

## **Personal Priorities for Godly Leaders**

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:2–3

Code: B130808

A survey of today's evangelical landscape can be a letdown. Biblical teaching is scarce and moral scandals abound. Too many church leaders have concealed sexual sin and financial schemes behind a thin façade of ministry. Eventually the world exposes their hypocrisy, shaming believers, discrediting the gospel, and defaming the Lord. In that setting, it is imperative that a true Christian leader have irreproachable character.

The biblical standard for a church leader's character is found in 1 Timothy 3. Paul initially lists several moral qualifications for an elder: He is to be "the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money" (1 Timothy 3:2–3).

### **Sexual Purity**

A leader must first be "the husband of one wife." The Greek text literally reads "a one-woman man." That phrase doesn't refer to marital status at all but to his moral character regarding his sexual behavior. If he is married, he is to be devoted solely to his wife.

It is possible, however, to be married to one woman yet not be a one-woman man. Jesus said, "Everyone who looks on a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). A married—or unmarried—man who lusts after women is unfit for ministry. An elder must love, desire, and think only of the wife God has given him.

That qualification was especially important in the church at Ephesus, the sexually perverse city where Timothy ministered. Many, if not most, of the congregation had at one time or another fallen prey to sexual evil. If that was a man's experience before he came to Christ, it wasn't a problem (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). If it happened after his conversion, but before he assumed a leadership role, it was a problem. If it happened after he assumed a leadership role, it was a definite disqualification (1 Corinthians 9:24–27). Those same standards apply to men in positions of spiritual leadership today.

Sexual purity is a major issue in ministry, and that's why Paul placed it at the top of his list. It is in this arena, above all others, where leaders are most prone to fall. The inability to be a one-woman man may have put more men out of the ministry than any other issue.

### **Not Given to Excess**

A leader in God's church must also be "temperate." The Greek word translated "temperate" (*nēphalios*) means "without wine" or "not mixed with wine." It refers to sobriety, the opposite of intoxication.

Because of their position, example, and influence, certain Jewish leaders abstained from wine. Priests were not to enter God's house while under its influence (Leviticus 10:9). Kings were advised not to consume wine because it might hinder their judgment (Proverbs 31:4–5). The Nazirite vow, the highest vow of spiritual commitment in the Old Testament, forbade its participants from drinking wine (Numbers 6:2-3). In the same way, spiritual leaders today must avoid intoxication so that they might exercise responsible judgment and set an example of Spirit-controlled behavior.

It's likely Paul's primary usage of *nēphalios* went beyond the literal sense of avoiding intoxication and extended to the figurative sense of being alert and watchful. An elder must deny any excess in life that diminishes clear thinking and sound judgment. Commentator William Hendriksen said, "His pleasures are not primarily those of the senses . . . but those of the soul." [1](*Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], 122)

Drinking is only one area in which excess can occur. Overeating has been called the preacher's sin, and often that's a just criticism. If a man cannot exercise self-control and discipline over something as basic as his physical appetites, he proves that he is irresponsible, immature, and unfit to lead. A leader who displays uncontrolled excess of any kind weakens his testimony and cripples his usefulness.

Paul's point is clear: Godly spiritual leaders must be moderate and balanced in every area of life.

### **Self-Disciplined**

It follows that a "temperate" leader will be "prudent," or self-disciplined. The temperate man avoids excess so he can think clearly, which leads to an orderly, disciplined life. He knows how to order his priorities.

A prudent man is serious about spiritual things. That doesn't mean he is cold and humorless, but he tempers his humor by the realities of the world. A world that is lost, disobedient to God, and bound for hell leaves little room for frivolity in his ministry.

Such a man has a sure and steady mind. He is not rash in judgment, but thoughtful, earnest, and cautious. He follows Paul's counsel in Philippians 4:8: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." His mind is controlled by God's truth, not the whims of the flesh. Jesus Christ reigns supreme over every area of his life.

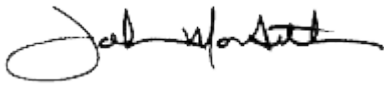
### **Well-Organized**

It follows that a man who is prudent will have a "respectable" or orderly life. That means he handles every area of his life in a systematic, orderly manner. His well-disciplined mind leads to a well-disciplined life.

The Greek word translated "respectable" is *kosmios* and derives from the root *kosmos*. The opposite of *kosmos* is "chaos." A spiritual leader must not live in constant chaos, but in an orderly fashion since his work involves administration, oversight, scheduling, and establishing priorities.

The ministry is no place for a man whose life is a continual confusion of unaccomplished plans and unorganized activities. Over the years I have seen many men who had difficulty ministering effectively because they were unable to concentrate on a task or systematically set and accomplish goals. Such disorder is a disqualification.

These traits lay the foundation for a man's ministry. He must have his personal life under control to be an effective overseer. However, there are other qualities he must also possess which directly affect the people he serves in leadership. We'll look at those next time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W. Hunt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

(Adapted from [Divine Design](#). All Scripture quotations are from the [New American Standard Bible](#).)

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