

A Pattern to Follow - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **1 Timothy 3:1-7** (#531)

Introduction: What is a family? Rather than any sort of genetic relation, the idea of the family has changed over the past few decades to include anyone who chooses to go through life together, whether there is legal recognition of that fact or not, whether there is any sort of binding commitment or not. And yet, we Christians have been given a definition for the family to aim at, which begins with God's creation of Adam and Eve in the garden. **Genesis 2** speaks to that God ordained order, just as it clarifies – in **verse 24** – how that family is to grow and continue: through the marriage of one man and one woman.

It is only with that God-given background in view that we can rightly understand what Paul is writing here in **1 Timothy**: the church is a family. In contrast to the common belief that churches should be run – or at least influenced and guided – according to business principles and organizational management theories, what the Scriptures insist on is that the church is to be governed much like a family. This is Paul's basis for what he said to women in **1 Timothy 2**, and it will be the continuing basis for what he writes to men in **1 Timothy 3**. In **verse 15**, Paul even refers to the church as the “household of God,” which is a theme that will come up again later in this letter to Timothy.

If our organizing principle isn't politics, economics, or sociology – if it is the family, as Paul has been arguing – then what does that look like in practical terms? How should our church be organized? How can we, together, be and make disciples according to Christ's command? Let's see in **1 Timothy 3** today...

3:1 The first principle that we need to see is that there are roles in the church. That might already be obvious from our discussion with you ladies back in **chapter 2**, but let me remind us of it again here: just as the Lord gave men and women equal yet distinct roles for the family, so He continues that pattern when it comes to the church. Thus, our church is not organized based on some sort of pragmatic “what works?” or “who’s best at this?” principle, but instead according to the commands given here in the Scriptures. We begin with Paul’s description of overseers – sometimes referred to as elders or bishops...

What Paul first tells us is that seeking to serve Christ’s church in this way isn’t a bad thing but instead is a “noble task.” Now, why does he bring that up? I think it’s fair to say that some of the same concerns you and I might have – some of our own hesitations about those who seek a leadership position, some of our own worries about their motivations, certainly some of the examples that were seen back then in the Ephesian church – were really nothing new. Power and leadership have always been a challenge for sinful human beings, and there is little difference there between the first century world and our own. But, rather than acting as if leadership in the church is bad, Paul insists on the opposite. Just as it is good for the family to be served through the God-given roles of men and women, so it is good for the church to likewise be served in a God-ordered way.

Men: desiring to serve Christ’s church is a good thing. As we’ll see in the coming verses, the primary requirements to do this faithfully and well aren’t what we tend to think of when discussions of “leadership” come around, but instead the call is simply to be a faithful, consistent, imperfect-yet-forgiven man who strives for holiness and is willing to show others how to follow that path. Every man here should be asking the Lord in prayer what it will look like to serve Christ’s church.

Many of you will be called in other ways and other areas, but some will be called to be overseers. That's not something that you should feel ashamed of or try to avoid. Instead, it is a noble and honorable way to serve Christ's people well.

So, what does a faithful example to Christ's people consist of? Paul answers...

3:2-3 A lot of ink has been spilled on these two verses and a lot of opinions have been put forth: some in the same spirit as Paul's writing and some that seem to be fixated on a certain hang up or concern. Rather than delving into random details, I'd like to make three observations:

The first is that all of the traits listed in **verse 2** are positive: these are things to be pursued, embodied, and upheld. If somebody wants to be an example to Christ's church – and being an example is a better description of the role of overseer than what we often think of if I were simply to say “leader” – then notice that these are the sorts of things that God's people everywhere, overseer or not, should strive for. Here, all through the passage the language is specifically male, which is why we limit the role of overseer to men. A man who wishes to serve as an overseer should look to be living faithfully, such that no sustained concern would be true of him. He should be a husband of one woman. While we often debate about what this means for divorcees, Paul's usage of the term is likely not focused on that question – instead it seems to be: if married, does the man care for his wife like Christ cares for the church? Is he devoted to her? Notice how that's a much broader picture, in some ways it's even stricter than simply being a narrow emphasis on divorce.

Not only these, but an overseer is to not be ruled by their passions or whatever reactions are applauded by our society; no, he is to be known for being level-

headed. Similarly, he is to be self-controlled – not only in words, but also in actions. This sort of example should lead to respect, at least from fellow Christians who care for what the Scriptures say more than traditions, preferences, or culture. He is to be demonstrating care for others – that is what hospitality points to. Often, we try to use this as a litmus test, as in “have I been in their home?” While that’s not entirely wrong, again, the point is larger: hospitality is more than just entertaining people in your home, but also caring for the needs and comfort of others in a Christ-like way. And, as well, he must be able to teach. This man isn’t necessarily supposed to be an expert professor, so let’s be careful of seeing this too narrowly. The teaching in view here relates to their skill, accuracy, and willingness at communicating and exemplifying this kind of Christian life and truth to others.

That’s the first point. The second is just the opposite: **verse 3** largely contains the “nots,” these characteristics should generally not be true of him. Drunkenness certainly isn’t a Christian characteristic, and I suspect we could safely conclude that this would also apply to being controlled by any other substance, legal or otherwise. Notice that being violent is prohibited and gentleness commended. In a similar vein, always being argumentative is not a good thing. On that note, let me push against the spirit of our age: so often we trumpet those who have an opinion about everything and seem to like sharing it. We call them “strong leaders,” but we shouldn’t. We do need men to example what it means to land faithfully in their understanding of the Bible, but we don’t just want personalities and opinions as our examples. Peacefulness, humility, not always needing to weigh in: these are good characteristics that we should be looking for. When it came to finding a king, the Lord told Samuel that the heart mattered more than appearance, so also here: these characteristics are less about “leadership” and more about character. Which is why we can also say that this man must not love money. That’s almost

sacrilegious to say these days: we tend to judge everything economically, from health care to putting a roof over somebody's head. That isn't the Christian measurement, and it shouldn't be the thinking that guides God's people.

Third, D. A. Carson has pointed out something that we need to see: with the possible exception of being able to teach, none of these characteristics are remarkable at all. We should expect these of every man in the congregation. And, in a broader sense, most of these should be characteristic of you ladies, too. So the picture here is not of an exceptional man, somebody just a step below Jesus, but instead it is of a faithful man. This isn't to a checklist so much as it is a snapshot, pointing the church toward examples of how to actually live the Christian life.

Towards that goal, Paul lists three other traits...

3:4-5 The first speaks to the man's family. Remember the context: the church is a family. So if the man is to provide a faithful example of Christ-like living and serving, he needs to first be doing that in his home. How so? It looks like the pattern that Paul has already alluded to for how God created the family, and it involves – as the Old Testament spells out in detail – children who submit to the authority of their father. I don't think this means perfect children – then nobody would be an overseer in Christ's church! But it does point to a pattern of family life: if the man exemplifies Jesus to his family, then he's likely to be able to help the church to see and hold to that way of life and belief also.

3:6 Next, we see something about the man's record, his history in the faith. Often, our culture has gone one of two wrong ways on this: either we think that age equals faithfulness, meaning we only appoint overseers who are quite old; or we

join the youth-obsessed spirit of our age, all but ignoring this command. We must do better: the point is, does this man have a track record of following Jesus? Experience does matter. How *much* is left up to our discretion, but this man certainly should have followed Jesus long enough to make the earlier characteristics plain in his way of living, thinking, and speaking.

3:7 Lastly, Paul looks to the community, which doesn't mean that this man must be on every board and known for his riches. Instead, the question is whether folks around town would generally see him in respectable terms. Or is this man known for cheating others, being one person at church and another in the community?

Where does all this leave us? The church is a household led by character and example rather than by loud opinions and personality. Therefore, leaders in the church must be molded by Christ more than the world. Since that molding is what we all need, let's pray for folks to serve us in these ways, providing examples of Christ-like-ness that we all can follow. Men: your conduct at home, in the faith, and in the community matters. And it matters not just for your sake, but because we all need to better see how to follow Jesus. Christ has already done the work – He has already perfectly embodied these characteristics. You and I won't be perfect, but will we – by the Spirit's power – seek to aim our lives at this kind of faithfulness? If so, we'll arrive at a place where we can genuinely help others to follow Jesus. We'll be able to humbly guide Christ's church not like the sort of leaders so common in our world, but instead as the sort of servants whom Christ Himself perfectly embodied. Men: pay close attention to your way of life. Women: pray for these kind of men in our church, pray for your husband. Seek to build up this kind of masculinity in your boys. Let's be a church known for joyfully following Jesus together. Let's be a family who examples our Savior's call well.