

# 1 Timothy 3 - Qualifications of Elders, Deacons, Deaconesses; The Nature of the Local Church

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## Local Church Government

Everything rises or falls with leadership, whether it be a family, a church or a nation. The form is not as important as the caliber and character of the men holding office. That is the problem today in public life, and that is the problem in the Church.

There are three main forms of Church government:

- Episcopal: one, or several, in charge at the top, typically outside the local church
- Presbyterian: representatives elected from the membership
- Congregational: the people make the decisions

All can work well, and all can be characterized by strifes and divisions. Paul will also emphasize that there are two aspects of a spiritual officer: he must be a man of faith, and he must be motivated by love. Paul explained the three responsibilities in a local church:

1. Teach sound doctrine (v1-11)
2. Proclaim the Gospel (v12-17)
3. Defend the faith (v18-20)

In this chapter, Paul moves from instructions concerning worship in the Church to laying out qualifications for leaders in the church. In 1 Tim 1, he discussed women and leadership (v11-15); now he discusses men and leadership, specifically the personal qualities necessary for effective church leaders.

## 1 Timothy 3

- (3) Leadership (3:1-13)
  - (A) Elders (3:1-7)
    - (a) General commendation (3:1)

1 It is a **trustworthystatement**: if any man aspires to the office of **overseer**, *it is* a fine work he desires *to do*.

1 It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*.

1 This is a trustworthy saying: The one who would an elder be, a noble task desires he.

1 This is a truesaying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desires a good work.

- The Ephesian church already had elders before Paul wrote this epistle (Acts 20:17-35)

— It is possible that the false teachers mentioned in 1 Tim 1:3-7 were elders (Cf. 5:22,24-25)

- "...trustworthy statement" - used 5x in the Pastoral Epistles

— A person can aspire to hold an office out of good or bad motives; Paul assumed good motives (the desire to do a worthy work, not personal accolades)

- "...overseer" - *episkopes*, emphasizes this person's leadership and management responsibilities; synonymous with "elder," "pastor" or "shepherd" (1 Peter 5:1-3; Acts 20:17,28)

— The office of elder was common in churches at the time Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles. He had appointed many of them (Acts 14:23)

— Paul, who founded a number of churches, never spoke of himself as a bishop

This saying focuses less on the *person* than on the *position*. Paul is not commending people who have a desire to be a leader; he is saying that the position is significant enough that it should be the kind of task that people aspire to.

## Elders/Pastors

- "Elder" - *presbuteros*, old man
  - Paul never said that each congregation required at least one elder to be a church. There appears to have been more than one elder in some churches (Acts 20:17; Phil 1:1), but not in all.
  - It is an official position of leadership in the church that carries pastoral responsibility (1 Peter 5:1-2)
  - It also describes the maturity of those who hold the position, primarily spiritual maturity
- "Pastor" - *poimen*, shepherd
  - Describes the gift and work necessary to fulfill this position; the gift and work of a shepherd
- "Overseer" - describes the main responsibility inherent in the position
- In NT: bishop, elder, and pastor were synonymous
  - In the early church, a bishop never had authority over other bishops or elders

### (b) Qualifications (3:2-7)

#### (i) Personal life (3:2-3)

2 An overseer, then, must be **abovereapproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, skillful in teaching,**

2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

2 Therefore, an elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife, stable, sensible, respectable, hospitable to strangers, and teachable.

2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

- Paul lists 15 characteristics that should distinguish the life of a man who aspires to be an elder (v2-7):

- "...above reproach" - *anepilempton*, not to be laid ahold of; above reproach; possess no observable flaw in his character or conduct; no cause for justifiable criticism, now or in the past, that someone could use to discredit him or bring reproach on the name of Christ or the church (Cf. 5:7; 6:14; Titus 1:6)

— Make no mistake: you will be blamed for things if you hold office or a position of authority. One must strive to assure that they aren't justified or true. Being blameless

means one is free from guilt, even though he might be accused of something inappropriate or sinful.

- "...the husband of one wife" - *mias gunaikos andra*, not referring to re-marriage after wife's death (Gen 2:18; Cf. 1 Tim 4:3)
  - There are four major interpretations (see chart below)
  - The main question is whether Paul was referring to a potential elder's present situation, or over his entire lifetime. Based on the other 14 characteristics, it's likely Paul was referring to present situation.
- "...temperate" - *nethalion*, sober, clear-headed, well-balanced (3:11; 2 Tim 4:5)
  - "temperate in all things" means keeping your head in all situations
  - "...self-controlled" - *sothron*, prudent; serious attitude, earnest about his work, knows the value of things; self-controlled; same Greek word is translated as "sensible" in Titus 1:8
  - Does not speak rashly, a person of sound judgment, master of himself and his situation
  - "...respectable" - *kosmios*, respectable, orderly; dignified and decent in his conduct; same Greek word is translated "modest" in 2:9
  - "...hospitable" - *philoxenos*, one who opens his home to others; loving the stranger
    - This was an especially important quality in the early church since there were few public accommodations for traveling ministers and a large need to take in needy Christians temporarily (Cf. Acts 16:15,40)
    - An elder should be a person who reaches out to strangers, the unsaved as well as believers, and makes them feel at home in his house.
  - "...skillful in teaching" - *didaktikos*, qualified and competent to teach, explain and defend the truth of God; a pastor is automatically a teacher and certainly a continual student of the Word
    - This qualification is the primary difference between elders and deacons; this command is repeated in 2 Tim 2:24; Titus 1:9
    - This is the only qualification that involves ministry skill or gift
    - The ability to teach is not a characteristic required of all Christians, only of overseers (elders)
    - The style of communication can vary according to individual gifts (large groups, small groups, personal discipleship, street evangelism, etc.)
    - The Pastoral Epistles make it clear that the primary leadership of the Church is in the hands of the teachers...those who can preach the truth and refute error (2 Tim 2:24; Titus 1:9). The primary leadership of the Church should not reside in the hands of administrators.
    - Many scholars believe that "pastors and teachers" refer to one person with two functions (Eph 4:11)
    - To teach and preach is the primary task of elders (1 Tim 4:6,11,13,16; 5:17; 2 Tim 2:15,24; Titus 2:1). Timothy had a gift of teaching (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6).

- There were a plurality of elders overseeing the work of each church (1 Tim 5:7)
- These men had to be qualified. The most important qualification—Intelligence? Personality? Vision? Administration? Decisiveness? Courage? ...all ok, but most important: Integrity!

### **VIEW 1: HE MUST BE MARRIED.**

**This view sees as disqualified all unmarried men.<sup>162</sup>** Those who hold this view usually appeal mainly to the context of the passage for support. To be consistent, the elder then should also have children.

<u>PRO</u>	<u>CON</u>
If a man is going to oversee a local church, he must have successful experience overseeing a family household (v. 5).	The emphasis on "one" in the Greek text suggests a contrast between one or more wives, rather than one or no wives.
	Paul could simply have said the elder needed to be married if that is what he meant.
	To be consistent, verse 4 would require that the elder have children (plural), too. <sup>163</sup>
	Jesus put no stigma on a man remaining single to serve the Lord (Matt. 19:12), and Paul said that it is possible for a single person to serve the Lord more effectively than a married person can (1 Cor. 7:7-8).

### **VIEW 2: HE MUST BE MARRIED ONLY ONCE.**

**This view sees as disqualified men who remarry for any reason, such as remarried widowers and divorcees.<sup>164</sup>** Those who hold this view often put much emphasis on church history, specifically, that the early church, according to the writings of some church fathers, discouraged remarriage.

<u>PRO</u>	<u>CON</u>
Paul urged the unmarried and widows to remain unmarried in 1 Cor. 7:8.	Paul urged the younger widows to remarry (5:14; cf. 1 Cor. 7).
The early church looked down on remarriage for any reason. <sup>165</sup>	Remarrying did not disqualify widows from receiving regular support from the church (5:9).
If a man does not remarry, he provides a better example for the church of what it means to be Spirit-controlled and totally dependent on God's grace.	There is nothing essentially sinful about remarrying when the marriage bond has been broken (1 Cor. 7:9; cf. Rom. 7:2-3).

The phrase "wife of one man" (5:9), which is identical to "husband of one wife" except for the switch in sexes, in its context seems to mean married only once.	Since this appears to be the only moral qualification for the elder office, it is unlikely that Paul viewed remarriage as the worst possible moral offense that would disqualify a man.
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A variation of this view that some interpreters prefer, is that divorce and remarriage disqualify a man, but the death of a wife and remarriage do not.<sup>166</sup>

<u>PRO</u>	<u>CON</u>
There is nothing morally culpable about being a widower, but there is about being a divorcee.	Not every case of divorce renders a man morally culpable (blameworthy).

### **VIEW 3: HE MUST BE MONOGAMOUS.**

**This view sees as disqualified any man who is married to more than one woman at a time.** This would include bigamists, polygamists, and perhaps remarried divorcees—depending on the circumstances of their divorce.<sup>167</sup> Advocates often emphasize the syntax of the passage: "one-woman man."

<u>PRO</u>	<u>CON</u>
The emphasis on "one" wife in the Greek text contrasts with more than one wife.	To be consistent, we would have to conclude that polyandry was also common (5:9), but it was not. <sup>168</sup>
Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures practiced polygamy at this time. <sup>169</sup>	If this is all Paul meant, he hardly needed to mention it since polygamy was inappropriate for all Christians, not just elders (cf. 1 Cor. 7:2).

### **VIEW 4: HE MUST BE A MORAL HUSBAND.**

**This view sees as disqualified any man who is or has been morally unfaithful to his wife (or wives if he is remarried).**<sup>170</sup> Some interpreters view any divorce as infidelity, others only divorce in which the husband has been unfaithful. Those who argue for this view often emphasize the theological issue that God requires high standards for leaders.

<u>PRO</u>	<u>CON</u>
This is an idiomatic use of the phrase "husband of one wife." It means a "one-woman man." One paraphrase reads "committed to his wife." <sup>171</sup>	Paul could have said "faithful to his wife" if that is all he meant.

Paul seems to use "wife of one man" in the same way, in 5:9, to describe a faithful wife.	Since God commanded all Christians to be morally pure, Paul must have meant more than this here.
Since this is the only moral qualification for an elder, we should probably interpret it broadly as forbidding immorality.	
One variation of this view is that the man must be a faithful husband <i>now</i> , even though he may have been unfaithful in the past (before and or after his conversion). <sup>172</sup>	
<u>PRO</u>	<u>CON</u>
This interpretation is consistent with the other qualifications for elders, all of which deal with the man's present condition.	All the other qualifications for elders view the man's total record of behavior, not just his present condition.
God forgives all sin and so should the church.	A presently faithful husband may have established a record of previous unfaithfulness that would make him a bad example as an elder.
	The consequences of sin usually follow, even though God <i>does</i> forgive the guilt of all sin. For this reason, immorality in marriage disqualifies a man.
A second variation of this view is that the man must have proved himself faithful, in the past (either all his life or since his conversion) as well as in the present. <sup>173</sup>	
<u>PRO</u>	<u>CON</u>
Paul must have had the man's record of behavior in view, since the other qualifications require that we take the past into consideration.	The church should forgive all sin since God does.
If Paul had meant that God wipes away the <i>consequences</i> of sin, as well as its guilt, he did not need to give any qualifications. Almost any Christian presently walking in fellowship with God could qualify.	

3 **not overindulging in wine, not a bully, but gentle, not contentious, free from the love of money.**

3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.

- 3 He must not drink excessively or be a violent person, but instead be gentle. He must not be argumentative or love money.
- 3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;
  - "not overindulging in wine" - *me paroinon*, not a person who sits long with the cup and drinks to excess; not a brawler, playboy, or a slave to alcoholic beverages
  - Paul used "wine" to represent any enslaving beverage
  - It is appropriate to extend its meaning to any destructive addiction: drugs, gambling, eating, pornography, etc.
  - Paul advised Timothy to use a little wine for health reasons (1 Tim 5:23)
  - Total abstinence was not required of believers. There are many Christians that include a table wine with their meals, but many abstain in public to avoid stumbling a brother (Rom 14:21).
  - "...not a bully" - *me plekten*, not contentious, pugnacious or violent; not looking for a fight
  - Someone who resorts to physical or verbal violence to vent their anger or to settle disputes
  - A leader, when wronged, must have no thought of retaliation
  - "...gentle" - *epieikes* (Cf. 2 Cor 10:2; Titus 3:2)
  - "...not contentious" - *amachos*, a peacemaker, not a troublemaker; describes a person who is not argumentative or quarrelsome
  - "...free from the love of money" - *aphilarguros*, not covetous; it is the "love" of money, not the possession of it, that is the disqualifying factor. The opposite attitude is contentment.
  - You can covet many things other than money: popularity, size of ministry, power, prestige, etc.

#### (ii) Family supervision (3:4-5)

- 4 *He must be one who manages his own household well*, keeping his children under control with all dignity
- 4 *He must be one who manages his own household well*, keeping his children under control with all dignity
- 4 He must manage his own family well and have children who are submissive and respectful in every way.
- 4 One that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;
  - "...manages his own household well" - *tou idiou oikou kalos proistamenon*, one who has control of his family; presides over, governs, "as a loving shepherd" (1 Peter 5:3)
  - Family members submit to his leadership out of respect for him (Cf. Prov 24:3-4; 27:23; Eph 6:4)

5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),

5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),

5 For if a man does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?

5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

- The elder's responsibilities in the church are quite parental, so he should have proved his parenting ability in the home before he receives larger responsibility in the church. The home is the proving ground for church leadership.

### (iii) Maturity (3:6)

6 *and not a new convert*, so that he will not become conceited and fall into condemnation incurred by the devil.

6 *and not a new convert*, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.

6 He must not be a recent convert, so that he won't become arrogant and fall into the Devil's condemnation.

6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

- "...not a new convert" - *neophytes*, not someone newly planted or one newly come to the faith

— How new is too new? There should be evidence that he can function as an elder (teaching, leading, defending the faith, etc.) without becoming conceited (Cf. 5:24-25)

— Immaturity can include vulnerability to pride and a serious stumbling (Prov 16:18). The immature elder may also see the position as an opportunity for personal advancement and fail to understand the importance of the office.

### (iv) Reputation among unsaved (3:7)

7 And he must have a **good reputation** with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.

7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

7 He must be well thought of by outsiders, so he doesn't fall into disgrace and the trap set for him by the Devil.

7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

- "...good reputation" - a good reputation outside the church, with unbelievers, is essential so he does not bring reproach to the name of Christ or the church itself
- Does he pay his bills? Does he have a good reputation among the unsaved with whom he does business? Does he manifest a wholesome character in his ethics? (Col 4:5; 1 Thess 4:12)

Two things stand out in Paul's list of qualifications for elders: (1) The man could not be guilty of doing something seriously wrong, and (2) other people had to perceive his conduct as proper for a Christian.

Prospective and current elders should meet ALL of these qualifications, without fail. The reason is that an effective church depends on its leadership. The NT does not legislate the details of church operations, so it is important that the men making these decisions be spiritual men who set a good example, and have the respect and confidence of church members.

(B) Deacons (3:8-13)

(a) Personal qualifications (3:8)

**8 Deacons** likewise *must be men of dignity, not insincere, not prone to drink much wine, not greedy for money,*

**8** Deacons likewise *must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain,*

**8** Ministers, too, must be serious. They must not be two-faced, addicted to wine, or greedy for money.

**8** Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

- These verses do not spell out the functions of a deacon, but simply clarify the type of person who qualifies to be a deacon. Elders and deacons are distinct in function but similar in character.

- "Deacons" - *diakonos*, meaning servant

— Even though deacons are not given the authority of the elders, they still must meet certain qualifications

— The usage of this word is often traced to Acts 6, ostensibly designating assistants to the apostles

— If Acts 6:2-7 is a preview of the sort of needs the deacons of v8-13 exist to meet, then we can say that deacons exist to support the ministry of the Word by helping people in need

— This God-given role balances the fact that the church must be led, people must be helped, the Gospel must be preached, and needs must be met

- Pastors/Elders cannot function effectively if they are constantly called on to meet other's needs within the church; thus the relationship between Pastors/Elders and Deacons is designed by God to be a partnership in ministry, for the progress of the Gospel.
- Paul and Apollos were called deacons
- "...men of dignity" - *semnos*, worthy of respect; worth imitating
- "...not insincere" - *dilogous*, not two-faced, saying one thing and doing another; or living one way part of the time, and another way at another time
- Honest; not hypocritical, does not gossip, not a sycophant; forthright
- "...not prone to *drink* much wine" - not an alcoholic or addict; parallel with elder qualification (see note on v3)
- "...not greedy for money" - does not love dirty money; parallel with elder qualification (see note on v3)

(b) Doctrinal qualifications (3:9-10)

- 9 *but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.*
- 9 *but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.*
- 9 They must hold firmly to the secret of the faith with clear consciences.
- 9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.
  - Describes a man of conviction who behaves in harmony with his beliefs
  - A deacon who does not know the Bible is an obstacle to growth in a local assembly
  - A successful or popular businessman, or generous contributor, doesn't mean he is qualified to serve as a deacon
- 10 These men must also **first be tested**; then have them serve as deacons if they are **beyond reproach**.
  - 10 These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.
  - 10 But they must first be tested. Then, if they prove to be blameless, they may become ministers.
  - 10 And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.
    - "...first be tested" - an untested Christian is an unprepared Christian
    - This is not to imply that they should be given a trial appointment as deacon, but rather that the church should constantly be examining and testing the members of the congregation, so that when the need for selecting deacons arises, they will know what members are qualified for appointment.
    - A pilot doesn't really know his own qualifications until after his first *real* forced landing

- "...beyond reproach" - *anegkletoi*, without reasonable grounds for accusation; beyond reproach; parallel with elder qualification (see note v2)
- This should be true of this man in the past, as well as in the present; having past the test of time

### Training Periods

- Joseph - servant for 13 years in Egypt before becoming Prime Minister
- Moses - cared for sheep for 40 years before being called
- Joshua - Moses' servant before becoming his successor
- David - tended sheep when invited by Samuel to be anointed king of Israel

#### (c) Spousal qualifications (3:11)

11 Women *must* likewise **bedignified**, not **maliciousgossips**, but **temperate, faithful in all things**.

11 Women *must* likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

11 Their wives must also be serious. They must not be gossips, but instead be stable and trustworthy in everything.

11 Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

- "Women" - does this describe female deacons or the wives of male deacons? See note: **Deacon's Wives or Female Deacons?** below.

- Paul gave four qualifications for these women:
- "...dignified" - *semnas*, reverent, known for their character
- "...malicious gossips" - *diabolos*, malicious gossips; do not slander others (this is one of the titles of Satan)
- "...temperate" - *nephalious*, well-balanced, temperate; parallel with elder qualification (see note on v2; Cf. Titus 2:2)
- "...faithful in all things" - *pistas en pasin*, completely trustworthy

### Deacon's Wives or Female Deacons?

Exegetically, it is very hard to determine. It probably refers to female deacons for the following reasons:

1. There is no definite article or possessive before "women," which would need to be present to mean "deacons' wives"
2. The "likewise" of v11, like that of v8, leads one to expect a new category (Cf. 2:9; 3:8; Titus 2:3,6)
3. It would be unusual for Paul to prescribe qualifications for wives of deacons but not for wives of elders.

4. The fact that he inserted special qualifications for women—in the middle of his list of *deacon qualifications*—seems to indicate that he considered these women to be “deaconesses.”
- Paul described Phoebe as a “deaconess” (*diakonon*, servant) of the church in Cenchrea in Rom 16:1. This may mean she was simply a “servant” of the church. However, the term he used allows for the possibility that she occupied the *office* of deaconess in her church.
- The *office* of deaconess is not certain in the NT church, but evidence suggests that women had this *ministry*, for it is certainly seen in the post-apostolic period.

(d) Family qualifications (3:12-13)

12 Deacons must be **husbands of one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.**

12 Deacons must be husbands of *only* one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own households.

12 Ministers must be husbands of one wife and must manage their children and their families well.

12 Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

- After describing qualifications for Deaconesses in v11, Paul returns to qualifications for male deacons

- “...husbands of one wife” - parallel with elder qualification (see note and various interpretations on v2)

- “...good managers of *their* children and their own households” - good managers of their family and household; parallel with elder qualification (see notes on v4-5)

13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a **highstanding and greatconfidence** in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

13 Those ministers who serve well gain an excellent reputation for themselves and will have great assurance by their faith in the Messiah Jesus.

13 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.

- Two rewards for faithful service as a deacon:

- “...high standing” - a good reputation; high standing; a military term referring to rank; a rung on a ladder

- “...great confidence” - increased confidence in dealing with others and God (Cf. Matt 20:26-28; Mark 10:43-45)

Paul said nothing about the duties of deacons in this passage. This indicates that he did not associate specific tasks with the office. He seems to have intended that deacons should function as official servants of the church in whatever capacity the elders may see a need for this. They were in effect the elders' assistants.

(4) Reason for appropriate conduct in the church: it is the pillar of truth (3:14-16)

(A) Paul's delay (3:14)

**14** I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long;

**14** I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long;

**14** I hope to come to you soon. However, I'm writing this to you

**14** These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly:

- Paul's hopes were never realized

(B) Paul's commands (3:15a)

(C) Paul's reasons for commands (3:15b-16)

(a) Church is the pillar of truth (3:15b)

15 but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one should act in the **household of God**, which is the church of the living God, the **pillar** and **support** of **the truth**.

15 but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

15 in case I am delayed, so that you may know how to behave in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

15 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.

- "...household of God" - "household" is better translation. The local church is to be a "family" of believers, thus it should conduct its corporate life as a family rather than a business, an entertainment center, or some other type of organization.

- Born again into God's family (John 1:11-13; 1 Peter 1:22-25)

- "...pillar" - a support for something set on top of it

- Each local church supports the witness of each believer in it, and holds that testimony up before the world, in which untruth abounds

- "...support" - bulwark, foundation: the church is to protect truth and make sure it does not fall

- "...the truth" - could be interpreted as either specifically Jesus Christ (John 14:6), or more generally to the truth of God's redemptive plan

— Since the hymn that follows in v16 is specifically about Jesus, it's likely that was Paul's referent here

### **The Church**

From the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning "assembly," referring to the political assemblies in the Greek cities where business was transacted by qualified citizens.

- It means "those called out" (Acts 19:29,32)
  - It must be fed on the Word of God (Matt 4:4; 1 Cor 3:1-2; Heb 5:12-14; Ps 119:103)
    - A Church does not grow by addition, but by nutrition (Eph 4:11-16)
    - The decay of our nation must be laid at the base of America's pulpits...
- (b) Church conveys the mystery of godliness (3:16a)  
(c) Church conveys Christ (3:16b-e)  
(i) Incarnation (3:16b)  
(ii) Resurrection (3:16c)  
(iii) Necessity of believing faith (3:16d)  
(iv) Ascension (3:16e)

16 Beyond question, great is the **mystery of godliness**: He who was **revealed in the flesh**, **Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory**.

16 By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.

16 By common confession, the secret of our godly worship is great: In flesh was he revealed to sight, kept righteous by the Spirit's might, adored by angels singing. To nations was he manifest, believing souls found peace and rest, our Lord in heaven reigning!

16 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.

- "...mystery of godliness" - Jesus' life and ministry clarified this "mystery" by showing what "godliness" looks like (John 14:9)
- "...revealed in the flesh" - the Incarnation (John 1:14)
- "...vindicated in the Spirit" - His resurrection (Mark 1:9-11; Rom 1:4)
- "...Seen by angels" - post-resurrection sightings (John 20:11-14; 1 Peter 3:22)
- After His resurrection, He was only touched by loving hands and only seen by loving eyes (Cf. Acts 10:37-43)
- "...Proclaimed among the nations" - proclamation by the disciples (between the resurrection and ascension) (Rom 16:25-27; Eph 3:8-9)

- "...Believed on in the world" - the regeneration of those who heard and believed this witness (Acts 13:48)
- "...Taken up in glory" - the ascension (Acts 1:9; 2:33)