

1 Timothy 3:1-16

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[0 : 00] Now as we come into this third chapter of 1 Timothy we have for most of the chapter we are concerned with the qualifications that the apostle writes as being necessary for a bishop or overseer or elder and deacons on the other hand Now the word that is used here bishop if a man desire the office of a bishop he desireth a good work The word bishop is in the Greek it's the word episkopos from which we get the term episcopal as an episcopalian church and you think well does that mean that they are right and we are wrong to be Presbyterian well no because the term bishop and elder or episkopos and presbyterios are used interchangeably in the New Testament and the same application the same descriptions are made of both bishop or overseer as the word means if you think of the term episkopos it comes from the term scopus meaning to see like a telescope that which enables you to see from a distance scope is that which you are able to see epi means upon or above so that which literally oversees episkopos is what you get episcopal from it is the overseer and likewise the term presbyterios or elder from which we get the term presbyter and presbyterian for our own form of church government it is used interchangeably and the objection of the reformers to having bishops in their church was not that they objected to the term but rather they objected to what the term had come to mean and their argument was not no no we mustn't have bishops it was that going by scripture we've already got bishops because wherever there is an overseer wherever there's a teaching elder in a congregation that's the scriptural term of bishop for a gathering of people and there's ruling elders and there's teaching elders and they're clearly on the same levels this oversight that is required it's the same meaning so this is why when the translators correctly translated as bishop you'll often find that modern versions will change it to overseer probably because of the implications of the term bishop but it's actually literally correct to put bishop it's just that it means the same as overseer or you know pastor as in our present understanding one who has oversight of a group of the Lord's people if a man desired the office of a bishop he desired a good work a bishop then must be blameless the husband of one wife vigilant sober good behaviour given to hospitality apt to teach not given to wine and so on and so forth now if you read these qualifications verses 1 to 7 for example what you might notice is first of all that there is only actually one real if you like gifting qualification required and that is at verse 2 apt to teach one who is to have the oversight of a congregation must have an aptitude or recognised ability or give thing that the church recognises to teach and this is clearly to be the teaching elder all the rest in whatever an elder or an overseer or whatever is required if you look at them they're actually pretty ordinary qualifications they're not always got to be one who's of outstanding intellectual ability and one who can know all the original tongues and the Greek and the Hebrew and he's going to have three degrees at least and he's going to be an outstanding person in his community and he's going to be one that everybody thinks is wonderful no the qualifications require actually very very ordinary in the sense

that they are something which every Christian really ought to be every Christian ought to be blameless in the sense that nobody should be able to point the thing and say look at the scandal they're guilty of look at the things they do aren't they terrible they should be blameless not drawing needless criticism towards themselves blameless the husband of one wife well this identifies the overseer as necessarily being male in that sense but also and here I'm going to float a boat a personal opinion here which I realise nobody else in the entire church shares and I've never come across a single person that agrees with me on it but still if you look at what it says here husband of one wife people down the centuries take that to mean one wife at a time so that if a minister or a presbyter or a bishop if he is widowed then he can be married if we turn the page to chapter 5 and we see the qualification for widows at verse 9 who's to be included amongst those who are cared for by the church let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old having been the wife of one man and if you were to say well what does that mean does that mean having had two or three husbands but you know they each died before she had another one does that qualify her and we'd probably say no it says one wife but we often find

I don't know whether it's male chauvinism or what that when he comes to the bishop being the husband of one wife then we'll say oh yeah yeah that only means one wife at a time it's okay for him to remarry if his wife is dead now I am very conscious that godlier men than me better men than me down the years John Knox Samuel Rutherford a host of other reformed giants have taken the line that provided you are respectively widowed it's okay to remarry and they have done so and the Lord appears not to have you know regarded that as sinful nevertheless again going by what the word of God actually says here's a personal opinion I personally take this to mean that a minister oblique elder should only have one wife full stop because that's what the bible says others disagree I'm not criticizing them you must disagree in love but this is what it says but leaving this on one side you know are we saying ordinary Christians it would be okay to have lots of different wives well of course it wouldn't what they're looking at is first generation Christianity here where people will have been in the situation of perhaps bigamy or polygamy if they've been pagans before perhaps they have married multiple wives perhaps they have gone on living in that system of either one proper wife and two or three common law wives and of course the church has to be careful how it deals with this it is said of one of the missionaries in Africa that they came across this tribe where the chief and various of the tribal elders had multiple wives and so they came in and the gospel said well that's no use you've got to get rid of whoever you married first and you can keep her and you get rid of the rest and of course when all these former wives then had no one to look after them no one to provide for them there was really nothing else for them to do to be able to sustain and support themselves but many of them had to turn to prostitution and so the message that the tribal peoples picked up was that the missionaries of this Jesus

Christ favoured divorce and prostitution and of course that would be the opposite of what they were in favour of so it may be that in certain circumstances in a first generation capacity it might be necessary for the church to say look you don't have polygamy and you don't have polygamy and so on but if you're already getting that then for this generation just look after your wives and care for them and so on probably better that you choose one of them to be a proper wife and the rest you treat as sisters and look after and care for but don't get rid of them but from now on if you're going to be a Christian it's only one wife now whether that's the situation we're looking at or not those who are to lead the church all these characteristics it's not that they are so special but rather they are to personify they are to embody not the bishop must be and the elder must be but the eldership the leadership those with the oversight must embody and personify what a

Christian ought to be it is that those who are to lead must themselves personify these Christian requirements ordinary Christians ought to retain or limit themselves to one spouse at least one at a time you know for ordinary Christians of course we manage after widowhood is fine but to be vigilant to be sober to be blameless to be of good behaviour to be hospitable not given to wife doesn't mean you have to be teetotal but just not given over to it little moderation no striking violent with your hands what can a Christian is going to be vile with their hands obviously some would have been people are being redeemed out of their old nature and sometimes it takes a while for that old nature perhaps to be completely if you like made gracious completely sanctified not greedy of filthy looker obviously this is something which works its way into the church because the church is composed of human beings it used to be said even in a reformed and protestant and presbyterian context leave aside all the abuses of the medieval church and Rome and so on that when people were considering their calling from the

[9 : 57] Lord and if they were called to another parish or congregation wasn't it amazing somebody dryly remarked and how people never seemed to be called downwards from big rich congregations down to a little sort of poorer ones they only ever seemed to be up the scale they were called the Lord now of course that's not to rubbish the sense in which a people may be called to greater challenge or bigger numbers or more responsibility but there is always the danger not so much in a day when everybody is paid the same as happens to be the case in a free church for example where the stag line is the same right across the board whether you're the minister of the biggest congregation or the smallest they're all paid the same that wasn't the case in a former age when the richness of the land and the area and the parish where you were would determine the kind of stipend that you got there's always the danger of love of money coming in greedy or filthy looker an overseer is not to be that but patient not a brawler the idea of an overseer an elder a minister being a brawler getting into fist fights outside the cavern sort of thing to us it seems ridiculous but again this is the kind of behaviour that the gospel was meant to be contrasted with this was the behaviour of the old pagan ways in Ephesus this is the way that paganism caused people to be brawling covenous drunkards and so on and promiscuous and lascivious and so on

Christians were meant to be examples of godliness sobriety moderation kindliness hospitality they were likewise not to have wild children that couldn't be controlled one that ruleth well his own house having his children in subjection with all gravity but if a man know not how to rule his own house how shall he take care of the church of god all of these things it's not that these things if you're going to be a bishop right make sure you do all these things but rather what Timothy is told to look for is look for men who embody these characteristics look for men who are themselves brave and sober and serious and faithful and blameless and hospitable look for men who live happily with their one wife and whose home is open and hospitable whose children are not under the thumb but who are suitably obedient and respectful and subjection with all gravity not a novice lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil now that means not too recent a convert doesn't refer to one's youth or age because you can still be a novice if you come to the faith quite late in life but the danger is that having just become a Christian and if you are then if you use the term promoted or given an office of responsibility right away then the old nature is still very very recent and the old self is still very much there at the door and the temptation well

I must be a far more convincing Christian than so many others look how quickly I've been given this position of responsibility actually really good I am able to exercise my authority and so on lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil those who have been believers a little bit longer who have gone on with the Lord who have experience of the difficulties and the struggles and the conflicts and the challenges and the problems of being a faithful Christian in a pagan society they recognize that leadership is so often leadership is literally service and that service is so often slog and I don't mean that in any disparaging sense but the vast majority of Christian service and that's what leadership is you're to lead by example and service will be unsung will be unspectacular and will maybe largely unseen it will be slog away in the background just like if you think of you know a great big massive warship think of us here an aircraft carrier or something that looks spectacular and say jets coming off and helicopters here and everywhere but how many of a crew will that huge aircraft carrier have well they have hundreds maybe thousands of a crew the vast majority of that crew you don't see they are working away either in the engine room or the boiler rooms or the screens and doing the sonar or they're cooks perhaps in the galley or they're doing their own particular job or they're on a ship and they're sleeping in their bunks so that when the next ship comes on they get up they get out they do theirs and the next ones go off for a sleep everybody's doing their job quietly faithfully largely unseen so that this huge big ship with all the necessary working parts of it the engines and the machinery and all the complicated stuff all works like clockwork because everybody is doing their quiet little bits but if anybody decides oh no

I want me to be seen I want to be up there on the bridge with the captain I want the brass around my hat I want the responsibility and maybe they're not ready for the responsibility because they haven't realised that with that power comes this solemn responsibility it's not a case of oh I'm in charge isn't it great it's a sense of you are responsible for the souls on that ship you are a care for their lives for their wellbeing that they are looked after that they are kept as far as possible safe it's not that it's a case of isn't it great to be up front isn't it a case to solemnly process in with a presbytery an induction or whatever no it's a case of you have the charge of souls people in a particular area will look to you as elders or as overseer or whatever for an example of godliness and they will take their example from what they see the overseers or elders or leaders or bishops do and what we ought to do of course is go by what the word of god says and go by the scripture says but often people say yeah but so and so does this so it must be okay because look he's an elder or he's a minister he's a bishop or whatever it must be okay if he's doing it

I must have got it wrong and people will take their example and their understanding of how to take the scriptures from what they see people do and that is the truth of the matter that we will often be the only bibles that some people will read sometimes even christians if a man know not how to rule his own how shall he take care of the church of god not a novice lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil moreover he must have a good report of them which are without in other words even the heathens ought to have a decent opinion of him lest he fall into their approach on the snare of the devil now it's not that the church takes its rule from what the world thinks but it would be counterproductive for the church to make rulers or leaders of people whom the world regards with total contempt because of their behaviour or by their perhaps double dealing with others or the way they conduct their business or whatever so being blameless will fall into the category of having a good report of them which are without lest he fall into our approach in the snare of the devil but notice

[17 : 50] I say again notice how unremarkable most of these characteristics are it is not that those in leadership are required to be special or super saints it is just that these are the characteristics that a Christian ought to embody and therefore how much more those who are to lead Christians should be the personification and the embodiment of these characteristics likewise must the deacons be grave not double tongued not given too much why not greedy of filthy lucre holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience and let these also first be proved and use the office of deacon being found blameless pretty much the same characteristics as are required for an elder overseer bishop the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience that is that which is that which was previously withheld from mankind but is now revealed to those who love seek and serve the lord and they hold that in a pure conscience as would the elders of course as well we'll come to talk about the mystery of god in just a wee minute but something to notice here about the deacons what is unusual here verse 11 even so must their wives be grave not slanderer sober faithful in all things it's the words must their wives you'll notice if you have the authorised verse in italics that means it's not there in the original

Greek and in the Greek as in the Hebrew the word for wife and for woman is the same so what we have in the actual text is even so the women otherwise be grave not slanderers sober now what's it talking about here is it talking about just the wives of deacons and if it is why doesn't it require it for the wives of elders bishops presbyters why does it require it for deacons but not for the the eldership wives and the suggestion is the likely understanding is that either we're talking about where there's a deacon his wife is in him as it were with them jointly in the early church or that there was some kind of office of deaconess which is the more likely of the two that there was a female diaconal office in a way that there was not a female presbyterial office now whatever form that took whether it was simply ministering to or practical ministries to women or children or whether it included practical ministries with men as well we do not know but what we do know for example is that in Romans chapter 16 for example we read verse 1

I commend unto you Phoebe our sister which is a servant of the church which is at Cancra now the word that is translated in English servant is the same word diaconon as we have for deacon or deaconess so whatever form that took I would suggest to you that there is a scriptural suggestion of at least in the apostolic church some form of diaconal recognized ministry that included women in this way otherwise it is extremely strange that the wives of deacons should have this additional requirement laid upon them that isn't laid on the wives of elders bishops overseers ministers what have you so that would imply this requirement that they have the same kind of characteristics as the male deacons grave not double tongue not given too much wine not given a filthy lucre grave not slander sober faithful in all things it's a very similar requirement and it would imply that there's something additional that perhaps we have missed from the new testament church let the deacons themselves be the husbands of one wife ruling their children their houses well for they that have used the office of a deacon well purchased to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in

Christ Jesus now obviously in the new testament church the deacons were not simply concerned with fabric and finance and practical work we see for example that Stephen was appointed amongst the first six or seven deacons likewise Philip who became Philip the evangelist and Stephen himself evangelised amongst the Jewish people before he was martyred and so on so they wouldn't be confined simply to the practical works but that is what they were called to and set apart for and if they prove themselves faithful and diligent and worthy in that then they might be called to the more spiritual office to subsequently these things write I unto you hoping to come unto thee shortly but if I tarry long that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God which is the church of the living God the pillar and ground of the truth now two or three things here first of all

Paul is saying well I hope I'll be there soon enough anyway but just in case I'm not this is how you are to order the church these are the kind of men of whom you should make leaders whether at diaconal or presbyterial level and or the kind of women who ought to occupy diaconal office but if I tarry long I just know how thou want us to behave thyself which is the church of the living God and the contrast here the living God as opposed to the dead idols remember that Ephesus is the centre of Diana worship die great is Diana of the Ephesians is the riot that they had in Ephesus but that's a dead idol as opposed to the living God the pillar and ground of the truth now of course the only pillar that we can have ultimately is Christ the one who holds up the entire edifice likewise so we have where the pillar is as it were going upwards the ground or ground is foundational that upon which we build if we look at 2 Timothy for example chapter 2 if we see there at verse 19 where we read nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure having this seal the Lord knoweth them that are his in his church which is of course a mixed bag where there is the pillar and the ground of the truth that which holds it up and that upon which the foundation upon which it is built the Lord knoweth them that are his that's the foundation of God that standeth sure and remember what Paul wrote to the

[25 : 06] Corinthians as well in 1 Corinthians 3 other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Jesus Christ the living God is the pillar and ground of the truth it's not really the church that is the pillar and ground of the truth it's of the living God the pillar and ground of the truth the church is built upon the foundation of Christ and the apostles the truth is not built upon the foundation of the church the church is not itself the foundation it is built upon the foundation the living God the pillar and ground of the truth and then we have this final verse which is quite a doctrinal verse there's a lot of doctrine a lot of teaching in it but it is thought by some commentators to be almost like an early church hymn like a sort of mantra that would be sung or chanted at their gatherings the gatherings of the

Christians which were often held before daybreak really early in the morning one reason for that being that most or many of the early Christians were slaves so that meant that they had to be about their duties once the day started so they would often meet effectively at night time so early morning while it was still dark so that they could meet together so they could worship together before the business of the day began so this was something it is thought by some commentators which they recited or sung or chanted because if you can see here there is a sort of rhythmic balance about it here without controversy great is the mystery of godliness or piety in other words you can have confidence in the mystery of godliness it's not a mystery because nobody understands it it's a mystery because it is that which was hidden but is now revealed that which was hidden but is now revealed remember that we are grounded upon the foundation that the lord is now where we have the what paul writes to the corinthians again going back to first corinthians chapter 2 remember what he says about the mystery of god in this year chapter 2 verse 7 we speak the wisdom of god in a mystery even the hidden wisdom which god ordained before the world unto our glory which none of the princes of this world knew was hidden from them too for had they known it they would not have crucified the lord of glory but as it is written i have not seen nor ear heard neither have entered into the heart of man the things which god has prepared for them that love him in other words you cannot perceive it with the human ear or the eye of flesh or with the senses you cannot penetrate that spiritual realm by that which is merely fleshly and he goes on but god hath revealed them unto us by his spirit for the spirit search of all things yea the deep things of god for what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of a man which is in him how can anybody know what you're thinking or feeling unless you tell them and how can anybody know what somebody else is thinking or feeling unless they tell you and how can you know what is in the heart of god unless god through his spirit reveals it to you now we have received not the spirit of the world but the spirit which is of god that we might know the things that are freely given to us of god which things also we speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the holy ghost teacheth comparing spiritual things with spiritual but the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of god for they are foolishness unto him neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned without doubt without controversy great is the mystery of godliness the mystery of this piety it is that which is hidden to the world it is hidden to those who do not believe and do not trust it doesn't make sense to them it is revealed only by god's spirit and what we find here is that this is this piety is as opposed to the ungodliness which wrong doctrine or worldliness brings with it if we look for example at chapter 4 verse 1 the spirit speaketh expressly in the latter times some shall be part from the faith giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils verse 7 but refuse profane and old wives fables exercise thyself rather unto godliness where there is wrong doctrine when it's simply fables or traditions or the words of men it will produce wrong results if you sow

bad seed you'll get bad plants coming up you'll get weeds you'll get toxic plants coming up and likewise in chapter 6 for example verse 3 if any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words even the words of our lord Jesus Christ and to the doctrine which is according to godliness he is proud knowing nothing but talking about questions and strife and so on so without controversy great is the mystery of godliness God was manifest in the flesh justified in the spirit seen of angels preached on to the gentiles believed on in the world received up into glory there's a sort of rhythmic balance here they're like couplets here in this particular verse now manifest in the flesh God became flesh and until such time as God the Son appeared from the womb of the virgin God could not be seen even God the Son could not be seen in heaven because we read that he was seen of angels but he wasn't seen of angels whilst he was in glory he was only seen of angels once he was born physically and then they beheld from heaven and they beheld his glory as he became the infant Jesus of Nazareth God was manifest in the flesh justified in the spirit why does God need to be justified you know surely he doesn't need to be justified like we need to be justified no to be justified is to be declared to be righteous and Christ is declared to be righteous by the Spirit of God when he appears amongst men to all intents and prepositions looks very much just like an ordinary man what declares him to be God the Son is not only the appearance of the dove and the voice of God from heaven which most people don't see of course only the disciples will witness it and John the Baptist and others but also the fact that having died he is raised again by the power of God this is God's testimony and the witness of the Spirit of God declares him to be righteous he is justified by the Spirit notice the contrast here the couplet manifest in the flesh justified in the spirit seen of angels heavenly beings preached unto the gentiles the nations the unbelievers those who are outside of the people of Israel see the couplet again see the contrast that which is heavenly with that which is earthly believed on in the world again earthly where he was believed having taught having testified people believed in him people accepted him received up into glory where just now of course he reigns at the right hand of the Father there is in each part of this verse there's an earthly and a heavenly an earthly and a heavenly element there is that which can be comprehended with the flesh manifest in the flesh justified in the spirit seen of angels preached unto the gentiles believed on in the world received up into glory these are the things which the Christians believed and recognized about the God whom they worshipped recognizing Jesus Christ as God and each aspect of it is a miracle the fact that he is believed on in the world first John tells us chapter 5 verse 19 we know that we are of God and the whole world lieth in wickedness all the world lies in wickedness and yet in Ephesus itself the center of Diana worship where remember if you read in Acts I think it's 16 uh there uh where you've got it might be 18 where you've got all the occult people who bring their books and their partitions and they burn them all they burn them all at Ephesus this center of occult practice and Diana

worship and so on the world life and wickedness but even there the shafts of light of the Gospel come in and not only is it new teaching and new doctrine but it begins to change lives and as it changes lives those who are able by God's Spirit to embody that change to live out that change to show the difference in their lives as they become living examples of the power of Christ and the witness of the Gospel problems such from amongst such might leaders be taken and set apart and ordained whether to the practical care of the physical aspects of the church's work or to the spiritual oversight and they are not called upon to be supermen and superwomen perhaps in the case of the diacono office they're just called to be ordinary Christians evidencing these ordinary characteristics that Christians ought to be but living it out consistently making a witness in their life in their testimony in their walk that they have been changed they have been transformed by the power of Christ this is the work of the Gospel this is what we declare this is what we believe and this is what the Ephesian Christians almost certainly recited at their gatherings grew without controversy great is the mystery of godliness he was manifest in the flesh justified in the spirit seen of angels preached unto the gentiles believed on in the world received up into glory and such a God in the flesh and now in glory changes lives changes hearts makes a difference and gives hope that is the God in whom we believe and that is the God who we ought to reflect in the lives that we lead on the path that we follow you