

01.23.11 / 1 Timothy 3:1-13

Passage Insight

Character is the word of the day, and as we will see, the qualifying character necessary to be considered for the roles of overseer (elder) and deacon is something for which the office holder can take zero credit. Let's explore this now.

When we survey the New Testament, the terms "bishop," "pastor," and "elder" are synonymous. "Elder" is the translation of the Greek word "presbutes," which means "an old man," and "overseer" is the translation of the word "episkopos," sometimes also translated as "bishop." Additionally, "pastor" means "shepherd," one who protects and cares for the flock of God. While each of these terms is used to explain slightly variant aspects of leadership in the New Testament, they collectively refer to the same church office, that of overseer, or in our context here at Vintage21 Church, elder/pastor.

The list of qualifications for an overseer is lofty and sets a very high standard. Contrast such a life with the truth that without Christ, our deeds are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). In other words, for a man to exhibit these characteristics, he would have to have been changed from the self-centered, hedonistic man that he once was, and the only way to see such a dramatic swing of the pendulum from dirty rags to the list we see here was to be changed by Jesus Christ. Said another way, life of this caliber is evidence that this life belongs no longer to the man in question, but rather to Christ. The process of sanctification is just that, a process. The Lord allows us to experience the passage of time in a linear sense and provides opportunities for our development and growth in the faith as we move through life. Often through trial we are shaped and developed, and our faith is at once honed and sharpened. Because the Lord has allowed for this process, we see in verse 6 that an overseer must not be a recent convert. The potential for pride is great enough already in our flesh, and when we find ourselves in positions of influence over others, we are increasingly likely to either ascribe additional merit to ourselves as a result of the position in question or to somehow take credit for the acquisition of such a position. Remember what we said, however, about the characteristics that qualify a man for the role of overseer – these characteristics are evidence that Christ is moving through this man, changing him, sanctifying him, and as such, he can lay claim to none of the results; neither can he lay claim to any office afforded to him by the same. Finally, consider what some other passages have to say about eldership in the local church:

- Elders keep watch over people's souls: Hebrews 13:17
- Elders pray for the sick: James 5:14
- Elders set an example for how to live in Christ: 1 Peter 5:1-4
- Elders work not for their benefit but for the glory of the Lord: 1 Peter 5:2

Regarding deacons, we see that the Greek is "diakonos," or servant, and it is clear once again that a high degree of character is required in order for someone to be considered for this office. The difference in the lists is not so much in the quality of a person's character, but rather a distinction between the roles in question. Overseers are called to oversee the larger function of the church, including governance, preaching, and teaching, while deacons are called to perform specific tasks with the goal of meeting the specific needs within the body of Christ. Just as the names suggest, overseers oversee, and deacons (servants) serve in specific capacities.

While the traits required for both overseers and deacons should be sought after by all Christians, the Lord graciously allows for our sanctification to be a process. That said, we should all aspire to lives of such character, whether or not we are called to a specific office in the local church, all for the sake and glory of Christ.

Again, character is the word of the day, and as we read Romans 5:1-5, character is often developed through suffering:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

To aspire to the role of overseer or deacon is to request the development of character, and to request the development of character is to invite suffering into your life. Fear not, however, because we are promised suffering and attack at the hands of the world (John 15:18-25), and character ultimately leads to hope that doesn't disappoint, for it is eternal. Ultimately, the character that is developed in these times is that of Christ, and this is something that all Christians, regardless of whether or not they are called to specific positions as elders or deacons, should aspire.

Application Questions / Prayer

Aspiring

- 1) The Greek for "aspire" in verse 1 literally means "to stretch out." Aspiring in this case means that we will be stretched out and changed. If you aspire to the role of overseer (males) or deacon (females), in what ways could you be stretched in developing the character traits seen in this passage?
- 2) What would you have to give up in order for this to happen?
- 3) How does the sufficiency of Christ's grace play a role in making this possible?

Suffering for the Development of Character

- 1) Suffering is redeemed when we are in Christ, and the Lord uses it to develop character. How has suffering led to the development of character in your own life as you rely on Christ?
- 2) How has this changed you?
- 3) Give specific ways in which you trust the Lord more deeply as a result?

The Call for All Christians

- 1) If we are saved by Christ, we are all being transformed from one degree of glory to another into His image and likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18). What do you hope for in your life in the ways of transformation?
- 2) What does your group need to pray for on your behalf right now?

Sources

- Prayer
- Bible Exposition Commentary
- Bible Knowledge Commentary
- The Teacher's Commentary
- Tyler Jones