

“This is a True Saying” (1 Timothy 3:1)

This phrase “this is a true saying” literally means “this is a faithful saying.” It appears only four other times in the entire New Testament: **1 Timothy 1:15**, “*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*”; **1 Timothy 4:9**, “*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.*”; **2 Timothy 2:11**, “*It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him.*” And **Titus 3:8**, “*This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.*” Everything that God says is a faithful saying that can be trusted without a shadow of doubt! However, when God has to mention them more than once, it is for the purpose of emphasis.

The first of these four faithful sayings focuses on the salvation work of Christ for sinners, and the apostle Paul added that he was the chief of them! Confession of sin is the only biblical starting point for genuine salvation. There is no other reason for Christ to come but to save sinners! The second phrase in 1Timothy 4:9 has the context of godliness. After salvation, the believer remains on earth to bear a godly witness on behalf of Christ. In order to accomplish this, he has to be nourished up in “the words of faith and good doctrine.” This is the evidence of the believer’s salvation as 1 Timothy 4:8 explains, “*For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*” The third passage in 2Timothy 2:11 emphasizes the new life every believer has in Christ. Using a first class condition (assuming to be true), Paul taught that every believer who has died with Christ will also live with Christ. Living with Christ means that his life reflects the nature and attributes of Christ. His friends and family members will be able to see Christ in his life. He speaks the way Christ would speak. He thinks and is motivated by Christ in all that he does. He dresses with Christ’s approval in mind. He acts and reacts and responds to trials the way that Christ would. The fourth passage in Titus 3:8 emphasizes the fruit of salvation whereby the believer will consistently do good works. Righteous deeds characterize his life all the time. He is not perfect but he will desire to do right and not wrong. Whenever his wrong or sin is pointed out to him, he will repent immediately because he desires to be right with God all the time.

All these four usages focus on salvation and the outcome of salvation. 1Timothy 1:15 emphasizes the gospel of salvation wherein Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of the world and beside Him there is none other. Titus 3:8 emphasizes the fruits of salvation which are good works. Anyone who says that he believes in God must demonstrate it by his transformed life and show forth good works in his new life. The context of 1Timothy 4:9 is in the following verse 10 which emphasizes the importance of carrying the cross and necessity of suffering for Christ for the gospel’s sake. 2Timothy 2:11 emphasizes the importance of being dead to self and sin and being alive to God through Jesus Christ. In these verses above, the emphasis is on salvation, fruit of salvation and being persecuted for salvation. In 1Timothy 3:1, the use of this phrase “this is a true saying” is not related to salvation. The context is the qualities of leadership for the elders.

In other words, God has elevated the qualifications of leadership for both the elders and deacons to an extremely high level. It is just as important as the doctrine of salvation. This definitely points to special care and consideration for every believer to take note of. Please

also observe that these five occurrences are all found in the Pastoral Epistles. They are specially written for the church leaders and members alike to highlight the importance of salvation and godly leaders. Every member has a responsibility for who is to be elected in the church, and each elected leader must take note that all these qualifications are to be found in his life. When leaders are godly, the doctrine of salvation is well protected and biblically emphasized. When the leaders are ungodly, i.e. carnal or worldly, the doctrine of salvation will be distorted. For example, there are neo-evangelical leaders who teach that the most important doctrine in the Bible is to preach the gospel and that to defend other doctrines like the perfect Bible and biblical separation is not necessary. This teaching is carnal and not of God. The preaching of the gospel is important but the foundation and basis for the gospel of Christ is the perfect Bible. The first line of defence and protection of all the doctrines of the Bible including the doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the doctrine of biblical separation. Therefore, when neo-evangelical leaders say that only the gospel of Christ matters and the rest of the doctrines are secondary, they are actually speaking with a forked tongue, like the serpent! By allowing the attack on doctrine of the perfect Bible to succeed and by not practising the doctrine of biblical separation, it is as good as destroying the faith and testimony of the believers. Such subtle backdoor attacks on the Word of God by these neo-evangelicals have resulted in many fundamental churches becoming citadels of false doctrines who ignorantly promote the doctrines of devils without realizing it! Such is the success of the evil one in these last days, and churches that do not have godly pastors, elders and deacons will surely go down this slippery slope of spiritual death! It is, therefore, vital that members of God's churches learn and realize the grave responsibility that has been entrusted to them to choose God-fearing leaders to protect God's work and God's people. If they do not choose based upon biblical criteria revealed to us in Holy Scriptures, they will choose based upon carnal criteria. There are only two options! The consequences are so dire that the churches that have fallen down the slope of spiritual death have remained at the bottom and not one has climbed back up! They were lulled into a comatose state of spiritual doldrums and members play church and sing hymns like the walking dead, not knowing that they are travelling on the broad way that leads to destruction. Choose your leaders well based upon godly criteria!

1Timothy 3:1 says, *"This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work."* Eldership is for the male gender only. The entire section on the qualifications of an elder (verses 1 to 7) is in the masculine gender. The word "man" is in the masculine gender. Women cannot be elders in God's churches. This is not an issue of equality but biblical truth from God. The church belongs to God. God sets the rules as He knows His children best. 1Timothy 2:9-15 give the biblical reasons why God does not allow women to be pastors and elders. Women are not to be ordained as pastors and elders. Any one church that breaks this commandment of God sins against God. God will not bless a church that disobeys His Word. The reasons given by God for women's subjection in the church are:- Adam was created first and then the woman; and Adam was not deceived by the serpent whereas the woman Eve was deceived. These are two historical facts that cannot be changed at all. These are eternal truths that God has given for the biblical set up of His church. Every church must abide by these truths or else they will suffer spiritual decay which will inevitably lead to spiritual death! This is a non negotiable doctrine that must be obeyed by all of God's faithful children. Church leaders will answer to God for the spiritual well being of God's children. God decides who are born male and female. It is God who saves and God always knows what is best for the well being of His church. The men who are to be pastors and elders must have the

following criteria given by God in 1Timothy 3:1-7. 1Timothy 3:8-13 are criteria for both deacons and deaconesses. We shall study the criteria of elders and pastors first.

If a man in the church has a genuine desire to serve as an elder, he desires a good work. The two words “desire” and “desires” are different in the Greek. The first “desire” (*oregomai-present tense and middle voice*) refers to the desire of the mind. This means that he has it in his mind to become an elder. The present tense indicates that it is a continuous desire which he must have for the rest of his life and ministry. This desire is strong and grows stronger with time as his responsibilities increase. The fear of God would be upon him. The use of the middle voice indicates that he must have it in himself. He must not become an elder for the sake of others. He should not do it because there is a need in the church. These reasons will not stand the test of time. He himself must continue to desire in his head to become an elder because it is a conviction that God has given to him. He cannot run from this grave and awesome responsibility. To be an elder is NOT a promotion. It is a calling. Those who see the office of an elder as a promotion would be sinning against God and these must not be made church elders. Sadly, there are those who clamour to be elders for personal esteem; they like it when members greet them “Elder so and so” for their ego’s sake. These are carnal men who have sinned against God and must be stripped of their office. They have brought great shame to this high office of God. Such a desecration of God's office must be categorically condemned by God's people.

The second “desire” (*epithumeo-present tense and active voice*) refers to a strong desire from the heart. This is the passion that a man must have for his office. This is also a continuous desire as seen in the use of the present tense. When we combine the two “desires” together, we find that the whole person is involved. Both his head and heart must possess this desire. This means that the first requirement for the man is that he must have a continuous lifelong desire to become an elder. If he has no desire to become an elder, do not urge him to become one. He will be a miserable elder and he will carry the load of leadership with a sour face and one day he will collapse under the stress and strain of this high office given by God to the local churches today. Can the desire diminish? The answer will be a definite “yes”. When that happens, the elder ought to step down from office, seek God’s will and renew his covenant relationship with His God in relation to his eldership. This desire is a heartfelt experience that is a good indicator of the elder's personal relationship with God. If he is far from God and his ministry as an elder has become dull and tasteless then his walk with God is probably also dull and listless. When his walk with God is vibrant and intimate, his ministry as an elder will also be the same, vibrant and on fire for the Lord. The spiritual state of the elder complements the spiritual state of his service as an elder.

Hence, the long list of spiritual qualifications follows this “faithful saying”. These spiritual qualifications must be adhered to strictly and rigidly. No one is allowed to tamper with the list. Every elder must possess ALL the qualifications listed. If he has all of them except one, then he cannot be an elder. For example, if a man has all the qualifications listed here but he cannot keep his house in order (for example, he is afraid of his wife), he cannot be an elder. All elders must meet this entire list of qualifications in various degrees. He can improve as he serves but he must first possess all of them. He may be apt to teach but he should continue to learn and improve on his knowledge of God’s Holy Word to become a better and more effective teacher. If he is not apt to teach God's Word anymore because he has stopped studying God's Word, then he needs to step down! He is no longer qualified.

To ordain a person to be an elder is a spiritual responsibility that must be borne by every member of the local congregation. To put into leadership someone who does not have any of the qualifications listed in 1Timothy 3:1-7 would destroy the church. The elder will have to carry out duties and responsibilities in the church and make spiritual decisions. If he is carnal and worldly and has no or little knowledge of the Word of God, he will make decisions based on carnal and worldly philosophies. He will soon bring about members in the church who are like him, carnal and worldly. At the next election, he will nominate men who are just like him for the offices of deacons and elders! Like elder like deacon like member. The church will die with such elders. However, if the elders are godly, then the church will also be godly. Godly elders will plan for God's people godly programmes where God's Word will be faithfully taught and emphasized and the people blessed. Their prayer life will be active and vibrant because they will pray before they plan and act. They will always lean on God rather than use man-centered ways to care for the church. Their emphasis would be Christ and spiritual truths in all the ministries of the church. God will bless such a church where God's people are Christ-like in thought, speech, life and deeds.

“This is a faithful saying” is for us to take note in order to choose godly elders. All the qualifications are spiritual in nature. Elders hold the highest office in God's church. They are to be the under-shepherds of the flock of Jesus Christ. They are to feed, protect, nurture and even give their lives for the flock. May God's people take their electoral rights seriously and prayerfully for God's glory and the blessing of God's church. AMEN.