



Sexuality AND LEADERSHIP



AN INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDY IN 1 TIMOTHY

¹ Here is a trustworthy saying: whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

⁸ In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

¹¹ In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

¹² A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well.

5. DIGGING IN - PART 1

- A. Underline the words stand out as the most important.
- B. Draw a box around the sections of the text you think relate to sex and sexuality.
- C. Draw a circle around any words or phrases that you have questions about.
- D. Write any questions or thoughts in the white space.

6. DIGGING IN - PART 2

- 1. What words did you highlight as being the most important?
Why did you choose them?
- 2. Share and discuss any questions or comments you noted.
- 3. Which sections did you highlight as relating to sex and sexuality?
Why did you choose those sections?
- 4. What is the big idea that is being communicated in this text?
Can you summarise it in one sentence?
Can you summarise it in one word?

7. SPECTRUM DEBATE

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the statements below? Why?

Statement 1:

“The behaviour of leaders doesn’t affect me.”

Statement 2:

“It would be a problem if a church leader was ‘quarrelsome’ (verse 3) or a ‘malicious talker’ (verse 5).”

Statement 3:

“This list in 1 Timothy 3 is more about what people are like on the outside than what they are like on the inside.”

Statement 4:

“This list in 1 Timothy 3 is about leaders achieving a higher level of perfection than others.”

Statement 5:

“Everything on the list in 1 Timothy 3 should be true of every follower of Jesus.”

8. DISCUSSION TOPICS - EXPECTATIONS OF LEADERS

Choose two or three of these topics and share your thoughts and questions with one another.

1. Why do you think there are specific expectations for a church leader?
2. How would it affect you if a leader in your church was not 'trustworthy' (verse 11)?
3. What might the problems be with a 'recent convert' becoming a leader (verse 6)?
4. "They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience" (verse 9). What do you think this means and why might it be important?
5. Is this list more about how people are seen by God or more about how people are seen by outsiders? Or Neither? Or both?
6. Does the sexual behaviour of Church leaders matter? Why or why not?

9. QUOTE: ADAM CLARKE ON BLAMELESS BISHOPS

“This Christian bishop must be blameless; ανεπιληπτον, a person against whom no evil can be proved; one who is everywhere invulnerable; for the word is a metaphor, taken from the case of an expert and skilful pugilist, who so defends every part of his body that it is impossible for his antagonist to give one hit. So this Christian bishop is one that has so conducted himself, as to put it out of the reach of any person to prove that he is either unsound in a single article of the Christian faith, or deficient in the fulfilment of any duty incumbent on a Christian. He must be irreprehensible; for how can he reprove that in others which they can reprove in him?”

Adam Clarke, Bible Commentary, 1832

- What do you think of Clarke’s explanation of 1 Timothy 3:2?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of applying this metaphor to the whole text?
- Who is the intended subject of the bishop’s blamelessness? The church? Potential opponents? The community at large? God?
- In each case, how would being a one-woman man *mias gynaikos andra* – μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα, “faithful to his wife”, contribute to this blamelessness?

12. TRANSLATING “LEADER”

- A. 1 Timothy 3 uses two different words for church leaders. Mark them on the text with an *.
- B. 1 Timothy was originally written in the Greek language.
The first word for leader in the text is *episkopēs* - ἐπισκοπῆς.
The second word for leader in the text is *diakonous* - Διακόνους.
- C. Look at some different translations of those words. You could use different Bible versions in the room, or follow these links:



https://biblehub.com/1_timothy/3-1.htm



https://biblehub.com/1_timothy/3-8.htm

- D. Different Churches use different titles for their leaders. If you were translating 1 Timothy 3 for your own local church what two words would you use for church leaders?

13. DIGGING IN - PART 3

We saw how the original Greek text of 1 Timothy has no spaces, paragraphs or punctuation.

- A. If you were going to divide the text into sections, what would the sections be? Draw lines on your copy of the text to show where each section begins and ends.

- B. Bible translators sometimes add headings or titles to the text of the Bible. What titles would you give each of the sections you have just marked? Write them on your copy of the text.

- C. Are any words, phrases or ideas repeated in each section? Underline them.

- D. Get into a larger group and discuss the reasons for your choices. What ideas are repeated in 1 Timothy 3? Why do you think they are repeated?

14. DISCUSSION TOPICS - REPUATION

Choose some of these topics and share your thoughts and questions with one another.

1. 1 Timothy 3:7 says a Church leader should have “a good reputation with outsiders”.
Why is this important?
How much does a Church leader need to fit in to the culture around?
2. Why is it important that a church leader be “worthy of respect” (verses 8 and 11) ?
Why is it important that a church leader be “above reproach” (verse 2) ?
3. Does verse 2 (and 12) mean that only men can be church leaders?
Why or why not?
Does it mean only married people can be leaders? Why or why not?
Does verse 4 mean only people with children can be leaders? Why or why not?

16. FIND THE EVIDENCE

● MARRIED WITH CHILDREN

If we assume that 1 Timothy 3 means only men were to be leaders in the early Church, do we assume that all leaders were to be married (verse 2 and 12)? Do we assume that only people with children could be leaders (verse 4 and 12)?

In 1 Corinthians 7:8 Paul writes to the early Church: “To the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do.”

Can you think of other early Church leaders that were not married?

● LOOKING AT THE GREEK

Reading 1 Timothy 3:2 as saying “a church leader must be a man” depends on decisions made by translators about the order and meaning of the words.

You don’t have to be an expert in Greek to look online and see what the original says and why it’s been translated into English in different ways.



Follow this link to see for yourself:

https://biblehub.com/interlinear/1_timothy/3-2.htm

● “HE”

Our English translation refers to the leaders by the pronouns he and him. Those aren’t there in the original Greek language, but there is no easy way to translate that into English.

It can be hard for us to answer whether the language refers to men only or to everyone, so we can find out the opinions of scholars who read Greek all the time.

“Paul refers to the bishop throughout at a man. My reading of the rest of the New Testament inclines me to think that this is more because that’s how Greek grammar normally refers to both genders together.”

Tom Wright

Paul for Everyone. The Pastoral Letters. SPCK, 2003

16. FIND THE EVIDENCE

● FEMALE LEADERS

To answer our question we need to consider the list of female leaders in the New Testament. Some are named, some are not. Some had leadership titles. A few examples:

Phoebe, a deacon (Romans 16:1).

Junia, “outstanding among the apostles” (Romans 16:7).

Priscilla, a church planter (Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy).

Nympha, who hosts a church (Colossians 4:15).

Consider: Some have argued that what these women did in the Church was not the same as the leadership roles mentioned in 1 Timothy. This is apart from Phoebe who is given the title ‘deacon’.

● MEN ONLY

It might be helpful to consider some common arguments that only men were allowed to be leaders in the early Church.

1. Jesus chose twelve men to be his apostles.
Consider: Jesus also chose twelve Jewish people to be his apostles, but there were non-jewish leaders in the early Church.
2. 1 Timothy 2:12 says: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.”

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 says “Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

Consider: Earlier in 1 Corinthians, in chapter 11, there are instructions about how men and women are to behave when they praying and prophesying, so it’s not as straight forward as it seems when we read the verses by themselves. There is a lot going on behind both these texts.

17. “LIKEWISE, THE WOMEN”

Because the Greek in 1 Timothy 3:11 *gynaikas* - Γυναῖκας can be rendered either “women”, or “wives”, there is debate about whether this section refers to the wives of the male deacons, or is a word about female deacons.

Here is an excerpt from Andrew Robert Fausset’s 1871 commentary:

“There is no reason that special rules should be laid down as to the wives of the deacons... there were doubtless deaconesses at Ephesus, such as Phoebe was at Cenchrea... it appears he requires the same qualifications in female deacons as in deacons, only with such modifications as the difference of sex suggested. PLINY, in his celebrated letter to Trajan, calls them “female ministers.”

A. R. FAUSSET . The Pastoral Epistles of Paul the Apostle to Timothy and Titus, 1871

- What clues in the text point to a “deacon’s wives” understanding?
- What clues in the text point to a “female deacons” understanding?
- What other factors, outside the text, influence how people make a determination like this?

21. THE IMPACT OF SCANDAL

Consider the conclusions of Frick, Moser and Simmons's event study of church scandal and the correlation to the number of people leaving the Church:

“Our preferred estimates show that the recent sexual abuse scandals had a significantly negative immediate as well as long-term impact, in the sense that, they increased the annual number of exits from the Catholic Church. Sexual abuse scandals in the Catholic Church also raised exit rates in the Protestant Church with a delay. In contrast, we find zero effects of the financial scandal on exits from the Catholic Church while there are positive impacts from these scandals on exits from the Protestant Church.”

Bernd Frick, Katharina Moser, Rob Simmons, 'Spillover Effects of Scandals on Exits from the Catholic and Protestant Churches in Germany', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Volume 60, Issue3, September 2021.

- What is the most notable thing about these findings?
- What anecdotal evidence is there about the impact of church scandals in your context?
- In your context, what are the differences between the impact of a scandal that involves sexual behaviour compared to another form of scandal eg. finance? What are the reasons for these differences?

22. DISCUSSION TOPICS – APPLYING 1 TIMOTHY 3

Choose two or three of these topics and share your thoughts and questions with one another.

1. It's a common question: Which parts of scripture do we live by and why?
Why do people find this difficult?
Is this a difficult question when it comes to sexuality?
2. What would it mean to “be worthy of respect”, “above reproach”, and “have a good reputation with outsiders” in your community?
How much does this differ between one community and another?
What stays the same?
How much is sexual behaviour a part of this?
3. Tom Wright says that 1 Timothy 3:
“implies that there were some, perhaps many, people in the early Christian churches who did have two or more wives – just as there are some converts in churches in Africa, for example, who have come from a background where polygamy is normal.”
Tom Wright. Paul for Everyone – The Pastoral Letters. SPCK, 2003. Pg 30.

Do you imagine the early Church being made up of people with a range of different sexual relationships and practices?

Do you think the Church today is made up of people with a range of different sexual relationships and practices?

Tom Wright comments:

“they should be accepted as members of the church as they are, but should not be put in a position of leadership where they would then be regarded as role models.”

Is the “role model” aspect of leadership a good reason to expect particular sexual behaviour from church leaders?

Are there other reasons?

4. Are there certain character and behaviour expectations for leaders in your local church?
Are there certain character and behaviour expectations for everyone in your local church?
Are the expectations the same or different?
Are there different character and behaviour expectations for different roles in your local church?
How might sexual behaviour come into this?

24. RESPONDING

Responding to Scripture.

This week, ask yourself:

- Where are the places of influence God has called me to?
- What areas of my life can God be at work in so that I can be 'above reproach'?

You might want to respond in some more ways. Here are some suggestions.

- Write a personal prayer responding to what you've heard in the scripture.
- Create something: a poem; a painting; a list; a sculpture; a meal; a photograph; a wordcloud.
- Read or listen to all of 1 Timothy at BibleGateway.com.
- Choose just one word or phrase and think about what it means.
- List some personal commitments that you want to make in the coming week.
- Read some more about how to apply scripture to our lives:



<https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/how-to-apply-the-bible-to-your-life-in-four-steps>



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