

# MORAL BEHAVIOR FOR MODEL BELIEVERS

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*By the Book™* A Chapter by  
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## Let's Begin

*Let's face it: the world expects those who call themselves Christians to demonstrate different behavior than everyone else. Why? Several reasons are apparent, but one reason clearly stands taller than all the rest. A Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. And since His sinless life stands virtually without dissent even from hardened atheists, those who claim Christ is Lord over their life should act like He really is Lord over their life. In short, Christians should look like Jesus in their behavior.*

*Does the world have a point? It certainly does! Even though believers are far from moral perfection, they nonetheless must exhibit a moral excellence which reflects the life of Christ rather than the life of the world.*

*Paul writes the key to understanding this chapter, "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (v. 15). Believers must learn and practice behaving ourselves.*

*In chapter three, Paul reflects on the moral behavior of three different church groups—leaders, helpers, and members. Hence, as we study this section of 1 Timothy, let's follow the simple outline below:*

- I. The Moral Model of Leaders (vv. 1-7)**
- II. The Moral Model of Helpers (vv. 8-13)**
- III. The Moral Model of Members (vv. 14-16)**

## I. The Moral Model of Leaders (vv. 1-7)

It has often been said the church rises or falls with leadership. No greater vacuum may be found since the Reformation for proven, effective, godly leaders in God's church than today. The church is crying out for capable leaders. Some churches attempt to solve the lack of leadership by loosening the requirements the Scripture gives for pastors and/or "bishops." Abandoning God's Word is never the solution, however. We must wed ourselves to Scripture, even if we suffer because of our stance. In the end, the negative consequences of poor leadership—unbiblical leadership—will outweigh a strict adherence to the Word of God.

As Paul unfolds the profile for Biblical leaders overseeing God's church, he makes a crucial distinction between the *aspiration* to leadership and *qualifications* for leadership. Frequently we confuse the two as if they are the same.

Consequently, far too often situations arise when the energy to lead is present but the empowerment to lead is absent. In other words, being willing to serve as a pastor is not enough. One must also be *called* to lead, *equipped* to lead, and *empowered* to lead.

First, note Paul's focus on the *aspirations* of a moral model to lead God's church. He begins the chapter acknowledging the significance of church leaders, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (v. 1). The Greek word translated "bishop" is *episkope* and literally means "to see over." The term was used of one who "visited," "inspected," and "supervised" work such as a superintendent. Hence, the "bishop" was the overseer, one who "watched over" God's church. He gives oversight, insight, and overall direction to work of the church. Note, also that the term "pastors" and "elders" are used interchangeably with "bishop."

The "bishop" is an office to be "desired." Not all ambition is bad. Desire is a God-given emotion, an emotion which motivates us to excel, to compete, and to finish. The term

*The church is crying out for capable leaders.*



### Reflection Connection

*Does your church place high standards on the office of pastor? Are the standards focused on moral integrity? Explain.*

translated “desire” carries the idea of “a reaching after,” “a longing for.” While ambition could be godless and sinful, the desire to be a preacher is a worthy one. In fact, one’s desires are necessary in securing assurance God is calling one to be a pastor. Remember: *willingness to serve is not enough*. Hence, aspiration to be a pastor is not enough. One must also be qualified to serve as pastor of God’s church.

Second, therefore, note Paul’s focus on the *qualifications* of a moral model to lead God’s church. The Apostle continues, A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (vv. 2-7).

What strikes one immediately as Paul’s profile is examined is his emphasis on moral character. Integrity stands out as the number one qualification of serving as pastor in the New Testament church. Weighing integrity against standards which dominate today is an exercise in frustration. Many churches focus on educational levels, socio-economic status, physical attraction, speaking abilities, and personality traits among many other “qualifications.” Understand: it is not that any or all of the above factors are unnecessary as criteria for certain churches.

On the other hand, Paul makes it clear that no matter the educational level, preaching ability, or positive personality profile a man may possess, if moral integrity is not present, then a man is not qualified to serve as pastor in God’s church. Note the qualifications as Paul gives them:

- ✦ *Blameless*: This means “without reproach.” The pastor’s life is beyond just criticism. His life cannot be attacked. Of course, even the best of men be criticized, abused, and accused.
- ✦ *Husband of one wife*: The term literally means a “one woman man.” He has only one wife and has not divorced.
- ✦ *Vigilant*: Paul is referring to being temperate. In other words, he keeps his head in all situations. Oftentimes, the bigger the leader, the bigger the temptation. Hence, Paul speaks of courageous and constant integrity.
- ✦ *Sober*: To be sober-minded is to be calm and seriously earnest about one’s service. That is, people know the pastor “means business.”
- ✦ *Of good behavior*: As the old saying goes, one practices what one preaches. There is an orderly aspect to life, a discipline in all spheres of living.
- ✦ *Given to hospitality*: Simply put, this is loving strangers.
- ✦ *Apt to teach*: A pastor is definitively a pastor-teacher. He is a careful student of the Word.



- ♦ *Not given to wine*: No greater temptation for young pastors exists today than to give into to cultural pressure to casually “drink” a little to be socially acceptable; total abstinence is necessary for the godly pastor.
- ♦ *No striker*: The pastor cannot be violent, either with hand or tongue.
- ♦ *Not greedy of filthy lucre*: Paul refers to money gotten wrongly or used wrongly.
- ♦ *Patient*: The qualified pastor makes allowances for others and is gentle in confrontation; there is a sweet reasonableness about him.
- ♦ *Not brawler*: In other words, he is a peaceable person, neither troublesome in spirit nor disagreeable in attitude.
- ♦ *Not covetous*: The Biblical pastor avoids chasing money, popularity, or denominational advancement.
- ♦ *Rule well own house*: For him, family life is highly important.
- ♦ *Not a novice*: That is, he is not “newly planted.” Paul is not necessarily referring to age. Some men mature faster than others. There is a danger, however. Pride easily destroys a “novice”.
- ♦ *Good report... those without*: The key question is, what do lost people think about him? Does he pay his bills? What do people around town think of him? The fact is, they are not likely to accept the message he preaches if they will not accept him.

## II. The Moral Model of Helpers (vv. 8-13)

Paul shifts from the leaders of the church to those who officially assist the leaders. Historically, we know this group as *deacons*. Paul writes, “Likewise *must* the deacons *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless. Even so *must* their wives *be* grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well” (vv. 8-12).

The deacons, Paul asserts, are given to the church to assist the pastor. We must be careful at this juncture because we easily can rely on tradition rather than Biblical revelation. For example, contrary to what some assume, deacons do not make church policy or “run” the day-to-day affairs of the church so the pastor is free to “minister.” Instead deacons relieve pastors of minor servant tasks so they may give themselves to the Word and prayer (cp. Acts 6:1-8; Phil. 1:1).

One observes quickly as the standards of the deacon are read, that they are very similar to the character profile Paul gave to qualify men to be pastors. For brevity’s sake, we will note only the characteristics which prove to be different from the former list:

- *Grave*: The term means to be seriously minded. However, it does not imply lacking of a sense of humor.
- *Not double tongued*: Deacons cannot say one thing but mean another.

### Reflection Connection

*Are the same high standards required for prospective deacons as are required for prospective pastors? Are qualifications for wives of deacon candidates considered? Explain.*



- *Mystery of faith in pure conscience:* A deacon's faith is tested and proven true.
- *Wives:* Concerning wives, those who are married to deacons must be an active part of their husband's service to Christ, His church, and their assistance to the pastor. Wives support their deacon husbands in word, attitude, and service.

Not only does Paul deal with the deacon's moral *standards*, he also describes the deacon's standing in both church and community. He writes, "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus (v. 13). The godly deacon who remains a Biblical model actually "uses" his office wisely. His faithfulness is rewarded with good standing in the community where he ministers Christ (cp. Acts 6-8).

### III. The Moral Model of Members (vv. 14-16)

The third group Paul summons as moral models are *church members* at large. While high demands are placed upon both pastors and deacons, all members of Christ's body are called to moral excellence. He writes, "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (vv. 14-16).

While no one disputes the high moral qualifications and expectations placed on those who "desire" the office of pastor (v. 1), we must keep in mind that God places high moral expectations on every member of Christ's body. As we mentioned in the beginning, the world expects those who call themselves Christians to demonstrate different behavior than everyone else.

Paul, therefore, gets personal with each member—"thou... thou... thyself." Indicative of the moral responsibility every child of God possesses, the Apostle establishes two principles.

*First, every believer is to watch his or her behavior* (vv. 14-15). We must both know and develop how we "oughtest to behave." Paul is not referring to how one behaves at worship services or Sunday school. Rather he is concerned with the whole life and character of Christians; that is, the manner of life and moral development evident in all of life (cp. Eph. 2:3; 2 Cor. 1:12). Even more, the Apostle is concerned about behavior which could hinder an unbeliever from coming to Jesus.

In addition, Paul reveals the foundation of his moral thrust. The church remains the "pillar and ground of truth." Pillars in the pagan temples magnificently decorated the ancient structures. They were made of marble, studded with jewels, and overlaid with gold. Believers display truth, defend truth, demonstrate truth, and, if necessary, die for truth. If the church does not stand for truth, who will? If the church does not present truth, where will the masses of unbelieving people find it? We are to sustain and uphold God's truth before the world.

#### Reflection Connection

*Does your church practice church discipline? Is it consistent or haphazard? Who decides on the "enforcement" of church discipline? Perhaps a short discussion could be led by your pastor during this portion of the study.*



*Second, every believer is to worship the Savior (v. 16).* Worshipping the Lord Jesus stands “without controversy.” In other words, the consent of all is fully behind it. Bowing to Christ remains the unanimous conviction of Christians everywhere. Their worship song is, “Great is the mystery of Godliness.”

Three eternal truths about the Lord are clearly implied in Paul’s statement. First, “Great is the mystery of Godliness” sets forth our Lord’s *incarnation*. He was “manifest in flesh.” His identity was previously hidden from view. But through the Bethlehem birth, He was made visible on earth as a real man. God became a man. “The Word made flesh” and “dwelt among us” as the Apostle John puts it (John 1:1, 14). Paul points out Him being “justified in spirit” or vindicated.

Second, “Great is the mystery of Godliness” sets forth our Lord’s *resurrection*. Paul reminds us He was “seen of angels.” Angels followed the life of Christ, from His birth in Bethlehem to His death at Calvary to His resurrection from the tomb.

Third, “Great is the mystery of Godliness” sets forth our Lord’s *exaltation*. Paul asserts the Lord Jesus was “believed on in the world” and “received up unto glory”. Imagine the celebration when the Lord Jesus was welcomed back to heaven! Heaven opened wide its gates and received her King with shouts of jubilation.

### Golden Greek Nugget

One is struck by the similarities between Biblical qualifications for pastors (vv. 1-7) and qualifications for deacons (vv. 8-13). One significant difference, however, is Paul’s insistence that pastors are “apt to teach” (v. 2). The phrase is but a single word in the Greek, *didaktikos*, and means “skilled in teaching.” This quality of teaching was urged by Paul to be used in Timothy’s ministry (2 Tim. 2:24). No pastor may avoid both his duty and calling in being an expositor of God’s Word. And, no church should consider a man as pastor who is not both proficient in Biblical knowledge and capable to effectively communicate that knowledge to the congregation. A pastor must be “apt to teach.”

### Wrap Up

*What a Savior to live for! Leaders, helpers, and all church members should live in such a manner that no reproach is brought upon such a wonderful Lord. We are called to be moral models. May the church of the Lord Jesus stand tall in a world lost without Jesus Christ.*

