



1 Timothy 3:1-16  
House Rules: 1 Timothy  
“Leadership Rules”

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January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Today continues the series in 1 Timothy that we’ve been in to start the year. This is the Apostle Paul’s letter to Timothy, who is shepherding the church in the city of Ephesus – a church that Paul got going, having spent a couple years there doing so. And today we get to a stretch of the letter where Paul gives words of wisdom about church leadership.

You may or not be aware of this or really ever have thought of this, but: **Every single one of us is a leader in some facet of life.** We tend to think of leaders as people who are in certain toplevel positions: like CEO’s, professional sports head coaches and so forth. But grandparents are leaders. Volunteer coaches in Little League are leaders. The manager of a Starbucks is a leader. The small business owner is a leader. Parents are leaders.

And in this passage Paul gives some qualifications for people who would be leaders in the church. First: **He writes of those who would be “overseers.”** The word there is “episkopoi”. Traditionally this word has been translated as “Bishop.” But how we think of that word (Bishop) today – as someone who oversees a region of churches in certain denominations such as Episcopalian churches, which get their name from the Greek word here – ...that is almost certainly not what Paul intended. And if you think of “Bishop” as one of the pieces when playing chess, that’s even further off the mark/less helpful. 😊

So, “overseer” is a good translation, and it speaks of someone who is helping to lead a church. Now, the other term to talk about leaders of the faith community that we see in the Bible is “elder.” Elders are leaders of the Jewish faith all the way back into the Old Testament (Moses appoints the first elders). So even as Paul writes, there’s lots of history with Elders. In the New Testament, the word is Presbuteros. We get “Presbyterian” from it. Episcopalians are governed by Bishops, and Presbyterians are governed by Elders.

The question worth asking at this point, is: **Is there any difference between them (episkopoi and presbuteros) in the first century church? We**

actually have a really good idea about that from the Apostle Paul himself. In Acts 20:17 Paul addresses a group of Elders: Presbuteros. Then a few verses later, still speaking to the same group of people, he calls them overseers – episkopoi. The terms seem to be interchangeable. So, these leaders in the church – episkopoi he calls them here, but it applies to Presbuteros as well – are called to live with these standards.

Now, overseers and Elders work together with Deacons: You can think of episkopoi and presbuteros as the “head” of the church, and **Diakonos – deacons – are the “heart” of the church.** And deacons have standards for their ministry as well. Paul lists some things about them starting in verse 8, and there’s some crossover and similarity to the earlier requirements for overseers. Deacons are first mentioned earlier in the New Testament, in the book of Acts, and their ministry tends to be one of service. So, the ministry of diakonos is one of service – in fact, the word can be translated as servant – and it’s another form of leadership in the church.

So, if you’re going to be a church leader, these are the standards that are set. Most of them are standards for Christians to live up to whether they’re in formal church leadership positions or not: above reproach, faithful in marriage, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, not violent but gentle, not a lover of money...all Christians are called to live with these attributes and qualities. If we did a better job of that, the gospel message would be received by non-Christians with much greater openness. Mahatma Gandhi once said, **“I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ” (Mahatma Gandhi).** What a shame. No wonder Paul also admonishes these leaders to have a good reputation with outsiders (v. 7).

But this gets back to what I started with earlier: we are *all* leaders in some sphere of life. We may not consider ourselves “leaders” per se, but we all have the opportunity to lead people to know Jesus. Unfortunately, as reflected in this statement from Gandhi, sometimes we lead people *away* from Jesus. So, in our daily living, how we treat people, how we interact with others, living with the kinds of characteristics that Paul lists here, we can lead others toward Jesus. Even if it’s incremental movement forward, that’s better than no movement or movement in the wrong direction.

Ok, let's change gears for a bit. As many of you know, I enjoy playing basketball. I haven't been able to play really since knee surgery 6 months ago, and the pandemic has kind of laid waste to playing hoops with others as well. So, to get a bit of a basketball fix, I was reading some stuff about the sport online the other day, particular when it came to defensive strategies. And I came across a newspaper article that caught my attention.

In it was this quote from an NCAA basketball coach: "We were kind of a make-miss between zone and man [man to man] with Penn State," [Coach] Frese said. "So, I think based on each team it's really whether we're able to make them comfortable or uncomfortable in the type of defense that we're playing." So, the coach was talking about the differences between zone defense and man-to-man defense, and the impact the defense they play in any given game has on the other team.

Now, in case you don't know the difference between zone and man to man defense, I'll read their definitions for you, just so we're on the same page, because this is important and pertains to the next point in the message:

- **Man-to-man: The type of defense in which each defender is assigned a specific player to guard.**
- **Zone: A defensive tactic in which players guard areas of the court, rather than specific men.**<sup>1</sup>

I want to ask you a question. When you read those definitions there, who do you presume they're talking about? Not what team...but more broadly than that: who can play basketball? ..... Men, right? It's "man-to-man" defense, or zone defense where players don't guard a specific "man." The rules talk about *men*.

Now at this point, I need to come clean on something: I copied and pasted those definitions – and there was a another one I could have used that defined the phrase "open man" – and I got those from the glossary of terms at the *official website for the Women's National Basketball Association* – the WNBA! **In other words, in the (arguably) top women's basketball league in the world, they play "man-to-man" defense. They pass the ball to the "open man."** And the coach who was quoted in the article I read is Brenda

Frese, the head coach for the University of Maryland's women's basketball team.

You see, cultural usage of words can be very different from dictionary meaning. You would think that "man" and "men" refers to males only. But it doesn't always. We use these words in sort of an idiomatic way: the word or phrase doesn't mean what you would think it means, or what the words normally mean. We have lots of idioms: "Raining cats and dogs" "hold your horses" "dead as a doornail" and, ironically, "it's all Greek to me."

This is important to understand in this passage when Paul writes that an overseer should be faithful in his marriage. Some translations will read, "married to one woman." The Greek literally reads, "a man of one woman." *Mias gunaikos andra*. We get it again in verse 12 in discussing deacons. It's highly possible that this is an idiomatic phrase – kind of like the phrase man-to-man defense. If you take that basketball phrase literally, then women should not be allowed to play basketball. But it's an idiom. It doesn't mean what it seems to mean.

*Mias gunaikos andra* – man of one woman – may very well have been the same thing: a gender-inclusive idiom. Idioms are one of the hardest things to translate from one language to another – even when you can talk face to face and have the idiom explained. "It's raining cats and dogs" – translated literally into another language would have people looking up at the sky to see this strange thing. It's even more difficult when you're 2,000 years apart. **We know for sure that the masculine language was used to address groups of men only as well as groups of men and women; but the female equivalent would only be used to address a group of women.** That was as common for them as it is for us today. For instance, I could very easily say to all of you, "Hey you guys, let's go get ice-cream after church." And everyone in the room would feel invited. But if I said, "Hey you *gals*, let's go get ice-cream after church" then no guy would be going to get ice-cream. We've started using "humankind" in the last few decades (longer?), but "mankind" still means all humanity in a way that "womankind" probably never will.

It's the same thing in the New Testament and their culture of the day. That's why Paul will use "brothers" and not "sisters" as a term of endearment when writing to a church, when it's intended for everyone in the church – including women. So, it was normal for them to use masculine terminology when referring to a group of both men and women. In fact, I came across a stat this week from one New Testament scholar that there are over 7500 instances of masculine language in the New Testament that either *must* be, or *certainly could* be, addressing a mixed gender crowd.<sup>2</sup>

So, it would make sense that this phrase could very well have been known to mean not just men, but women as well. To be a person of one spouse. To be faithful in marriage to your spouse – whether you're a man married to a woman or a woman married to a man. Even some scholars – not all, but some – who believe the Bible says women's roles are limited in the church, agree that this "man of one woman" phrase doesn't prevent women from serving in these roles. They see it as an idiom.<sup>3</sup>

**Also: Paul mentions women in particular in verse 11, not as a contrast with the qualifications for these leadership positions in the previous verses, but as a way of emphasizing that they can serve in this way as well.** They need to be highlighted because the freedom and value women found in the Christian faith was completely counter-cultural. It was new and needed to be reiterated.

Lastly, and this is crucial to understanding what Paul might have really meant in these verses: This view that women can in fact be in these positions reflects Paul's ministry, which we see elsewhere. He lifts women up in their leadership roles in other places of Scripture, which makes it difficult to interpret a phrase or two like today's in a literal way. I'll give three examples. First in Romans 16:1 Paul writes, **"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon (diakonos) of the church in Cenchreae...she has been the benefactor (prostatitis – one set over others) of many people, including me"** (Romans 16:1). So here he's naming a woman as a deacon. Some translations will translate it as "servant" which isn't wrong. But the Greek word is the same as we have in today's passage about what we call deacons, and is used elsewhere in the NT to describe the ministry of others as

well. And to describe what she's done that is so commendable, he uses a Greek word that means to be "over others" – literally, it means to "stand over." It's a word that conveys leadership and authority. The same root word is used in today's passage when Paul writes about these leaders managing their household well.

Second, a few verses later (Romans 16:7), Paul writes about Andronicus and Junia, who Paul says are "my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles..." So, here Paul is listing a husband and wife, and naming them as apostles – and not just ordinary ones, but outstanding ones. ☺

And the last example I'll give is this: Paul mentions three women by name in his letters who were leaders of churches in their homes. Of course, all churches only met in homes, so don't take that to mean that they're second class churches. So, this means: **These women were the leaders of these churches: Chloe in 1 Corinthians 1:11; Nympha in Colossians 4:15; and Apphia in Philemon 2.** They were hosting – and remember, "being hospitable" is one of the traits Paul says in today's passage that overseers should have, probably because the church met in their homes – they were hosting and leading churches in their homes. All of these things – and there are many others – help us to understand what Paul means in 1 Timothy. He couldn't have lifted up these women in this way, and then try to limit and silence them in the Church.

There is a lot more that can be said on this topic of women in ministry. As I said last week, I took a whole 10-week, 5 credit class on it in seminary. I'll have more resources with the sermon on our website and Youtube Channel if you care to dig in deeper.

I want to close with a couple comments about our leaders today and all of us as leaders here at Rose Hill. **Here at Rose Hill, as in all Presbyterian churches, we have Elders who oversee the church; we – like most Presbyterian churches (not all) – have men and women.** We always have 6 actively serving, with two elected each year. Our Elders are the top level governing and overseeing body of a local church – just as they were 2,000

years ago and before into the Jewish faith. As head pastor, I'm accountable to them, and I work closely with them. They work hard, volunteering their time, to make sure that Rose Hill is on track with Jesus, moving in the direction we believe God is calling us, they spend time in prayer about that direction, they ensure we continue to be Biblically-based, lifting up Jesus, glorifying the father, and led by the Spirit; and they want to make sure we are moving forward in being all that God is calling us to be.

They have been diving in especially deep in the last few weeks with a lot of work in preparation for a day and a half retreat four weeks from now, to really hone in on how Rose Hill can flourish and impact Kirkland and the surrounding communities. We have high hopes that the retreat will be a catalyst God uses to propel us forward to be the church in ways we have not experienced here at RH: that it will propel us forward to be the church in ways that Kirkland has not experienced before, so that the people of Kirkland would experience Jesus' love in ways they have not experienced before.

**And: Our Deacons, much like the deacons of the New Testament, are the heart of the church.** There are 12 people – men and women on our board of deacons, elected 4 each year, also for three-year terms. They are a ministry of service, care, and compassion to people inside the church and outside of it: Cards and visits and phone calls for those who are ill or on hospice; providing receptions and more at Memorial Services; working with the Food Bank and other organizations to help those in need in the community, and more. They also give the Rose Hill Church family the opportunity to serve alongside them at times, particularly in ministries to those in need in Kirkland. They are a treasure and I am so grateful for the ministry of the deacons here at Rose Hill.

So, I'm grateful for the leadership here at Rose Hill Church. I'm thankful for our overseers, or elders as we call them – our presbuteros – and for our diakonos – our deacons, the ones who lead through service. Both leadership bodies here at Rose Hill live out their ministry with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love, as their ordination vows ask them to do. But as I said at the start: **We all are leaders, whether we hold a leadership title or not.** We all have a sphere of influence on others – our families, our co-workers,

our neighborhoods, our friends, and more. So, let's live out the call to be leaders wherever we find ourselves – living up to the standards set out in this passage, and leading people in ways small and large toward Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Let's Pray...Amen.

Note: If you would like to read more about this topic of women in ministry that is discussed as part of this sermon, the following links might be helpful:

<https://www.fuller.edu/womeninministry/#article>

<https://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/bibleandculture/2009/10/why-arguments-against-women-in-ministry-arent-biblical.html>

<https://www.pbpayne.com/does-one-woman-man-in-1-timothy-32-require-that-all-overseers-be-male/>

(Both the article and the comments below it are really helpful.)

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.wnba.com/archive/wnba/about\\_us/glossary.html](https://www.wnba.com/archive/wnba/about_us/glossary.html)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pbpayne.com/does-one-woman-man-in-1-timothy-32-require-that-all-overseers-be-male/> “Timothy Friberg, author of the Analytical Greek New Testament, who is a self-identified complementarian, emailed to me that he counted between 7500 and 8000 instances in the New Testament where masculine grammatical forms either must or could include women. That is approximately one instance per sentence in the New Testament!”

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pbpayne.com/does-one-woman-man-in-1-timothy-32-require-that-all-overseers-be-male/> - Particularly, read down in his comments section, where he names two contemporary scholars in one comment, and John Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.) in another who all would concede that this phrase “man of one woman” is idiomatic and does not exclude women from leadership roles, even though they hold the view that women should not be in leadership.