

GOOD CHRISTIAN OVERSEERS

1 Timothy 3:1-16

Key Verse: 3:1

"Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task."

In chapter 3, Paul instructs church leaders, such as overseers and deacons. They are appointed leaders in the church. Overseers are elders. Deacons are second-class leaders. Christian leaders are those who are trained in the holiness of God. Christians are, in essence, all leaders. For "Christian" means a man in Christ. A man in Christ should be a great leader like Jesus. Christians are also disciples of Jesus Christ. Disciples of Jesus are all learners of Jesus and teachers of the truth. This is the reason Jesus said, "You are the

light of the world" (Mt 5:14). Let's listen to Paul's instructions to the Christian leaders so that we may be good overseers of God's sheep.

I. Christians are overseers of each other (1-7)

First, a Christian must have a decision of faith (1). Look at verse 1. "Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task." In this verse, "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer," means that anyone who wants to be a Christian leader must have a decision of faith. It is because Christians cannot be overseers or influential persons naturally. As we know well, sinful human nature wants to be easy and glorious and great without any responsibility. Christians are the children of God. They must be the stewards of God's world with many responsibilities. As Jesus prayed whether or not he would drink the cup of sorrow in the garden of Gethsemane, staying up all night, so a Christian also must make a decision of faith when he wants to be an overseer. Without a decision of faith no one can become an overseer of God's flock. Decision making might be the hardest

thing. But those who have no decision of faith may become permanent sheep or habitual Christians or like a kind of animal.

We can see St. Paul's decision of faith during the time of his second journey. Wherever Paul went, he proclaimed the gospel of Jesus. As a result, the idol makers' business quickly died out. The owners of the business stirred up people and struck Paul until he looked dead. Then they threw him out on the street. But God helped Paul to come back to his consciousness. As soon as Paul stood up, he dusted off his clothes and quietly said what he determined. Acts 19:21 says, "After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. 'After I have been there,' he said, 'I must visit Rome also.'" There was a great possibility that Paul would be killed in Jerusalem. Even after he was attacked by terrorists and his body was mangled he did not say, "Would you like to see about my broken nose?" Paul said, "I will see Rome." "I will see Rome" was God's vision and it was Paul's vision. God wanted to evangelize the whole world through Roman roads.

Once Jesus experienced sheer disappointment. Jesus fed 5,000 people to their fill. Then the crowd of people came back again. This time Jesus wanted to teach them the meaning of the bread of life. Then people began to leave, one by one and two by two, grumbling until no one was left except his 12 disciples (Jn 6:66). Jesus asked Peter, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" (Jn 6:67) It meant, "You are also ready to run away in your mind, aren't you?" But Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:68,69). Peter could say this because he had a decision of faith in his heart.

Dr. John Jun was a man of decision. When UBF started 33 years ago, there were unbearable persecutions by narrow-minded church politicians. They said, "World mission is possible only for Americans or Canadians who have money. You poor UBF guys say that you pray to send missionaries to other countries. You young fellows are too presumptuous." In 1970 there was a

great disaster to our Bangladesh brethren. Ten million people were killed by a typhoon. We raised \$320,000 in relief money and sent it to Bangladesh through World Vision. Then some church politicians began to complain, "You UBF guys are inhumane. You don't give any money to poor Korean people, but all the money to Bangladesh people." Because of persecutions many suffered and many ran away. Then Dr. John Jun said, "Even if Dr. Samuel Lee and Missionary Sarah run away, I will remain for campus mission." God blessed his decision. Now he has 92 staff members under his leadership. A man who has no decision goes nowhere. One young man has worked on his undergraduate degree more than eight years. Still, it is questionable whether he would finish freshman courses by the winter semester 1994. It is imperative that each Christian must make a decision of faith to become a leader like Paul.

Second, a Christian must desire to be a Bible teacher (1). Look at verse 1b.

"...he desires a noble task." What could be a noble task? There are many tasks

in the world. Generally, the task of technological development has been known as the best. So many have studied science. The development of technology contributed bits and pieces of comforts to mankind. But this technological development has caused human integrity to decline. Many girls, who should be pure and faithful, are using birth control pills shamelessly. We know well, technology gave a little comfort and many deadly poisons.

Could there be a noble task other than technological development? Yes, there is! It is teaching the Bible one to one. The word of God heals sinsick people (2Ti 3:16). The word of God gives the Spirit of Jesus to all men. The word of God gives eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. The word of God gives a living hope in the kingdom of God. These days Bible teaching seems to be a losing job. Bible teaching offends hedonistic people. But only the word of God saves men from their sins. Only the word of God wins ugly sinners over to God. This is the reason the Almighty God who created the heavens and the

earth taught the Bible to a very slow and old man, Abraham, for 25 years and prayed for him until he became a blessing. Bible teaching is the way to help people to find the way of life and true happiness. This is the reason Paul urged again in verse 9. It says, "They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience."

Third, a Christian must have but one wife (2). Look at verse 2. "Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach..." This command, "the husband of but one wife," is repeated in verse 12. When it is repeated twice that a Christian man be the husband of but one wife, it must be of supreme importance. For a man to have one wife is the law of God given in the garden of Eden. When children of a family have one father and one mother they can grow happily. They are disciplined by their fathers and they are graced by their mothers. Thus they grow happily, happily, happily. Otherwise, no

children can be happy. The most tragic thing about living in this country is to see the girls and boys who are crying endlessly because their family is broken. Here we learn that in a family, there should be one father and one mother who have the fear of God in their hearts and who pray for their children.

Fourth, a Christian must master self-control (2). Look at verse 2 again. "Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach..." In this verse, self-control seems to be the key to other qualifications. Self-control means to keep one's mind safe and sound. Most people think that they can be their own man. In addition, they think that they have no problem to take care of themselves. But that is not the case. Sinful man cannot control his sinful nature because he is under the rule of the devil. But those who study the living word of God can control their sinful natures. When we are really going to practice self-control, it seems to be impossible. Our sins are bigger than the

mountain, higher than the sky. But when we do not give up Bible study and keep on studying the word of God, God gives us the Spirit of God to control our sinful nature. Proverbs 16:32 says, "Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city."

Fifth, a Christian must be hospitable (2). In ancient times, Christians were all branded as criminals because their holy lives challenged the corrupted people of the times. It was not easy to live as a Christian. But Christian brethren accepted helpless fellow Christians into their homes and lived together. Thus the church of Christ grew and grew, while the kingdoms of the world perished without a trace. Christian hospitality is open-mindedness. Without the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ one cannot be open-minded. Dr. Joe Schafer married right after obtaining a Ph.D. from Harvard and was accepted as a professor at Pennsylvania State University. He could have lived where professors lived. But in order to give hospitality to a girl sheep, he rented an apartment in a

poor area of town and they lived a common life together more than a year. During that time, the girl student lost 75 pounds and became very beautiful. These days most people enjoy privacy most. But Dr. Joe Schafer gave his privacy to God. He is a man of open heart to God because he wants to be like Jesus.

Sixth, a Christian must manage his own family well (4). Look at verse 4. "He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect." This verse does not necessarily mean that a Christian leader should make a lot of money and support his family abundantly. It means that a Christian's family life should be godly and prayerful so that his children may see their parents' godly life and come to know God. But there are many parents who say, "Do as I say, not as I do." Paul admonishes that we should not appoint new converts to leadership positions because the devil makes them proud first and next useless (6).

II. Deacons, the second-class leaders (8-16)

First, second-class leaders must have the deep truths of the faith (8-13). Deacons are under elders or bishops, mainly because their Bible study is shallow and their influence is not enough. So Paul admonishes them to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain (8). How can they be influential people? They can do so when they study the Bible deeply (9). When we meditate on verse 9, Paul admonishes second-class leaders to have deep truths of the faith. What are the deep truths of the faith? It is the Bible knowledge. It is believing and experiencing the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection and the hope of the kingdom of God. The truth is Jesus. But it is not easy to obtain the deep truths of the faith. In order to obtain them, we must study the Bible again and again. Next, we must master the Bible. Finally, we must obtain the spiritual

enlightenment of the Bible. We must study the Bible more than musicians or medical doctors or any scientists who study their respective fields. Through Bible study we have the assurance of eternal life. Through Bible study we can live in this world like holy pilgrims while on earth. Through Bible study we can be free indeed in this troubled world. Jesus said in John 8:31,32, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." In verses 11-13, Paul admonishes that women also must be trustworthy.

Second, the Bible truth is the pillar and foundation of the truth (14-15). In the past, Ephesus was a business center of the world. And there were glamorous pillars of Artemis (Ac 19). Many superstitious people believed that the pillars of Artemis' temple were the symbol of the foundation of the truth. They are like modern people who believe that money is everything. But money has influenced people to become anxious and depression patients. Paul says that

the church of the living God is the pillar and foundation of the truth. Here, "church" means Christians who committed themselves to God. They believe in Jesus and have eternal life and the kingdom of God as their inheritance.

Third, doxology (16). Verse 16 is a doxology. In this doxology, Paul mainly praises Jesus' grace and truth of incarnation. He said, "He appeared in a body." God, who is Spirit, appearing in the body, is indeed full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14). "He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit." This is a poetic expression of Jesus' grace and truth of incarnation along with his death and resurrection. Jesus is the Holy God. But he humbled himself and came to this world to bear all our burden of sins and iniquities and transgressions and died on a tree as a criminal. But God, in his almighty power, raised him from the dead on the third day. The next phrase says, "was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory." This is a marvelous poem and benediction. Jesus appeared

in the body and lived as a carpenter. After his Messianic ministry, Jesus was crucified on the cross. People believed that he was no more. But in 70 years, the gospel of Jesus Christ spread to the whole world through Roman roads. And the Risen Christ is now in glory and power and rules the world forever and ever.

In this passage we learn that we must decide to become a Christian leader, not a permanent sheep, and take up a noble task of teaching the Bible one to one.