

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: June 16, 2019
Lesson Title: "Setting the Example"
Lesson Passage: 1 Timothy 3:1-13

ABOUT THIS LESSON

In the lesson passage, Paul lists characteristics that ought to be found in Christian ministers and deacons. This passage can serve as a useful guide for choosing such leaders and, also, provides biblical criteria for them to use in continuing self-evaluation.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain the terms "bishops" and "deacons." (2) Describe the characteristics included in Paul's lists of qualifications for both.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Distribute sheets of paper. Ask class members to write at the top: "A PASTOR SHOULD BE...." Invite them to briefly jot down words that describe characteristics of an ideal pastor. Give them an opportunity to read some of their answers aloud. Then ask them to turn the sheet over and write: "A DEACON SHOULD BE...." Follow the same procedure, inviting suggestions concerning qualifications of deacons. Indicate that this lesson will tell us how Paul would have responded.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Refer to 1 Tim. 3:1, and ask: What is a "bishop"? Do we have any bishops in our church? Invite responses, then share this information: "Bishop" in 1 Tim. 3:2 translates the Greek word *episcopos*. The term comes from an old verb which meant "to look upon," "look after," or "inspect." In common usage, it came to mean "overseer" or "superintendent." By the 2nd century, the bishop had come to be regarded as one who was superior to other church officers; but this was not so in New Testament times. When Paul wrote to Timothy, the title denoted one who "looked after" the congregation. Ask the class to turn to Acts 20, then comment: In this passage, the church leaders from Ephesus are called "elders" (Greek, *presbuteros* or "presbyters") in v. 17 and "overseers," *episcopoi*, in v. 28. The point is, elders and bishops referred to the same persons, who were expected to "feed the church of God" (v. 28), by teaching and preaching the Word. These church leaders were roughly equivalent to those who serve as "ministers" today.

2. Call attention to the term "deacons" in 1 Tim. 3:8. Comment: "Deacon" translates the Greek word *diakonos*, "servant" (synonymous with "minister"). In its most primitive form, the term meant "raising a dust by hastening" (A. T. Robertson). Refer to 1 Cor. 3:5, where the

word "ministers" translates the plural form of *diakonos*. This means that the term *diakonos* ("deacon, minister") was also applied to preachers, like Paul and Apollos. Summarize by saying: We can't be entirely certain about the duties of "bishops," "elders," "overseers" and "deacons" in New Testament churches, but they seem to have been recognized "offices" in the church by the time Paul wrote this letter to Timothy. NOTE: One interpreter (Burton Scott Easton) believes that "in the third century--and doubtless in the second--deacons were more highly regarded than elders."

3. Review the qualities that are desirable in "overseers" (i.e., bishops, church leaders), using Paul's list in vv. 2-7: (1) **blameless** (without reproach, beyond criticism), (2) **husband of one wife** (faithful to the marriage relationship), (3) **vigilant** (temperate, "watches himself"), (4) **sober** (sensible, sound-minded), (5) **of good behavior** (orderly, well-behaved), (6) **given to hospitality** (open heart and open home), (7) **apt to teach (qualified to teach)**, (8) **not given to wine** (not a drunkard), (9) **no striker** (does not assault others), (10) **not greedy** (not hungry for personal gain), (11) **patient** (gentle, pardons human failings), (12) **not a brawler** (not "trigger-happy" in relationships), (13) **not covetous** (not a lover of money, not mercenary), (14) **rules well his house** (manages his household well), (15) **not a novice** (not a recent convert), (16) **has a good report** (well thought of).

4. As class members examine the desired attributes of deacons ("church helpers") in 1 Tim. 3:8-13, observe that several traits appear in both lists: (1) They, too, must be **respectable, truthful, sober** and **not greedy** (v. 8). (2) They should be **well-versed in the accepted doctrines of the church** ("mystery of the faith," RSV) and believe them with a clear conscience (without any mental reservations) (v. 9). (3) Like the bishops ("let them also") they are to be tested before being installed (v. 10). APPLICATION: Verse 10 makes it clear that the selection and ordination of deacons should be done with great care, and only after they have demonstrated the authenticity of their faith and Christian character. (4) **"Husband of one wife"** (v. 12) is frequently cited as a prohibition of divorced men. But it could refer to polygamy or relationships with concubines, both of which were common in that day, or, some say, a second marriage after the death of a wife. (5) In the Greek text, the first word in verse 11 is *gunaikas*, which means simply, "the women." The KJV translates it, "their wives." But interpreters are divided on this point. While a great many accept the implication that these are the spouses of deacons, some see this as a reference to deaconesses, women deacons. (6) To "gain a good standing" (v. 13) means that deacons who do their work well will find increasing joy and confidence in their Christian faith.

CLOSING THE LESSON

Ask the class to formulate five statements summarizing qualities that are desirable in all church leaders. (Write these on the board.)

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