

Chapter Six: On the Virtue of Bishops

If anyone desires the office of bishop, he desires a noble work. Therefore, a bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, modest, hospitable, able to teach, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence.

Writing to Timothy, he shows in general what kind of person a bishop ought to be. 'He desires a noble work.' I do not reproach him, he says. He desires a noble work, namely the office and presidency, provided he desires it for the sake of helping many and not for glory. For a bishop is also called a watchman because he watches over and observes everyone. Even Moses desired this, not for glory, but for the benefit it would bring to many.

'Blameless.' He should be aware of no evil within himself, for if he is aware of any, it is wrong for him to desire the office of bishop, through which he makes himself alien to good works. 'The husband of one wife.' This does not mean that a bishop must necessarily remain without a wife or have a wife, but that, if he comes from a secular life, he should not be married to more than one woman. Or, in terms of marriage, he should have only one lawful wife, but if called to the office of bishop, he should fulfill it as one who has a wife as though he had none. As Paul says: 'I wish all were as I am.' And: 'He who is married cares about the things of the world.' How, then, is it fitting for a bishop to care for worldly affairs? Some in the Church say that he said this so that a man would not leave one wife for another, for that would be adultery. 'Vigilant'—sleepless, perceiving all things, fervent in spirit.

'Able to teach.' Sobriety, modesty, and hospitality should be possessed even by those under his care. He added what is proper to a teacher by saying: 'Able to teach.' 'Not given to wine.' By 'not given to wine,' he does not mean merely a drunkard, for that would be too crude, but one who is insolent and overbearing. Likewise, 'not violent' does not mean one who strikes with his hands, but one who wounds the conscience of a brother. 'One who rules his own house well.' For if someone does not know how to rule his own house, or if he could not rightly govern two or three natural brothers, how can he suitably govern the Church, which has so many people? For he must set an example in his own household.

'For if someone does not know how to rule his own house, how will he care for the Church of God?' 'Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover, he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.'

Why, then, does he give such strict commandments to bishops, saying they should not be violent but gentle, and other similar things, when he commands the disciples: 'Mortify your earthly members,' and 'There are some who have crucified the flesh of Christ'? Christ Himself

also commanded all to take up the cross and follow Him. Why, then, did he not rather command them to be like angels, in proportion to their secular life? We say that supreme virtue is the possession of the few; however, there needed to be many bishops, one for each church. Therefore, to avoid making the office of bishop rare or impossible for those who were necessary, he commands a moderate virtue, making the position itself more accessible.

'How will he care for the Church of God?' where the responsibilities are many and great. 'Not a novice.' The term 'novice' does not signify a young person but someone recently instructed in the faith. For Timothy himself was young in age, to whom he says later: 'Let no one despise your youth.' For how can someone who should still be a disciple become a teacher? He would be puffed up and exalted. 'Lest he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.' Into the same condemnation, that is, into which the devil fell through pride. 'Among those who are outside.' By 'those outside,' he means the Greeks. See how much diligence he applies. But what if someone is evil and yet has a good reputation? That cannot be. For it is lovable that the one who is most upright should also bear witness even from his enemies. Yet he requires this among other good things. This is signified by the conjunction 'and.'

But what if someone is good but his life is criticized? That is indeed difficult: but if such a person exists, let him not become a bishop. For if he must have a good reputation among those who are outside, much more should he have a good reputation among the brethren.

'Lest he fall into reproach.' For if he is evil, he will endure reproach and insult. 'And the snare of the devil.' For if he is evil in any way, he easily adds another snare to himself. For if, from suffering reproaches and insults, he turns toward sin, he falls into another disposition of anger and the memory of injuries: for no one can bear reproach without some touch of anger.

Likewise, deacons must be composed, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being blameless.

Why did he omit presbyters? Because he combined them with bishops. For what he said about bishops also applies to presbyters, since they are similarly priests and have the duty of teaching entrusted to them. 'Not double-tongued.' This means not deceitful or fraudulent. 'Not given to much wine.' He did not say 'not drunkards,' for that would be too crude; even though they may not become drunk, he says, they are nevertheless softened in the strength of their hearts. 'With a pure conscience.' He requires both faith and life. 'And let these also first be tested,' just as bishops are, so that they are not novices or newly converted.

Likewise, women must be modest, not slanderers, vigilant, faithful in all things. Deacons must be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great confidence in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you shortly.

But if I am delayed, I am writing so that you may know how one ought to conduct oneself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

He refers to women not in general but to those who minister. For what purpose would it serve if, among the clergy, he made mention of certain women? 'Not slanderers'—this corresponds to what was said earlier about being 'double-tongued.' 'Vigilant.' For the nature of women is easily deceived, so they must be diligent and vigilant. The more easily they are captured by deception, the greater their need for vigilance. 'Faithful in all things'—in both faith and life. 'Husbands of one wife.' You see how he expects the same from deacons as from bishops. This also applies to the women who minister. 'Ruling their children well.' He repeats this everywhere, wanting them to provide evidence from their domestic lives. 'For those who have served well as deacons.' Those who have given a good account of themselves in lesser duties will easily come to promotion and confidence in Christ. 'And great confidence.' But who could have confidence in the faith of Christ unless they have a life that matches their faith? 'I am writing these things to you.' He does not want Timothy to lose hope for Paul's imminent arrival just because he writes these things. Notice what he says: 'But if I am delayed.' Because he was led by the Spirit and did not know where the Spirit would direct him to go, he always hesitates. 'Which is the church of the living God.' The church is the house of God, not like the Jewish temple, but it is the pillar and foundation of the truth. And rightly he says, 'of the living God.' For do not think, he says, that it is filled with men, for it excels through God and is built for Him, and it has Him as its inhabitant.