

A Godly Oversight in the Church

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bible readings this morning. We're back in Paul's first letter to Timothy and reading this morning the first part of chapter 3. 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 1, it's page 992 if you have one of the church visitors Bibles.

And Paul is writing to Timothy and to the churches that he's been sent to deal with and to help and to help restore in the great city of Ephesus in the first century.

Churches that were straying, that were heading for the rocks, real danger, but needed to be rescued to become again what God wants all his churches to be. Churches that will truly win the world for Jesus Christ.

And he's been telling them how to correct some of the problems that they've had and now gets to the heart of what the problem really has been. And that is that there have been leaders in the churches, the wrong people, the wrong men, and teaching the wrong things and leading people astray.

So 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 1, the saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble task, a good work.

[1 : 26] Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach. Husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, a violent man, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

He must manage his own household well with all dignity, keeping his children submissive. For if someone doesn't know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Deacons, ministers, servants, however you translate that word, they likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, and let them also be tested first, and then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

Their wives, or as you see the footnote says, their women, likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

[2 : 52] For those who serve well, gain a good standing for themselves, and also great confidence or boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Amen. May God bless just his word. Do turn with me then, if you would, to 1 Timothy chapter 3, where again we're listening to the apostle give guidance.

It's hard to steer churches away from the rocks, because the gospel ship is always in danger.

In a world of human sin and error. The devil's snare is always active. That's so today, just as it was in 1st century Ephesus, where Paul tells us here in chapter 3, verse 7, that he had brought disgrace on the churches.

Because it captured many, including church leaders, to do the will of the devil. That's how he puts it again in 2 Timothy chapter 2. And so the churches were heading for the rocks, heading for danger, heading for destruction of their work and witness in the world.

[4 : 14] And they needed urgent rescue. As we've seen, the influence of bad leadership had left the church, in many ways, with problems. First of all, they had a wrong outlook on the world.

They'd become inward-looking instead of outward-looking. Taken up with themselves instead of with God's salvation for the whole world. So chapter 2 begins with Paul calling them back to a right outlook on the world.

Praying for all people. Proclaiming the gospel to all people. With the passion of the Savior for all people. Who wants them to come to a knowledge of the truth and to be saved. Another corrective was needed, as we saw last time.

They had to regain a godly ordering of the sexes. Everyone needed to repent and start serving the gospel harmoniously. My lectern's gone unharmonious here for a moment.

Thank you. It's alright, it's not vital. They needed to start serving harmoniously together, but as men and women. Being men and women.

[5 : 17] Not coveting each other's distinctive roles. God's good ordering of creation makes the sexes complementary. And men, Paul says, are to lead in the roles appointed to them.

Women in the unique roles that they bring alongside men. Without which that human partnership can't be complete. Not least, as verse 15 pointed out, in childbearing. A wonderful calling only women can achieve.

As well as, of course, all the other distinctive feminine gifts that only women can bring to the life of the church. They have no need, says Paul, to covet the one forbidden tree at the center of the garden for them.

Which is, as chapter 2 verse 12 says, that of authoritative teaching in the congregation. The teaching through which the church is shepherded, is led, is ruled by the word of God himself in the midst.

And that's the context of our passage today. Paul goes right on from the end of chapter 2 into chapter 3. Of course, there's no chapter divisions or headings in what he wrote. And in verse 1 of chapter 3, he returns to this issue of church leadership through its teaching.

[6 : 23] And he makes clear that it's not just women who shouldn't wrongly seek that role, but many men shouldn't either. Because the problem in Ephesus was that many of the wrong men had got into these leadership positions.

Bad leaders teaching the wrong things. Leading the church in the wrong way. And so the care of the church was being badly damaged. People were swerving away from the truth, remember chapter 1.

Being led to shipwreck. And instead of being harmoniously serving the Lord together, chapter 6 makes it clear. It was a church full of controversy, quarreling, and constant friction.

And as a result, the reputation of the church was in tatters. Look at chapter 3, verse 7. Clearly implies, doesn't it, that the leaders had brought disgrace on the church.

So that they were badly thought of by outsiders. They were a reproach to the gospel, to the church, and to the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The teaching of men like Hymenaeus and Alexander that we read about at the end of chapter 1, Paul tells us in 2 Timothy, had spread like gangrene.

[7 : 34] And had led people right into Satan's snare. So if you think that Paul's action at the end of chapter 1 in putting these men out, in excommunicating them from the church, if you think that was a harsh thing to do, you need to consider the havoc that was being wreaked in these churches.

Why is it that, by contrast, all through the ages, the church has so often tolerated those who are destroying the churches from within? And more than tolerated them, often honored them with fancy titles and robes and honorary doctorates and all sorts of things.

Not so, Paul. He is determined to rescue the church and restore the church. And if need be, that means getting rid of these baleful influences.

Removing bad leadership and recovering and recognizing that which is good. Of course, some of them might well repent. He talks about that in 2 Timothy chapter 2. And says clearly that if some are able to cleanse themselves from what is dishonorable, then once again they can be set apart as holy for the good work of the gospel.

But some will not do that. And so they must be replaced. And it's absolutely vital that when they are, the right kind of men, not the wrong ones, take their place.

[8 : 56] Because if the churches are to be steered away from the rocks and have any hope of becoming churches that will win the world for Jesus Christ, there simply must be godly oversight in the churches.

Christian leadership and especially church leadership is an absolutely vital matter for the mission of the gospel in every age of the church.

And that's what these verses are all about. But please notice, Paul's primary focus is not, repeat not, on making the key to all this, getting your church polity right, your form of church government.

The endless words and discussions and talks that have been given as though that is what the primary concern of these verses is, is astonishing. As though this was all about whether we should be Presbyterian, as we are, or Anglican, or Congregational, or Brethren, or whatever else it might be.

Friends, if that is what these words are all about, then we have to say, don't we, the vast majority of the churches have got it wrong. Because everybody thinks that Paul here is spelling out in detail their particular form of church government.

[10:07] It can't be. Everybody's, can it? It is not the polity that must be right as the primary thing Paul is saying here. It's the people in leadership that must be right.

You find the perfect form of church government if such a thing exists. Put the wrong people in leadership and God help you and God help the church. But if you have the right people in leadership, then even in the most flawed system of church government, and every system has its flaws, even that can serve Christ and the gospel faithfully.

So if you're hoping this morning for a partisan defense of Presbyterian church polity, I'm afraid I've no help for you today. And neither has the Apostle Paul. Now we need to talk about things far, far more important than that.

Things that are at the real heart of true Christian leadership. That alone is what can bring real godly oversight that the church always needs. Whether you're in the first century in Ephesus or the 21st century in Glasgow, whether you're Anglican or Baptist or Presbyterian or whatever.

Three things that Paul is absolutely clear about here. The first is this. He tells us plainly that proper Christian leadership and especially church leadership and oversight, that it is a commendable responsibility in the church.

[11:36] It's a great work for a man. Verse 1. The saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble task.

Literally a good work. A beautiful work. An excellent work. Notice, by the way, like in chapter 2, verse 10, he said that godly women also must adorn themselves with good works.

Well, here's a good work for a godly man, says Paul. Now again, be careful not to get fixated on the terminology, especially if you've noticed the footnote there and it says that this word overseer is often translated as bishop.

The real truth is, friends, that as you read the New Testament, there is a very great deal of fluidity about the language that's used for church leadership.

Gordon Fee points out here in his commentary that very probably the overseers spoken of here and the deacons in verse 8 and following, that they both come under a larger category of presbyters or elders.

[12:41] That word's translated as older man in chapter 5, verse 1. Then again as elder in chapter 5, verse 17. It's a bit confusing to be translated in those different ways. In other words, what he's saying is that both of these groups of church leaders are going to be those who are drawn from senior, mature men in the church.

We mustn't get fixated by the terminology. What Paul is focusing on here is not particular offices in the church. That word office in verse 1 isn't actually there in the Greek text.

What he's interested in is not offices but proper oversight. He's not interested in titles in the church but he is interested in the task, the good, commendable, honorable work of watching over the church of Jesus Christ and making sure that it's led well.

So I like the good news translation. If a man is eager to be a church leader, he desires excellent work. I think that general language helps us because we just can't help seeing English terms in our Bibles, can we?

And we recognize that we experience those words in our experience of church life and then we read into the text our particular understanding of that structure and polity that we're used to.

[14:01] But the real focus here is not the quirks of church polity but the quality of these church people who are needed for the real work of oversight and care of the church.

And the work of the overseer or the bishop, it has absolutely nothing to do with the sort of hierarchical ideas of church government that came to dominate in the Roman Catholic Church or indeed in the Anglican churches as we know them today.

In fact, in these letters, as in all the other New Testament letters, very often the word overseer or bishop is used virtually interchangeably with the word presbyter or elder. In Titus chapter 1, Paul

tells Titus, doesn't he, to appoint presbyters, elders in every town.

Then in the next verse he says, he describes them as overseers and talks about their teaching ministry. So we've got to be careful. In our tradition, we tend to talk about ministers, don't we, who preach and teach.

And we talk about elders who help lead. So that means we have a certain view of what that all means. But in fact, as I've said, that word elder can mean anything from an older man to something that's synonymous with what we would call a pastor teacher, somebody who oversees the flock of God.

[15:18] So it's helpful, I think, to note what one scholar says. The term presbyteros, elder, is of Jewish origin. It signifies seniority. Whereas episcopos, overseer, was of Greek provenance, indicating a person's superintending role.

One's just talking about the seniority of the person. The other's talking about the task. And the key component of that overseeing task is that of authoritative teaching.

That's the primary role of the overseer. That's how you lead and oversee the church. It's through the authentic teaching of the word of God. And that's what Paul's speaking about here.

That role, John Calvin says, it means the same as minister, pastor, or presbyter. Not the role that Paul has said is to be aspired to by a woman. He's made that very clear.

But, by contrast, it is a good work, a noble task for a man. If that is, of course, he's the right sort of man.

[16:25] And, of course, crucially, as verse 3 affirms, if he's able to teach. What about these deacons mentioned in verse 8 and following? Well, again, that's a word that's come to mean different things in different groupings of churches.

I suspect to most of us, we tend to think of that as a more practical role rather than a spiritual one. But, actually, that's a mistake as well. In fact, the word just means servant.

It's the word minister. A minister is a servant. A minister of the government. A minister of the crown serves the crown. A minister of the church serves the church. We've made that title of deacon into something that's quite specific.

And yet, actually, Paul refers to himself repeatedly as a deacon, a minister. In service of Christ. In chapter 4, verse 6, here he calls Timothy a minister, a deacon, a servant.

And notice that in chapter 4, verse 6. Notice what it means to be a good deacon, a good servant of Jesus Christ. To be trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.

[17:27] So, whatever this kind of service or ministry is, clearly it is a very spiritual service, isn't it? It's not a merely practical thing where spirituality doesn't matter.

Actually, some have argued, and I think rather convincingly, that this whole term deacon or servant is used in the New Testament, often particularly of somebody who is sent with a particular mission on behalf of the church, either where they are or to another place.

Whatever that might involve, all kinds of different service, but always a spiritual service. That's why verse 9 here is very plain, that clear Christian conviction is vital for the role of the church servant.

So, in summary, as we think of this whole passage and its message, we should be clear that the principles that Paul is laying down here are really to be applied to all who are in any positions of spiritual leadership and influence.

And, of course, particularly to those who are in more senior positions, such as pastor teachers and so on, as well as the junior helpers, the servants, the deacons, whoever these people might be.

[18:36] And the key point is that church leadership, and especially that which involves wide oversight of God's church, that it is a worthy task.

It's a commendable responsibility. It's a good work, says Paul. That term, by the way, good, noble, well, it's all through this passage.

Translated noble in verse 1, in verse 4, in verse 7, in verse 12, it's translated well, managing well.

Verse 13, it's used twice, good standing and serving well.

But why is it a good and worthy task? And if it is, why should Paul have to say that it is? Well, it's an excellent work because, look at verse 5, because it involves care for God's church.

And God's church, remember verse 15 tells us, is his household, it's his family. It's the family of the living God himself. Not only is the church vital for the world as a pillar and buttress of truth in a world of darkness, the church is immensely precious to God.

[19 : 48] Remember what Paul said when he spoke to these church leaders in Ephesus, but way back in Acts chapter 20 when he was passing through. He said to them, didn't he, pay 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.

It's a noble task because it involves the care of the most precious thing in the world to God himself, his own blood-bought flock, his people.

And it's a necessary task, remember Paul said back then to those leaders, because after I go away he said, fierce wolves will come in and attack this flock. And that's exactly what has happened.

That's why he's writing this letter. And so as John Calvin so rightly says, Paul calls this a work, a task, because things that are excellent are often arduous and difficult.

So this role of church oversight and leadership he says is not a dignified sinecure but a work. But in Ephesus it had become a sinecure, it had become a means of gain.

[21 : 04] Paul tells us the false leaders had made it that, hadn't they, in chapter 6, a means of gaining money, of gaining position, of gaining staff, standing in the church. And so they had gained lots in worldly terms while the precious church of the Lord Jesus Christ had lost vastly in spiritual terms.

And so perhaps among decent godly Christians in these churches the whole notion of church leadership had become debased and devalued. They were turned off the idea for themselves and certainly as something to get their able young men to aspire to.

Don't think about that. No, no, no. Don't do that. Go and do something worthy. Go and do something worthwhile with your life. Or perhaps sometimes they realized how hard it was going to be to actually be a worthy and a godly church leader against all these odds in a corrupted church.

That's certainly what we see in 1 Peter chapter 5 where Peter urges some of those mature men to take the lead, to take the responsibility in hard circumstances. But when church leadership is debased in people's minds, no wonder the best and the most able of men are turned right off.

They want to seek something better. They want to seek a noble career, not something like that.

That's a view of our culture today, isn't it? Where the church is thought of as an irrelevance at best or as a laughing stock.

[22 : 33] And church leaders are portrayed in the media, aren't they? As pathetic fools at best or far worse. I grew up watching Dad's Army.

What was the emblem of the Christian pastor, the Christian leader? The pathetic, effeminate, feeble vicar in Dad's Army. That's the BBC's view of church leadership, isn't it?

Or more recently, it's the vicar of Dibley. And the associated gaggle of incompetent buffoons on her parish council. That is our culture's view of church leadership. Feeble men or fierce fat women in cassocks.

That's true. Well, what man, and especially what manly man, what man's man wants to touch anything like that with a barge pole?

Of course he doesn't. He despises the idea of a pathetic calling like that. And he knows that this world will despise and deride him even more.

[23 : 34] He even begins to talk with his friends about, well, I'm thinking about perhaps training to be a leader of a church. What? I'll never forget, I've told you before, about meeting the professor of medicine whom I'd worked for for several years in the corridors of Aberdeen Royal Infirmary after he'd heard that I was giving up medicine and I was going to train to be a church leader.

He looked at me with utter contempt and just said three words. What a waste. He turned his back, walked away and never spoke to me again.

And you know, funny thing is, I still get that from all sorts of people. And I get it from Christian people who say, why would you leave medicine become a church pastor or preacher?

Because they think that's a noble calling. But the church, why would you do that? Because, says the apostle of Christ, there is no greater and more important task in the world or in all time or in all eternity than the care of God's church.

church. The church he obtained with the blood of his own. The church which is infinitely precious to him. And the church which has an eternal purpose for God.

[25 : 03] He wrote to the Ephesians, didn't he, that it is through the church that the manifold wisdom of God is going to be made known, not only throughout the earth, but in the heavenly realms among the rulers in the heavenlies for all eternity.

The church is the focus of the eternal purpose of God our only sovereign. The church is the focus of the extraordinary passion of God our savior.

And so all the power of the spirit of God at work in this world is focused on his church, to grow his church, to fill his church with men and women and boys and girls.

He's calling out of darkness and into light, into the eternal life of his kingdom forever. God's God's God's God's God's God's God's God's church.

It's a good work, says Paul, to have a share in the care of God's God's church. John Stott tells us that the Lord Jesus was called both Episkopos, overseer, and Diakonos, servant.

[26 : 16] He came not to be served, but to serve, and he became the great shepherd and the overseer of our souls. And John Stott says, could there be any greater honor than to follow in his footsteps and share in some degree the episcopae and diakonia, which he is willing to delegate to us?

That's why Paul says this saying is trustworthy. If anyone desires to be an overseer, he desires a noble task, a great work. But notice he says nothing about the desire for that task in itself being necessarily noble or good.

To feel called to that work may be completely misplaced, it may be unrealistic, because of a lack of competence, a lack of character, a lack of gifting, particularly that gift of teaching.

In fact, James, in James 3, verse 1, reminds us, doesn't he, that comes with great responsibility and will be subject to stricter judgment. And so James warns people off having that desire. And the problem in Ephesus was precisely that the wrong people had desired that thing and had got into that thing.

And that's why verses 2 to 12 follow on immediately here, precisely because church leadership is a commendable responsibility, a great work in the church.

[27 : 40] It requires, says Paul, leaders who have a consistent reputation in the world. The world needs to see a good witness from the men who are senior church leaders.

And of course, from all other church leaders, all the deacons here, and the women who serve the church, verse 11, whether it is the wives of the deacons or whether it's other women who serve alongside them. Verse 2, therefore, because this is such a vital task to God and for his eternal purpose in the world, therefore, an overseer must be above reproach.

Verse 8, likewise, deacons must be dignified. Verse 10, they must be blameless. Verse 11, likewise, the women must be dignified.

Verse 13, all must have good standing. You see the key criteria, it's there in verse 7, isn't it? Well thought of by outsiders, not just insiders.

That's very striking, isn't it? Not in disgrace, but rather having a consistent reputation in the world.

[28 : 57] Now, again, don't forget the context of this letter. It's about an urgent rescue mission for churches that are already foundering on the rocks because of this. This is not a dispassionate manual for how to choose church leaders, have a job description and give questions for interview.

Sometimes people seem to take it like that. There's very little here, is there, about the job description. Paul doesn't say anything about what the job is. Timothy knows fine well what the job is. And when have you ever seen a church advert for a parish vacancy like this.

Wanted. Pastor for St. Paul's Church. We're seeking a man who is not a lecherous womanizer, not a drunkard, a violent, quarrelsome bully, certainly somebody who has not got an uncontrolled family and feral children.

We don't want a conceited Johnny come lately who's utterly disgraceful in the whole town. And we certainly don't want somebody who's seen by everybody to be worshipping the devil. Well, you read that in that's exactly the point here though, isn't it?

This is a list of what not to look for. And it's a clear description of what you do not want. And if this is what you have, you have to get rid of it as fast as you can.

[30 : 19] He's describing, isn't he, what the church leadership, at least in part, had become in Ephesus. And the disgrace and the shame that had come on the church among the populace of Ephesus as a result.

It was self-indulgence, we're told in chapter 5, not self-control that had marked these men. That's the influence they'd had on others, especially the women, it seemed, in chapter 5, verse 13. They turned them into idols, gossips, and busy bodies.

People who didn't give help to anybody, let alone even their own families. They were scandalized, even in the sight of the decent pagan outsiders living in Ephesus. The leadership in this church was not only destructive to the true faith and sowing division in the church, it was bringing disgrace in the world outside.

And the picture that you get from reading this letter is absolutely dreadful. But here's the thing, friends, the picture is not one that has been confined only to the church in Ephesus in the first century.

Alas, so often these things have disgraced the church all through the centuries. Think of the reputation of the clergy in the medieval church of Rome and their vast accumulation of wealth, their disgraceful sexual exploits.

[31 : 43] Think of even the popes, the Borgias, the names synonymous with sexual deviancy. Or think of more recent times in the terrible disgrace and shame brought on the church by the rampant abuse of children that's so scourging the Roman Catholic church today.

Or think of all the instances that have been of scandals among the charlatans who preach the gospel on the TV throughout the world with their private jets and their huge bank balances and so often their skeletons in the cupboard.

Or just in individual cases, things that have happened so many times. Bullying, sexual misdemeanors, financial misdemeanors, dozens of things that have brought the church into disrepute.

So yes, these churches, these verses clearly tell us the things that need to be avoided, what need to be got rid of urgently in Ephesus. But of course, they tell us about principles that stand true for all time.

In any place, the church needs leaders who will have a good witness in the world outside. Paul wants all believers to have that, doesn't he?

[32 : 54] He says that so clearly in chapter 2 verse 2. Everyone is to live dignified in every way in the sight of others, without reproach. But if that's going to happen, you certainly need leaders in the church who will lead in these things.

Look at verse 2 and verse 7. They encapsulate, don't they, this whole section about the overseers. Verse 2, they must be above reproach. Verse 7, they must be well thought of by outsiders.

And likewise, the deacons, verses 8 to 12, are just repeating almost the same teaching all over again with the one exception of dealing about being able to teach. The whole thing, all the way through, is about two things, isn't it?

It's about character and competence. And notice all the focus, it's on observable conduct. It's what can be seen by everybody, not just inside the church, but outside the church.

He's not saying church leaders have to be perfect. Don't be ridiculous. Don't read this like a sort of unattainable counsel of perfection. It's not that at all. What it is simply saying is that church leaders, and especially senior leaders, they are to be people without major and obvious character flaws.

[34 : 11] They're not to be people with obvious weaknesses of character, which will clearly risk bringing the church into disgrace and into ruin. And there's nothing particularly Christian even about these things.

This is what you want in your school headmaster, isn't it? It's what you want in your bank manager and your doctor, certainly in your MP and certainly in our government ministers, which alas, it isn't always. But how much more should these things be seen in leaders of the Christian church?

The church needs, says Paul, people of control, verse 3, self-control, not self-indulgence. A man in control of his appetites for women, for wine, for wealth, Paul says.

Somebody who is not in the control of the lust for these things. A man in control of his tongue and his temper, who is able to teach and isn't quarrelsome and isn't violent.

He's not a bully. He's somebody that other people will actually heed and follow, not somebody who is forcing and pushing people all the time. However brilliantly gifted a man might be as a speaker, it's not enough, is it, if he's got major weaknesses in these areas.

[35 : 23] The church needs a man who will care for people who are hospitable, who are gentle, relational people, who give to others in love, not taking for others in lust, for power, for influence, for gain.

men. The church needs men, he's saying, who are competent, competent to lead other people. In the case of the overseer, the pastor, teacher, a core competence is there in verse 3, isn't it?

Ability to teach. As I've said, Paul always emphasizes this teaching with authority when he's talking about the presbyter or the overseer.

Because the church is ruled principally by their labor in preaching and teaching. That's what he calls it in chapter 5, verse 17. Laboring in preaching and teaching.

That's how the church is ruled. Often people say in this list that amongst a whole load of character requirements, this about teaching is the one thing about a spiritual gift.

[36 : 27] It's different. I'm less and less persuaded about that. I think that's rather a strange thing. Part of being able to teach others is that others will have sufficient respect to be able to learn from you.

Isn't that right? And what Paul is saying is that's hardly likely if you're a violent, quarrelsome drunkard whose life is in total shambles. Who's going to listen to him? Now you see, a teaching gift, an ability with words, even words with sound theology is not enough.

Somebody can speak impeccable truth with great flair, but the point is it's what's heard by the people that really counts, isn't it? Paul uses that same phrase in 2 Timothy chapter 2.

Just listen to what he says there. Flee youthful passions. Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversy that breeds quarrels. The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

Now that's the kind of person, isn't it, from whom you can actually learn things. Those are the qualities that actually make somebody able to teach others. It's as much about character as it is about charisma.

[37 : 51] That's what really makes a Christian leader competent, according to Paul. And the competence actually is much more than just in teaching. Paul's clear here involves managing.

Managing the household of God, verse 5. That's what it means to be in Christian leadership. And that word's there in verse 4 about families. Again in verse 12. It's the same word translated as rule through preaching and teaching in chapter 5, verse 17.

It's translated elsewhere as being over other people, being in charge of other people. Christian leadership, like any other kind of leadership, requires being able to handle and manage other people.

That's why Paul says in verse 4 and again in verse 12, if you can't manage your own household, your own family, how on earth do you expect to go manage God's household at all? Never mind manage it well. Some men, says John Calvin, have great knowledge but, listen, are not sufficiently in touch with ordinary people that they keep their great knowledge shut up within themselves.

And such people, he says, ought to, as the saying goes, sing to themselves and to the muses and go and do something else. That's right, isn't it? Don't think that if you can't cope with your own children, with your own family or with your own household business or with your own secular job, you can leave all that behind and go and work in the church and it'll all be fine.

[39 : 21] Think again, is what Paul is saying. Don't think you can go into ministry for an easier life because you can't cope outside. That's why Paul says in verse 10, even the most junior leaders, even the deacons here, must first be tested.

Tested in life and tested in Christian service. Notice the also there, that implies, doesn't it, the same is true and even more so, of course, for senior church leaders. That's why ministry apprenticeships are so important.

That's why trainee minister positions are so important for anybody who might think that one day they're going to serve in full-time ministry. Competence has to be observed.

In all areas of life. And it has to be confirmed by testing. If you think that one day you might want to become a missionary overseas, do not think that by getting on a plane and going far away you will suddenly become a missionary.

If you can't serve competently the church of the Lord Jesus right here and now, do not think a few thousand miles is going to do a magic transformation on you. Don't think either that all of a sudden you'll become a competent pastor just like that if you can't manage your own children when they're under five.

[40 : 41] That will speak volumes about your competence. Paul says the church needs people of control, people of care, people of competence and of course people of clarity and conviction about the faith.

Verse 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. People whose clear Christian faith is observable in clear Christian behavior that doesn't sully their consciences publicly with the consequences of sin.

He's describing the very opposite of the church leaders there in Ephesus. What did their behavior lead to? Quarreling, constant friction. What is our charge says Paul in chapter 1 verse 5?

Love that comes from sincere faith, not sham. And it's very clear that this applies to all leaders likewise but do notice in verse 9 because he mentions it here when he's talking about deacons that just emphasizes doesn't it that the deacon's role is a spiritual role it's not just practical however menial it might be at times.

And verse 11 applies it to spiritual women whether that is the wives or whether it's female servants that most scholars seem to think it does refer to.

[41 : 57] All in all we could sum the whole lot up couldn't we with one other word beginning with C credibility. Credibility. He's saying church leaders in every role they're in need to be people with credibility in the world outside as well as just inside the church.

People with a consistent reputation in the community in the city in the country. And they'll be that says Paul only if they are people not of sensuality not people always serving themselves but people of spirituality who serve and are seen to serve Christ and his people in the church.

When people see somebody like that they're seeing a man of sincerity who holds to the faith with a clear conscience there's no sham and pretense. They see a man of stability not a shallow person but someone who has real depth of Christian character not a narrow person focused on selfish ambition but with a breadth of care and influence among many in the life of the church and in the community.

And they see not an untried person but a person with a history with a proven track record of dependable service for Christ that brings not disgrace but honour.

Men of sincerity men of stability and men of strength not quarrelsome but not quivering either. A man who is able to teach who's able to be heard even when he has to exhort and rebuke with all authority as Paul says he'll have to do.

[43 : 37] Somebody who is respected by all inside and outside the church as a man not as a mouse. Dick Lucas puts it this way Paul he says is describing a man sized job.

No mistake not a macho bully nothing nothing like that but a strong shepherd who will fight for the lives of the precious people of God bought with his own blood with stability with sincerity and with strength.

This is not says Galvan a dignified sinecure it's a work. Paul describes this task as hard labour it's physically demanding it's not for somebody who's a clock watcher who doesn't want to work hard forget it it's mentally and spiritually demanding it needs strong men John Calvin knew what he was talking about he says this office is laborious and difficult and those who aspire to it should be careful to consider whether they are capable of bearing such a heavy burden things that are excellent are also arduous and difficult and Paul is saying the church needs men of consistent reputation for this commendable responsibility but when the church does have that he says in verse 13 at the end here it brings a clear reward there'll be a gracious winsomeness in both the messengers and in the message of the church verse 13 for those who serve well they gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence boldness in the faith that's in

Christ Jesus that verse I think just sums up the whole passage and it's telling us what proper well-functioning leadership produces for the church and for the world it's not just the deacon service he's talking about here it doesn't say serve as deacons it just says those who serve well he's meaning all of them and when Paul says that he is saying that in every sphere of church life when things are as they should be then people will gain for themselves and for the whole church both recognition and results there'll be recognition he says there'll be credit for Christ's messengers they'll have a good standing in the community and there'll be results there'll be confidence for the message they'll be able to speak boldly about their faith in Christ Jesus that's how the good news Bible translates it rightly it's the word used of Peter and John's boldness in Acts 4 in preaching the gospel it's what the church prays for in Acts 4 that we would continue to speak the word of God with boldness with confidence that's what

God our Savior wants for his church that's what will bring people to a knowledge of the truth to find salvation but it comes says Paul only when there is godly oversight in the churches it won't come when church leadership is allowed to go wrong won't come when leaders are disgracing the church

in the world only when they're dignifying it not when they're betraying the truth of Christ but when they're beautifying it in the sight of all when they're seen to be leaders of something that is good and right and pure and precious now friends not all of us and not most of us will be called to be church leaders but every one of us needs churches that are properly led that's the only thing that will keep churches from going onto the rocks it's the only thing that will keep churches bold and beautiful for the gospel beautiful in powerful godly winsomeness in the people and bold and powerful gospel witness to that faith and if we want

[47 : 37] Christian churches that are like that if we want that for ourselves if we want it for our children and for our grandchildren if we want it for our city and for our nations and for the other nations of the world then it involves all of us doesn't it we need to be seeking such men we need to be training such men investing in them testing them supporting them sending them and deploying them people who prove to be of consistent reputation to do this commendable responsibility so that the church will reap that clear reward of a powerful witness to our Lord Jesus Christ he desires that all people should come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved only churches like that will be able to fulfill that mission let's pray our God and Father how we thank you that in our Lord

Jesus Christ we see the great servant who came not to be served but to serve and the great shepherd and overseer of all those that he loves so would you help every one of us to follow him in every leadership responsibility you give to us whether it be in our homes with our children with other believers in the church whatever responsibility you have given to us to steward that we might beautify the message and that the message of Christ may be seen and also heard boldly proclaimed and that we would all be the kind of people from whom others can hear and can learn of our great God and Savior who desires all people to be saved for we ask it in Jesus name
Amen