

# Bristol Conference 1975-04 1 Timothy - Chapter 3: by Stan Ford

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of having the right qualities and characteristics for those who desire to be elders or bishops in the church.*

**Duration:** 39:02

**Scripture:** 1 Timothy 2:12, 1 Timothy 3:1-6, 1 Timothy 3:15-16

**Topics:** "Church Leadership", "Elder Responsibilities"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker introduces four individuals: Abidus, Henry, Gerald, and Stan. The speaker emphasizes that Stan is the greatest among them and should be forgiven. The sermon then focuses on the importance of elders and their responsibilities in the church. The speaker highlights the dangers of laziness and the need for elders to be diligent and responsible in their roles. The sermon also touches on the significance of the church as the pillar and ground of truth and the importance of proper behavior within the church.

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## Transcript

There are many fourths in our country, and some of these have become very popular. I would like to introduce our speaker tonight by borrowing the framework of a verse in your Bible. And now, Abidas, Henry, Gerald, and Stan, these three, but the greatest of these is Stan.

Really, he ought to be forgiven, didn't he? The third chapter, this is it. Now, to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? Not a novice, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must have a good report of them which are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Likewise must the deacons be brave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience, and let these also first be proved, then let them use the office of a deacon being found blameless. Even so, must their wives be brave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husband of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

For they that have used the office of a deacon will purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly. But if I carry 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.

And without controversy, you will notice my English correct pronunciation, 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 us into glory. May the Lord just add his blessing to the reading of his own precious work.

Hardly necessary, having read the third chapter, to remind you of that which I have been suggesting is the reason for the writing of this wonderful letter, that we may know how to behave ourselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. This evening we find ourselves in no difficulty whatsoever in seeing that here is a chapter that deals, first of all, with overseers, mission, elders. Here is a chapter that deals with deepness.

And if you would have the King James Version, there was. If you would like Mr. Darby, then indeed, the women. And then as you go down this chapter, we see it dealing not only with overseers and deepness, but then you go down the chapter and you see it dealing with the head of the church in the most classic of all Christian thoughts, as he dares to remind us that God is manifest in flesh, justified in spirit, seen of angels, preached on to the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory.

There is one sure thing that I am going to find it very difficult tonight to deal with the whole of the third chapter of 1 Timothy, especially when some of you have said, Mr. Ward, I wish you wouldn't speak the past. Well, however do you expect me to get through the chapter unless I speak past? But nevertheless, I shall do my best. You will notice that in this very first verse of this very wonderful chapter, we have brought before us an aspiration.

May I repeat that? We have brought before us an aspiration. This is a true saying. If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

I think that it's important for us to remember that the apostle is writing to young Timothy, he is speaking of churches that Timothy will be laboring in, and he is reminding Timothy that there is an office in the church, an office which indeed is an office to be desired. This is why I'm glad there are so many young men and women in this service tonight. If I have learned anything from the school of experience, I've learned this, that if there is one class of folk in the assembly of God's folk who are always being criticized, it is those who are overseers, elders, bishops, the same were.

And I'm glad you young folk are here because I want to say this to you. I trust if nothing more tonight, you may have in your heart developed a desire that if the Lord should tarry, one day you yourselves will step into the place of those that will have gone on before you to carry the responsibility, to fight the good fight in that particular area that God has called certain to. I ought to pass a word about this old English word, bishop.

I'm not quite sure why it is used so frequently in our modern translations, for every scholar acknowledges that the thought is not of an Episcopalian, whether it be Anglican or Methodist, bishop. I need scarcely remind you that such bishop, there is one over many churches. As far as the New Testament bishop is concerned, it is not one bishop over many churches, but many church, or many bishops, in one church.

You remember when the apostle writes to the church of Phillip, he dares to say this, to all the saints that are in Phillip, with the bishop, plural, and dependent. So it wasn't one bishop over many churches, it was many bishops in one church. And I think it's important to remember that.

But here is an aspiration. He who desireth the office of a bishop, desireth a good work. Now would you notice that? You see, I have found this, my brethren, sisters, and I think you would agree with me, that there are many popes who love to have the office of the bishop, but they don't want the work of the bishop.

Now he that desireth the office of a bishop, desireth not a good office, but a good work. So let's remember right at the beginning, the Spirit of God is saying to us, that those who are elders in the assemblies of God's popes are workers. My old friend Bill Patterson used to say, and many of you heard him say it, that there are three sorts of people.

There are workers. There are jerkers. There are shirkers.

And how true that is. There are those that are workers in the assemblies of God's popes. There are those that are jerkers.

You know, they work well while the conference is on, but a week after they forget all they've heard and they go back into apathy again. And then there are those that are shirkers. They'll always pass it on to others.

But the first mark of a bishop is this. An elder, he is a worker. It is a work, a real work.

The work of an elder. Then if you will notice in this verse that there is an aspiration, you will also notice there is an attribute. For there are attributes of a bishop.

For you will notice that verse 2 says that he must be blameless. I'm so glad it doesn't say sinless, else there would never be any. But it does say blameless.

And my brother, may I suggest this, and my sister, may I suggest it to you, for if there is one thing necessary today, it is that we as members of a local church shall pray, shall pray for the elders of the church. Let us pray then that those who indeed God has raised up amongst us by His Spirit may be those who are blameless. I often find that there are problems and difficulties come, and elders have to face them, and they would never have to face them if we as a church remembered those elders more frequently than we do.

Then you will notice that they are called not only to be blameless, but they are called to be those who are the husbands of one wife. Now this, of course, is most important. Maybe not in your land, maybe not in my land, but I believe it would do you good if after this service you spent some little time with dear Brother Bass and his wife, and asked them the meaning of this word.

They who have labored so long amongst those where polygamy is still practiced. Never let us forget that Timothy was to work in areas where polygamy was a real thing, and men had more than one wife. Yet here is the mark.

Paul is not saying, let me toss this as forever, Paul is not saying that a man who's never married can never be an elder. He's not saying that. What he's saying is that an elder must be blameless, and in an area where there are those who have practiced polygamy, he shall be the husband of one wife.

One wife. He goes further and he dares to remind us that he must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant. And how important that is.

Why? If there is one thing that is necessary of a man who will lead an assembly of a sister, who will take her stand among the women in the church of God, it is this, that they shall be men and women who will keep on going for God. Not only will they be those who are vigilant, inasmuch as they are continually watching over the church, but they will be vigilant in watching over the things of their own life that will mar their labor for the Lord. Then you notice that he dares to remind us that an elder shall be not only vigilant, but sober, given to hospitality, and asked to teach.

Now, in the light of what we have been considering in the afternoon, as to the training of a missionary, I think it's good that this shall be emphasized, that an elder shall be asked to teach. Now, would you please notice something. It does not say ask to preach.

It says ask to teach. Now, if my experience has gone for anything, it teaches me this, that quite frequently, the best preachers in assemblies are not the best elders. I don't tell you why.

Because they are so good at preaching, of a Lord's day, they are invited to occupy platforms in so many other places. And I sometimes have gone to preach at an assembly, and when I've gone, a brother has offered me his hand, has shaken my hand and says, Brother Sam, we're sorry, none of the elders are here. They're all out preaching.

Now, my Bible does not say an elder must be apt to preach, but apt to teach. And I believe that teaching is most important. And I have learned that there is more teaching done in a home, after a service.

And I want to say this to you. I am so glad that I'm not an elder. I am so glad that I'm not an elder.

I don't know whether my shoulders even would be big enough to bear the responsibility. I believe that we need to pray for elders in an assembly more than ever we've prayed for them before. When I was first converted and I came amongst the group of Christians that I'm still amongst, it was comparatively easy for the elders of the church to do pastoral work.

You see, in my assembly, there was only one brother who had a car. So we all walked to the meeting. After the meeting, we walked home.

And as we walked over the hill or down the hill, for our chapel is situated on the side of a hill, one of the elders would walk with us. And as we walked down the road, he'd say to us, Now, what did you think of Brother so-and-so and how he put it this morning? Or maybe we'd taken part. And he'd say, you know, it was quite interesting what you said, but, you know that lovely little word, but, but how easy it was for elders then to do pastoral work.

How difficult it is today. You know, you all roll up in your cars, I mean, it would be different if they were all fours, but there it is. But you all roll up in your cars, and as soon as the fellowship's over, you're back home.

And tell me this, is it not difficult for elders to do any counseling? Is it not difficult for them to teach? There are young Christians who come from godless homes, and the parents in those homes are not always happy about someone they don't know coming round to the home to speak to their children. You know, I'm glad I'm not an elder. When first I came amongst God's folk thirty years and more ago, I tell you this, it was

comparatively easy, but not so today.

Oh, how we need to pray, one for another, for those in our fellowship who are apt to teach. But then would you notice something more? That if, first of all, we have an aspiration, desiring the office, if we have then the attributes, then there are the attitudes of a bishop. He dares to say in verse 4, One that ruleth well his own home, ruling well his own house.

And then he says this, that if he can't rule his own house, how can he take care of the church? Now I know that later in this very same epistle, the apostle dares to remind in verse 17 of chapter 5, that there is the sense of ruling. Let the elders rule well. But let us remember that the rule of the assembly is the rule of taking care.

That's the attitude. The rule of taking care. Yesterday was it not, or was it the day before, but yesterday dear brother Andrews was reminding us about some young folks who were leaning out of the window.

Now he ruled about it, didn't he? He said these things must not be so. But he did not rule with a big dick. He ruled because he had care for the children.

He didn't want them to hurt themselves. And in the assemblies of God's folks, let me say this brethren sisters, oh I come across some assemblies where maybe elders do not rule as well as they should, but this I do know, this I am confident of, that if we knew all the circumstances, sometimes we would not be so critical. This came home to me very forcibly the week before I left England.

Some ten years ago we saw commence in Kirby, the new town outside of Liverpool, the assembly. I put the tent up there and labored for many weeks and the outcome was an assembly was started. And I went back the Sunday before I left to come here and I left on the Wednesday, that Sunday, I was away in Kirby and Liverpool speaking of their tenth anniversary.

They built a lovely chapel and when we went there was no one there and now there's a fellowship of about 120 remembering the Lord of a Lord's Day morning. God has honored that one. But you know, two or three young folk came to me and they said, Mr. Ford, we want to have a talk with you.

I said, well let's walk down the road. And we walked down the road. And they told me of a certain happening in the assembly.

And they said, and you know our elders are doing nothing about it. The previous evening I had sat in with the elders. This very case they were talking about, the elders discussed with me.

And they said, Brother Ford, we've come to the conclusion that what we have done about this matter and they had dealt with it and they had dealt with it very righteously and very firmly that what we've done, we're not telling anyone. Because they were elders, they didn't stand up and say what had been done. They were family.

There was a wife whose heart would have been broken. There were children. Yet some of these young folk said to me they're not doing anything about it, if only you knew.

Because elders are real elders who care for the flock, often things that they do when they gather together you will never know anything about and better that you don't. Not only for your good, but sometimes for the good of the person that has to be disciplined. Let's remember that and let's pray.

Then would you notice not only an attitude that they might take care, but would you notice the associates of the elders. I am not talking of the associates in the assembly, but verse 7 says that they must have a good report of them that are without. They are close and are known in the district.

They have neighbours and friends and these neighbours and friends are well, why they report well of the elders in the palace. I think this is most important. I believe if a godless man sometimes finds fault with those that love the Saviour, we need to be very careful before we judge.

Because quite often the godless will take an opportunity of saying that which is evil. But when it is known to the poor that there is that which is wrong and no answer can be given, I suggest that that elder would do well, do well, if he retrained from taking the rules in the church. I wonder if you would turn these things into one piece of art.

I do want us to continue our talk, but I do think these things are important. I don't think that they don't matter. I believe there is need of an understanding of the work of an elder.

And one piece of pie, if we may, and those first four verses, I'm going to suggest three things to you. I'm going to suggest, first of all, that Peter tells us of the threefold danger to an elder. And then he tells us of the threefold direction to an elder.

And then he tells us of the threefold diadem that can be the elder. First of all, he tells us of the threefold danger of an elder. And the first danger is a very simple one in verse two.

It's a love of laziness. May I repeat that? I think that's important. It's a love of laziness.

Why, Peter says, feed the flock of God which is among you, not of constraint, but willingly. Our brother was saying so ably to us as he's been leading us through that second of Philipians. How essential it is that we shall realize there are works to be done in the church of God.

The visiting takes time. The care takes time. And one of the greatest dangers to an elder in an assembly is the danger of laziness.

If you feel that God the Spirit has called you to be an elder, if your assembly has expected you as such, I dare suggest, my brother, I dare suggest this with all the love of my heart, that we've not only to feed the flock of God, but you and I have to do it not of constraint, but willingly. Willingly do it, continually working for the Lord. I suggest to you that the next danger is not the love of laziness, but the love of lucre.

Verse two says, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. We do not do the work of God for what we get out of it. If that be our motive, then the assembly of God's folk will be so desperately poor.

But an elder is one who does not do it for filthy lucre's sake. Please, I don't want to say very much about professional preachers. I don't want to say very much about... I want you to understand this.

Whoever you may be, if you love Jesus Christ, you are my brother. You are my sister and I love you. But I need to carefully remind you that in Christendom, not necessarily the church, but in Christendom, we are filled with men and women who are seeking to take a rule in a so-called church and they're doing it just for filthy lucre.

This should not be so. Now please, I speak so... I speak so firmly about this. It is my privilege, as some of you know, it has been my honor and desperate responsibility to lead the Bible readings in the University of

Cambridge.

During the month of March, when I'm home in England, I spend every day going from one college to another. We go into Emmanuel the first day, we go on to Trinity, we go to Trinity Hall, we go to Eve and Christ and Jesus and right through the colleges that make up the University of Cambridge. And once a week, I always lead a Bible reading with a theological student, the Theos of the University.

Now please, many of them, most of them are not even Catholics. Most of them never even intend to be saved or ever intend to do any theological work. Most of them go to get a theological degree because it's the best degree to get in Hebrew and Greek.

And if they want to turn to Hebrew and Greek as their study, then a theological degree out of the University of Cambridge, a second-to-none degree in any university in the world, will mark them. And as I speak to those men once a week, I find the most appalling questions. I hear the most appalling things from men, many, who are going to be perfectible creatures for the sake of filthy lucre.

And I dare say this to you, those things, or even the slightest suggestion of them, should never, never be among them. Never among them. I suggest to you that the third danger to an elder is not the love of laziness or the love of lucre, it is the love of lording.

Verse three, neither be lords over God's heritage, but being entombed to the flock. It's not lording it over God's heritage. Why bless God if guiding the flock and caring for the flock and shepherding the flock appears one of the dangers.

Sometimes we're apt to think that we are elders in the medium. Then would you notice not only the threefold danger, but the threefold direction. He said, Teeth the flock of God and teeth it fearlessly, not of constraint, not of constraint, not by fear or favour, is that meaning? Then he reminds us not only fearlessly, but freely, not considering payment for it too, and then faithfully as entombed to the flock.

These are the directions for those that are elders. Then would you notice the threefold dialect. I want to remind you, brethren and sisters, that if you and I will have a crown, we'll have it because we've won it.

That's why, that's why the Bible dares to tell us revelations to a crown of life for faithfulness. Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life. Oh, what a wonder to have such a crown to cast before his feet, not the crown of eternal life.

The crown of life cast into his feet and say, Lord, I've won it as I was an elder in that fellowship away yonder wherever I be, but I only won it because you enabled me to. Your work. Do you notice not only the crown of righteousness, oh, I'm sorry, the crown of life, the crown of life for those that are faithful, but the crown of righteousness for the fighting ones.

Not now the faithful ones, but the fighting ones. Do you remember when Paul comes to the close of his journey in that great fourth chapter of 2 Timothy, he says, I fought a good fight, I kept the faith, henceforth there's laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the law and the righteous judge shall give me in that day, and not for me only, but for all those who love his appeal. Here it is, the crown of righteousness for those who can say I fought a good fight.

Then would you notice a crown of glory proceeding. In these very verses in Peter, Peter says, and when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory. Oh, to be there to cross somebody's

feet, to say, Lord, they're thine, thou art worthy.

May I repeat myself? May I suggest to those of you that are elders, may I suggest there must be, there must be a threefold danger considered. There must be a threefold correction considered. There must be a threefold triad then considered.

God give us the grace to move and work by his name and his law. But then we come on verses eight to 13 to deacons. And I would like to say just a few things about deacons.

I would like to remind you of the appointing of deacons in the Acts. Was it not our brother, Mr. McKenzie, who reminded us of the sixth chapter of Acts? When those were chosen, those men who were of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom, they were chosen to be servants of the church. And remember, the word deacon is just a servant of the church.

Now, I wonder if I may please say this to you. There has arisen, hasn't there, the idea that a deacon is just a man who waits on tables, just a man whose responsibility may be for the handwriting of the gospel, may be for the material need of the faith. But it is interesting, isn't it, that the two men who left the biggest mark among those that were chosen as deacons, as far as we know, never waited on tables at all.

Stephen, Philip, not Philip, the apostle, Philip, the deacon. Isn't it remarkable that Stephen became the greatest preacher? And I want to say something to you young men who do a little preaching. If you want the ideal sermon, I tell you what to do.

Go and read Stephen's great sermon before the Sanhedrin table. The apostle Paul couldn't preach as good as that. It's the greatest of sermons.

And yet he was a teacher, a servant of the church. Isn't it remarkable that this man who went down to Samaria, who made the whole city joyful. You know, I like to meet men who make folk happy, don't you? There are too many folk who make folk miserable.

Well, he had this testimony, Philip. He made the city happy. They were glad.

They rejoiced. And what a preacher. He goes down to Samaria and all the whole city gathered around him.

They clamored to hear him, a deacon, a servant of the church. And here we see something in the sixth chapter of Acts of their appointment. I haven't really time to talk about that which was said of them, as honest, to the poor, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom.

I haven't really time, but I wonder if we could go a little further. And I wonder if we could take not only of their appointment, but I wonder if we could take, of their ability. Now, their ability.

The ability because they were of honest report. I believe the twelfth chapter of Romans is very real when it says, not gloatful in sickness, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. And I tried to emphasize this when I was speaking a little concerning the training of a ministry.

By the way, by the way, I went to Mr. McKenzie before the meeting. I was a little disturbed, please. And I would like here in the bigger meeting to clear it up.

You have all gathered that I'm not a Bible college man. Now, you've gathered that. But I want you to understand this, that with all my heart, and then a little bit more of something else added on to it, I believe in the autonomy of the local church.

I believe that the risen Christ walked between seven individual candlesticks, not a seven-branched one. There was no link between any candlestick and the other candlestick. The only link was that Christ was in the middle, they were shining, and their purpose was to shine their light so everyone could see Christ.

I believe in the autonomy of the local church. And tomorrow afternoon I've asked Mr. McKenzie to pass a word concerning some who do not always see eyes wide with me, God bless them. I wish they would.

But they did not always. But who feel that maybe a Bible college training would be useful. And there are many brethren that feel that.

And so during the study, tomorrow afternoon, I've asked Mr. McKenzie, would you answer that question for us, Mr. McKenzie, sir? So you've got a whole night to think about it. But, let me emphasize this, I wanted to put that in because I apologize if we gave the impression, if we gave the impression that others who don't just see eyes wide with the things I see are wrong. God bless them, I think they're lovely Christians.

Ah, their abilities. But then would you notice something of their wives, the wives of leaders? Now, there are those who have come to the hotel and Mr. Darby has translated it. Women, not wives.

You will notice the words that are in italics, of course, in our authorized version. But nevertheless, there are those that have thought that what's being spoken of here, not the wives of deacons, but deaconesses in the church. Mr. Moody's man, what was his name, Mr. Williams, is that him who's got the translation of the Bible, the Moody translation? Williams.

No, he doesn't translate it, he interprets it. There's a difference between translation and interpretation. He interprets it, deaconesses.

I only know this, that this is the qualification, I believe the word wise. I could quote to you the greatest of scholars, it's got to be a housewife. Well, I won't go any further, but there are men who all translated this word wise.

It says they shall be brave, not slanderous, sober, faithful in all things. And my dear sister, I am glad, praise God I am, I am glad that there are thousands of sisters just like that. Just like that.

You know, I have a favorite wedding sermon. Do you have a favorite wedding sermon? What sermon do they teach when you were married? Oh no, you better not tell me now, you're throwing me out. You know, I think wedding sermons are most important, but my favorite wedding sermon, I get the couple up the front, you know, you're going to ask them, wilt thou, and they say, I wilt, doth thou, and I doth, and all the rest of the thing.

But I get them up, and then I open my Bible, and I read the six mentions in the Bible of Aquila and Priscilla. Have you noticed something? Three times they're called Aquila and Priscilla, and three times they're called Priscilla and Aquila. Three times he puts the man's name first, three times he puts the woman's name first.

Because you know what I believe about a Christian marriage? I believe they're one in serving the Lord. I'm not my wife's boss, and she's not mine. I believe this is important.

I believe that spirituality, real spirituality, is seen when a man and his wife together serve the faith. I believe that a man's position is given to us in the Scripture, but I don't believe a woman's position is less than a man. Do you? If you do, how do you explain the 11th of Corinthians? God only tells us that the man is the head of the woman, but that God is the head of Christ.

Are you telling me that God is greater than Christ? I say it becomes a theological problem when some of you brethren start talking. I only know this, that sisters, I thank God for spiritual sisters. I believe there are many assemblies where sisters have taken their choirs, proper places in the assembly, but they are the power of God.

You all know, don't you? You notice I've taken the glasses off to look at the watch. The time's gone, really. But most of you know my favorite psalm, the 144th Psalm.

You know the great church psalm, where it speaks of the young men being plumb, grown up in their youth. I mean, there's a lovely description, a young man is being plumb, grown up in their youth. You know, the sort of thing when you blow, they wither.

Plumb. And then it speaks of the sisters, and it says, and let your daughters be as cornerstones, polished after the servitude of a palace. Do you know when I get to heaven, I'm going to have a word with old David? I am.

If I was writing about the men in the assembly and the women, I'd say the men, they're cornerstones. Or, you know, stone. The women, they're plumb.

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