danger of the sin of **pride**, by which he will **fall into the condemnation of the devil**. Pride is a weakness most easily fallen into.

Community Reputation

1 Timothy 3:7 (17) **He must have a good report of them which are without**—respected by the unconverted world. Unsaved people will not feel fellowship with a saint will not understand or agree with him and may not like him, but his life must be so upright that they will respect it and call it good. If it is otherwise, he will bring **reproach**—shame—upon himself and the church, fail to lead people to Christ, and will be caught in the **snare of the devil**—devil's trap. God does not have a double standard. The rules in our lesson for bishops and elders are for the rest of the church also. The same standard of holiness and perfection is given to us all.

JUST A THOUGHT

To hear truth and refuse it does not nullify truth.

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Mary Lehmann.
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