

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

1 TIMOTHY 3-4

I'll never forget when my daughter, Natalie, brought a young boy home that she said she wanted to marry.

As a child, she had brought home several stray cats, and in my mind, this was similar, *yet far more serious...*

This boy was fresh out of college. His most significant job had been delivering pizzas. Yet the assumption was that he was going to serve as a provider for my daughter and future grandkids. He needed to be properly vetted.

And so I spent the next year quizzing my prospective son-in-law. I left no stone unturned. *I had a check-list longer than the Jiffy Lube... a 40 point inspection...* I wasn't going to entrust the leadership and care of my daughter to just anybody. The man had to pass muster!

And this is how God feels about His Church.

The Church is *the darling of heaven - the envy of the angels - the bride of Christ* - and God isn't going to turn the leadership of His daughter over to just anyone...

He expects pastors and church leaders to possess exemplary character. They need to pass muster.

And in 1 Timothy 3, God gives us a Jiffy Lube-like inspection for church leaders - *a character checklist...*

Verse 1, **“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.”**

The NT uses three titles for church leaders: “bishop,” “elder,” “pastor.” In Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5, you’ll find all three titles used interchangeably of the same person...

“Elder” refers to the man himself - his **maturity**.

“Pastor” or “shepherd” illustrates his **method**.

And “Bishop” is the Greek word “episkopos.” “Epi” means “over.” “Skopos” is “to scope out, to see, to look closely.” Thus, an “episkopos” over-sees. This speaks of what a leader does - his **ministry**. He views the big picture. He oversees the spiritual health of the Church.

Three ingredients factor into the qualifications for church leaders - **gender, giftedness, and character**.

And as with the person who married my daughter, **gender** and **character** are the most vital of the three.

Yet sadly, today’s Church stresses the **structure** of church government, while the leader’s **character** is compromised. The NT, on the other hand, is *flexible* on structure, but *uncompromising* in regards to character.

You can have the best structure possible, but it’s worthless if it’s filled with ungodly people.

This is why, throughout Paul’s letters, you’ll find little outlining *church government*, whereas Paul has much to say on the quality and calibre of *church leaders*.

He begins in verse 2, “A bishop then must be blameless...” Just because a pastor preaches well - *he can’t be a crook... or cuss out the umpires at the church softball game... or hide*

from his creditors... or cheat on his income tax... or neglect his wife and kids...

He has to live in such a way that earns respect.

It reminds me of the pastor who embezzled \$25,000 of church funds. One of the elders commented, “We need to find him and get him back here, so he can work off the money he owes us.” He missed the point.

Here “a bishop... must be blameless...” not sinless, *just blameless*. We all slip up and sin, but we should repent immediately and address the damage done.

The Greek word translated “*blameless*” means “nothing to take hold of.” There should be no glaring, blatant issues in my life that an outsider can point his finger at and accuse me or the message I preach.

Obviously, there was much in Paul’s past to incriminate him - but his past had been dealt with by the blood of Jesus - and now his life was a testimony to God’s amazing grace. For a pastor, the question becomes, “Are there current issues in my life that will discredit the message I preach, or the Savior I serve, or the church I represent? Is my life blameless?”

One day, as Saint Francis walked down the street a young boy reached out from the bushes and tugged on his coat. He pleaded, “Please Sir, be as good as we think you are?” We need leaders who are blameless.

The next qualification, “the husband of one wife...”

This is a debated phrase. One group says it’s a ban on polygamists holding church office. Polygamy, or multiple wives, was popular among first-century pagans... Other folks

insist it incriminates persons who've been divorced and remarried - essentially eliminating a divorced person from serving as an elder.

I don't think either interpretation gets at the heart of what Paul wants to communicate. A literal translation of the phrase would be rendered, "a one woman man."

Paul's concern isn't as much a man's marital status as it is his attitude toward women and sexual purity.

A man may've been married for 50 years, yet still not be "a one woman man." He's had women on the side, or a fascination with pornography, or he was a flirt, or his eyes just wander to other women - his thoughts and desires are obviously not focused on one woman.

Whereas, a divorcee who repents of any wrongdoing in his previous marriage - he's renewing his mind - he's now deeply devoted to the woman he's remarried... This is the fellow who qualifies as a one-woman man.

Bible commentator Kenneth Wuest puts it, "We speak of the Airedale as a one-man dog. It is his nature to become attached to only one man. Since character is emphasized by the Greek construction... it's the bishop's nature to isolate and centralize his love."

This also has implications for a church leader who is single. Though he's unmarried he still needs to be a one-woman man. It's wrong for Pastor Casanova to play the field. He'll disrupt unity in the church. He should wait patiently on the woman God has for him.

Here's more of the check-list... **“temperate”** means **self-controlled**. It's the opposite of having a temper. A temperate man is a leader with his emotions in check.

“Sober-minded” a man who thinks clearly and keeps issues in perspective. He's a level-headed person.

“Of good behavior...” He lives an orderly life.

“Hospitable...” the word literally means **“to love a stranger.”** An elder should be friendly to newcomers.

And **“able to teach...”** Maybe not in front of a crowd of 5000, but certainly in a small group of believers.

Then **“not given to wine...”** In verse 8, the deacon should not be **“given to much wine,”** but an elder needs to abstain completely. A pastor or elder is in a decision-making position and could be called on at a moment's notice. A leader's senses should never be dulled or his mind cloudy or foggy from the influence of alcohol.

In addition, **“not violent...”** A church leader doesn't push people around. He's not a spiritual bully.

He doesn't use force or manipulation to get his way.

A pastor or elder understands how to lead people with love and gentle persuasion. He's a peacemaker.

“Not greedy for money...” A pastor needs to *feed the flock, not fleece the flock!* He doesn't love money.

Once, a toddler was playing in the den and found a quarter on the carpet. As toddlers do, he stuck it in his mouth and swallowed the coin. The dad saw what happened and yelled to his wife, **“Quick, call the pastor!”** His wife replied, **“You**

mean 911?” He said, “*No, the pastor, he can get money out of anybody!*”

In addition, a church overseer should be “gentle, not quarrelsome...” It’s been said, “A troublemaker is a guy who rocks the boat then convinces everyone else there’s a storm at sea.” An argumentative, combative personality disqualifies a man from spiritual leadership.

And “not covetous...” or envious over other people... even over other pastors, churches, and ministries.

Verse 4, “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence...” This is a key - *do his wife and kids respect his authority?*

If a pastor can’t win the respect of those who know him best, you have to question if he lives respectably.

And when it comes to a pastors’ kids, *remember they are kids*. I shielded my kids from unfair expectations.

It’s not whether a pastor’s kids will rebel, they’re sinners, all sinners rebel. It’s how a pastor responds in the wake of their rebellion. And coming down too hard is just as foolish as not coming down hard enough.

A wise pastor/dad knows a balance is needed.

Here, Paul says that a pastor’s ability to manage his household is an indicator of how well he’ll manage the house of God. Verse 5, (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)...”

Being both a pastor and a father, I'm often struck with the similarities of the two roles.

Both require the combination of *a strong hand* and *a sensitive heart*. Pastors and dads have *to rule* (or take charge), but they also have *to love* (or take care).

Family leadership is good training for spiritual leadership - and spiritual leadership is good training for family leadership. A pastor should be good at both.

You can neglect your kids, and be mean to your wife, and still be a good doctor - *but not a good pastor*. If you don't lead your family well, you can't lead God's family.

Years ago it dawned on me that church members are fickle. They leave the church at the drop of a hat - *and for the pettiest reasons*. Yet at the end of the day - when the smoke clears - my wife and kids will still be my wife and kids. A wise pastor will prioritize his family.

And he shouldn't be **“a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.”** Often a new believer wins a few early victories, and it goes straight to his frontal lobe. He gets inflated.

He mistakenly thinks the power is his... *he's wrong!*
And if this novice is a leader, *when he falls*, the innocent people around him will be affected. This is why a newbie needs time to mature before he leads.

“Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” The snare of the devil is a progression - *puff him up*,

set him up for failure, knock him off his pedestal, then bury him in condemnation.

Rush a new believer into leadership and you play right into the devil hands. The church needs seasoned men with *character* - not just clever *characters*.

I'm often reminded of a scene from the movie "[Eight Men Out](#)." It's about the 1919 Black Sox Scandal. Eight Chicago White Sox players threw the World Series.

There's a scene where the great player, Shoeless Joe Jackson, is leaving a building and gets swarmed by reporters. They're shouting, "[What did you do Joe? Were you in on the fix?](#)" Suddenly a little boy, ten-years-old, his voice rises above the din of the crowd.

Everyone else grows silent. The boy looks at his hero and says, "[Say it ain't so, Joe. Say it ain't so.](#)" Joe hangs his head, then turns and walks away in shame.

I don't want a little boy in my church to look up at me, and say, "[Say it ain't so, Pastor Sandy, say it ain't so.](#)"

Verse 8, "[Likewise deacons...](#)"

Once a pastor and deacon went deer hunting. When they arrived at their usual spot, they found a "*No Trespassing*" sign. That's when the pastor remembered that old man's Jones' farm was just down the road.

The deacon balked. "[Yea, but Jones is a mean, nasty, ornery cuss.](#)" The pastor told him not to worry...

When they rolled into the yard, the deacon sat in the truck while the pastor went to get permission to hunt.

When the door opened, there was Jones, “Pastor nice to see you! You’re our favorite pastor. When we go to town, we attend your church - *what can I do for you?*”

Obviously, permission to hunt was no problem, but as the pastor walked away, the farmer asked him, “Pastor, I’ve got a crippled old horse by the barn that needs to be put down. I’m fond of him and can’t bring myself to pull the trigger. Will you shoot him for me?”

As the pastor walked toward the truck, he thought he’d have a little fun with the deacon. He jerked his rifle off the rack, and snarled, “Nobody’s going to talk to me like that...” He aimed his gun at the horse and *blam...* the horse dropped. Suddenly, he heard, “*blam, blam...*”

He spun around and there was the deacon with smoke pouring out of the barrel of his shotgun. The deacon yelled, “Come on pastor - you got his horse, and I got two of his cows, let’s get out of here!”

Elders and deacons make an interesting team.

Elders look after the spiritual needs of the church. Deacons handle physical needs. The Greek word translated “*deacon*” means “*servant.*” Elder is a role of authority and oversight. Deacon is a post of service.

I call the deacons - the **designated doers.**

In the book of Acts, the elders were chosen by Paul and the existing elders - whereas in Acts 6, the deacons were chosen by fellow members of the congregation.

And Paul tells us that the deacons, “*must be reverent*” or that is, serious about the things of God.

“Not double-tongued,” or loose lipped. A gossip has no place as a deacon in the leadership of the church.

“Not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.

But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.” All leaders need to be proven before they’re appointed! The golden rule on selecting church leaders is this - *it’s much easier to hire them than it is to fire them.* Test and vet them first.

Verse 11, “Likewise their wives...” Here’s an example of how Bible versions can mix interpretation with translation. The Greek text literally reads, “*Likewise the women.*” The KJV assumed Paul was addressing a deacon’s wife. *Maybe... but there’s another possibility.*

Other NT passages suggest there was a female order of deacons in the church. Romans 16:1 calls Phoebe “*servant of the church*” - it’s the word *deacon*.

Deaconesses are *sisters who serve* the needs of other women. Often in church life, situations arise that need a feminine touch. It’s nice to have a group of deaconesses available to meet those special needs.

I like what teacher, J. Vernon McGee, had to say about this verse. He believed the reason women today clamor for roles in the church that are reserved for men is because they’ve been denied their *rightful* role.

Here Paul lays out the character of a deaconness.

They “**must be reverent, not slanderers**” In the Greek, it reads, “**not she-devils.**” “**Devil**” means “**slanderer.**”

I heard of a lady who had a great way to combat gossip. When approached with a juicy tidbit, she would insist that she and the speaker go directly to the subject to see if the accusation was true. I doubt anyone approached her twice with a word of gossip.

Before you say anything about anyone, make it pass through three gates: **Is it true? Is it needful? Is it kind?**

The deaconess should be “**temperate, faithful in all things.**” Women in leadership should be self-controlled.

It reminds me of the fellow who said of his wife, “**My wife should be in Congress, she keeps bringing bills to the house.**” A temperate woman controls her spending.

In verse 12, Paul goes back to deacons, “**Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.**” A deacon who serves faithfully gains people’s respect and gives them clout to serve boldly.

In Acts 6, a deacon named “*Stephen*” is waiting on tables - serving in practical ways... In the next chapter, he’s preaching the Gospel and working miracles.

Deacon is a role where folks can prove themselves.

Verse 14, “**These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you**

may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God...” Here’s the theme of 1 Timothy... **“how... to conduct ourselves in the house of God.”**

“Which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” Where else can you go to find the truth of God... The government, media, and school system no longer support biblical truth. They often undermine it. There’s only one place people can go today to find God’s truth, and that **“the Church of the living God!”**

We are **“the pillar and ground of the truth.”** If the Gospel is an explosion of grace and truth, then think of the Church of Jesus Christ as Ground Zero.

Paul writes in verse 16, **“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness...”** Godliness is like this enchanting, mysterious, beautiful woman. She has a mystique about her. The more you get to know her, the more you realize you’ll never figure her out.

As Blaise Pascal put it, **“I love God because I know Him. I adore Him because I cannot comprehend Him.”**

Philosopher Mortimer Adler became a Christian at age 82. He explains why... **“I believe Christianity is the only logical, consistent faith in the world. But there are elements in it that can only be described as mystery.”**

My chief reason for choosing Christianity was that the mysteries were incomprehensible. What's the point of revelation if we can figure God out ourselves?”

And here Paul summarizes the Gospel’s mystique...

“**God was manifested in the flesh...**” The *Ancient of Days* became a *Child of Time*. The *Infinite* became an *infant*. The Gospel begins with amazement, wonder.

Jesus was “**justified in the Spirit...**” He worked miracles, but not of His own hand. His power came from God’s Spirit. He operated as we should - *by faith!*

He was “**seen by angels...**” Jesus often received angelic assistance. But what’s more amazing is that for the 30-plus years He walked the Earth every angel in the cosmos stopped in their tracks and marveled...

He was “**preached among the Gentiles...**” This was an unexpected twist. The Bible was written by Jews, for Jews, about Jews, to save Jews... yet immediately, the King of the Jews was preached among Gentiles.

And “**believed on in the world...**” A man who never traveled more than 100 miles from His own hometown has become Lord in every corner of the planet.

And He was “**received up in glory.**” What began so inconspicuously... with peasant parents - in a backwoods village called Nazareth - in a Bethlehem stable - in the womb of a young maiden - *crescendoeed in the clouds!* The risen Lord has ascended to glory!

The Son of God **shows up** in the womb of a virgin. He **goes up** to heaven from a hill outside Jerusalem. From *arrival* to *ascension*... **great is the mystery!**

Chapter 4, “**Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy...**”

In the first three chapters of his letter, Paul tells Timothy to use the Bible biblically - stand up for sound doctrine - fight the fight of faith.

He says elders should be “**apt to teach**” - and He calls the church “**the pillar and ground of the truth.**”

Why all this emphasis on right doctrine?

Because the closer we get to the last days, false teaching will abound. It’s a shock to a new Christian to realize not every so-called “*Bible teacher*” really teaches the Bible. Some speak “**lies in hypocrisy.**”

Realize not everything labeled “*spiritual*” is **godly** or **biblical**. Walk into the “**Religion and Spirituality**” section at a Barnes and Noble Bookstore, and you’ll find books by Max Lucado and the Dalai Lama on the same shelf!

Today’s world is fascinated with all things “*spiritual.*”

Paul tells Timothy there are “**deceiving spirits**” in the world, and *demons spewing doctrine*. When Satan fell, a third of the angels joined his revolt. These angels are spiritual, but they’re “**deceiving spirits**” who inspire false doctrine. Their goal is for us to “**depart from the faith.**”

And here’s Satan’s advantage in the battle - **he lies shamelessly**. Demonically-inspired teachers tell people *what they want to hear* or *what they’d like for you to hear*. Unlike God, Satan has no obligation to the truth.

This is why Paul says of these demonically-inspired teachers “**having their own conscience seared with a hot iron...**” They’ve lost any integrity or fidelity to truth. Their conscience has been cauterized or desensitized.

These teachers are no longer governed by sacred Scripture, let alone God's Holy Spirit. They're governed by *politically correctness*, not *theological accuracy*.

And in the next few verses, Paul provides a rundown of what these false teachers emphasize... **“forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”** From food to sex - the false teacher forbids what God considers to be good.

Mormons don't drink coffee, but God created coffee beans... *Seventh-day Adventists* are vegetarian, but God created meat - **beef and sausage and bacon!**

Roman Catholicism denies its priests the opportunity to marry and enjoy healthy sexual intimacy - and it puts undue pressure on the priests... When God created beans, and meat, and sex... He said that it was good!

And He hasn't changed His mind! You please God not through abstinence, but by thanking God for His many blessings and then using them for His glory.

Holiness isn't about what *I can sacrifice for God*, it's about what *He sacrificed to save me!* Biblical spirituality involves the work of Jesus on the cross, and the work of the Spirit in my heart, *not self-deprivation*.

In *Colossians*, we studied a heretical doctrine known as *“Gnosticism.”* It taught strange forms of asceticism.

Asceticism is the attempt to please God and grow spiritually through self-denial. Yet Paul couldn't have disagreed more! We become more spiritual, not through the denial of God-

given pleasures, but through faith in Jesus and the Holy Spirit at work on my behalf.

A quick survey of history and you'll discover how often these verses have been overlooked. Christians often try to grow spiritually through fleshy techniques.

In the fourth-century AD, monasticism became a popular means of seeking spirituality. Monks retreated to monasteries. Some lived in the forest and ate only herbs and roots - and wore loincloths made of thorns.

A monk named Simeon Stylites set the standard for extremism: he lived atop a column for 37 years and bowed 1,244 times a day." Simeon thought that the more he suffered the more spiritual it made him. He was wrong!

Even today, there are Christians with the mistaken idea that self-deprivation is the key to spiritual maturity.

The more I do *without* the more spiritual I'll become.

It's the, "*If I don't smoke, drink, cuss, or chew - or run with women who do...*" kind of attitude." But just keeping your nose clean doesn't alter your heart.

You can live in a cave - and eat nothing but communion wafers - and still be full of lust, hate, pride.

What makes a person holy is not *what we do without*, but *what we take in*. I grow in God by receiving His nature, pardon, peace, love, joy, and power.

Jesus said in Matthew 15:11 it's "*not what goes into the mouth (that) defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.*" Real righteousness is a matter of the

heart. Christianity is not me trying to clean up my act - it's me trusting God to make me new.

Religion *conforms* us from the outside in. Whereas, God's Spirit *transforms us from the inside out*.

In contrast to self-deprivation, verse 4 encourages us to enjoy what God created. "For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." Once you've thanked God for it, eating a bowl of chocolate ice cream can be an act of worship!

I've heard it put, "The world says, 'I live to pleasure as I die to God.' The ascetic says, 'I live to God as I die to pleasure.' But the Christian says, 'I live to pleasure as I live to God.'" Christians are free to enjoy the pleasures God created... a good cup of coffee, a juicy piece of meat, a glass of wine in moderation, sexual relations with my spouse... As long as my participation doesn't cause me or others to stumble, I can have at it.

Certainly, much depends on the context. Sex, alcohol, and tobacco are often misused. They're often used as the sacraments of people who worship only pleasure.

Take alcohol for example. Often it's *misapplied, rather than sanctified*. It dulls, not heightens, our love for God. *And there's always the danger of addiction...*

There are benefits to avoiding alcohol - *but the act of doing so doesn't make you more pleasing to God*.

In the proper context, there's nothing God created that we can't enjoy for His glory. God created life's pleasures and

we're free to enjoy them if our doing so enhances our *gratitude for God and dedication to God.*

Verse 6, "If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed." People need to be instructed in God's Word. Christianity is a teaching enterprise.

"A good minister" is all about "good doctrine."

"But reject profane and old wives' fables..." Astonishingly, even in a high-tech society like our own, 20 million Americans carry a rabbit's foot or some other good luck charm - *though it wasn't lucky for the rabbit!*

Paul encourages Timothy not to trust his destiny to silly superstitions, but rather "exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things..." Through physical exercise, you can firm up your thighs. But through spiritual exercise - *prayer, and Bible study, and service* - you can firm up your faith (*which profits a lot*).

Health Clubs work off a business model where they sell far more memberships than their facility can accommodate, because they know after a few weeks most people will no longer visit. *Exercise is hard work!*

And godly exercise is still exercise.

It's been said, "You don't stop exercising because you grow old. You grow old because you stop exercising." If your Christian life has grown old and lost its vigor, you've probably stopped exercising spiritually.

And here's why spiritual exercise is so vital... "having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance." Physical fitness has short term benefits, but spiritual exercise shapes you up for eternity.

I'd much rather have a sculpted spirit and a bulging faith that'll last for eternity - than a well-toned corpse.

Verse 10, "For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

These things command and teach.

Let no one despise your youth... At the time, Timothy was probably in his 20s, and it was an issue.

Jewish priests didn't begin their ministry until they were 30 years old. Too many folks, Timothy was a kid.

When I was younger, I ran into the same resistance.

Some people refused to come to CC because they wanted an older pastor. I'll never forget Mrs. Aleman...

On my 30th birthday, she was excited, "Pastor, Pastor, I'm so glad you've turned 30. Now we no longer have a young pastor!" I didn't know whether to smile or cry.

Paul tells Timothy not to be intimidated by those who frown on his youth. Spiritual maturity has little to do with natural age. You can be young and possess great spiritual depth, or you can be old and a spiritual baby. What matters is time spent with God and in His Word.

Paul says Timothy needs to forget what people think and get on with leading those who want to be led.

He tells him, **but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.**"

All spiritual leaders should be first and foremost an example to other believers in attitude and action.

"Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." Timothy needs to read and study his Bible.

The old adage is true, **"leaders are readers."**

Verse 14, **"Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership."** God gives us spiritual gifts. He anointed Timothy through the elders of the Church. They prayed and prophesied over him.

But you have to use the gifts you've been given.

In the Parable of the Talents, the man with one talent had it taken away because he buried it and hid his talent. With ministry gifts, it's **use them or lose them!**

Verse 15, **"Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all."** Notice, Paul expects Timothy to **"progress."** It's a sin when a pastor stops trying to get better at his craft.

Imparting God's Word is a vital task that deserves my best effort. I need to be growing from year to year.

And finally verse 16, **"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both**

yourself and those who hear you.” A pastor juggles a lot of balls: *hospital visits, and counseling, and administration* - but the one ball a pastor cannot afford to fumble is the teaching of sound doctrine.

The salvation of souls and spiritual growth of God's people depend on his faithful parsing of the Scripture.

The Bible needs to be a pastor's pressing priority.