

QUALIFICATIONS OF OVERSEERS: 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7

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QUALIFICATIONS OF OVERSEERS: 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7

The passage of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 is generally understood to be a list of character-based qualifications for overseers in the New Testament Church. Although the majority of the passage is straight-forward and uncontroversial, there are a few matters which have generated much debate. First, there are questions about the tradition of Pauline authorship for the whole of the Pastoral Epistles (*PE*, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus). Second, in limited circles¹ there is concern over the language of *drunkard* (πάροινος, v. 3). Finally, and of concern to all, is the ambiguous phrase *husband of one wife* (μἄς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα) in v. 2.

Context

The *First Epistle of Paul to Timothy* has been traditionally viewed as a letter written by the historical Paul to the historical Timothy. However, throughout the modern era there has been ongoing debate over the validity of the traditional view. I. Howard Marshall (who theorizes against Pauline authorship)² provides this view of the scholarly divide:

A significant minority of scholars hold that the PE are the work of Paul, whether directly or indirectly by the use of a secretary/amanuensis. Nevertheless, most other scholars now take it almost as an unquestioned assumption that the PE are not the

¹This concern is among teetotalers because the passage does not condemn alcohol outright.

²I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 92.

work of Paul.³

The authorship debate hinges primarily on the author's language, style, and thought,⁴ and not on historical timelines.⁵ This lack of historical concern undermines the majority argument. The linguistic and stylistic differences between the PE and the definitive Pauline corpus can be accounted for in at least two ways. First, consider the different style and vocabulary Paul might use with the recipients of the Pastoral Epistles (Timothy and Titus, with whom Paul has a close relationship) to the typical audience of a Pauline letter (a particular church facing a particular crisis, with the expectation of other churches reading the letter).⁶ A second explanation, which has been offered by many minority scholars,⁷ is that the amanuensis (secretary) changed between Paul's other writings and the PE, or more license was given to the writer, which brought about the linguistic differences. Furthermore, the assumption of non-Pauline authorship brings with it a number of problems concerning the authenticity and authority of the Pastoral Epistles. As Walter Liefeld comments, "If the historical Paul and the historical Timothy and Titus are

³Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 57-58. Marshall is helpful, however, in listing 20 reputable scholars who are pro-Pauline authorship (including, Spicq, Fee, Knight, Towner, Stott, and E. E. Ellis). Additionally, my limited research has hinted that the majority opinion among *evangelicals* is pro-Pauline (consider also Mounce and Liefeld).

⁴Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 58-59.

⁵Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 79. For non-Pauline scholars, the timeline for the estimated writing of the PE fits within the life of Paul.

⁶cf. George T. Montague, *First and Second Timothy, Titus*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 20.

⁷cf. William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), cxxix; Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 88; Montague, *First and Second Timothy, Titus*, 20; George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 52; Walter L. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 21.

not the author and recipients, we move away not only from history towards fiction, but also away from a natural, legitimate understanding of the text.”⁸ For these reasons, this paper will take Towner’s position regarding authorship: “Paul is the author of these three letters however much or little others contributed to their messages and composition.”⁹

Paul’s first letter to Timothy is noteworthy because of its unique blend of pastoral, ecclesiological, and relational concerns. Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to oversee the city’s church, perhaps as an apostolic delegate, in order to bring it back to health. Timothy remained behind, in particular, to protect the church from false teachers, who had already done the church some harm. This letter aimed to teach and encourage Timothy in the building up of the church in Ephesus, including instructions on corporate worship, church offices, and personal relationships. Between Paul’s instructions for corporate worship and methods for dealing with false teaching, we find a most important topic: the qualifications for church officers.

Passage

In this passage, Paul presents Timothy with a set of qualifications for elders, and follows with a similar list for deacons and a group of women. The qualifications largely focus on character and seem specifically nuanced for the problems facing the church in Ephesus. Each of these offices come from appointment or selection and clearly includes a period of testing (either before or after selection). Utmost importance is placed on the character of the candidates, followed by the quality of personal relationships (with

⁸Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 21.

⁹Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 88.

the family, Christians, and the world), and lastly, a few qualifications fall directly on ability, e.g., having the ability to teach.

Verse 1

¹⁰Εἴ τις ἐπισκοπῆς ὀρέγεται, καλοῦ ἔργου ἐπιθυμεῖ.¹¹

*If anyone aspires to a position of responsibility, he desires important work.*¹²

The term ἐπισκοπῆς, translated *position of responsibility* above, could also be translated as *office of the overseer*. While there is consensus among scholars that ἐπισκοπῆς at least refers to a position of leadership,¹³ many contend that the term means specifically the office of an ἐπίσκοπος or *overseer*.¹⁴ However, the position of this paper is that this passage is more concerned with the candidates for office, and not the office itself, and will therefore translate terms with a focus on people and actions, not titles and offices.

The first clause of this verse establishes that it is not only good for a candidate to aspire to the position of overseer, but that the aspiration is a necessary qualification for holding office. Thus, a man's desire to lead a church should not be seen as pride or

¹⁰I am omitting πιστὸς ὁ λόγος because I hold the minority opinion (according to Knight, but shared with Metzger, UBS, and perhaps Mounce), that this phrase can be taken as a formula of asseveration, pointing back to v 2:15. cf. Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 572-573; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 167; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 153.

¹¹Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. [UBS] (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 1 Ti 3:1.

¹²Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

¹³Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 117.

¹⁴Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 154.

arrogance, but as a holy aspiration to do the work of God. The second clause confirms the first and further adds that the work of the overseer is good and important. This was perhaps especially important for the Ephesian church, which had trouble with false teachers and prophets, who may have damaged the congregation's view of leadership roles. It also encourages any man meeting the qualifications to aspire to the position, because it is a good work.¹⁵

Verse 2

δεῖ οὖν τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνεπίλημπτον εἶναι, μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα, νηφάλιον σώφρονα κόσμιον φιλόξενον διδακτικόν,¹⁶

Accordingly, the overseer must be irreproachable: faithful to his wife, self-controlled, thoughtful, honorable, hospitable, able to teach,

The term οὖν, translated *accordingly* above, is a logical inferential conjoining vv. 1 and 2. An overseer must be irreproachable because of the importance of his work. Although τὸν ἐπίσκοπον, *the overseer*, has a singular noun and article, the term is not monadic; rather, it is a generic article which distinguishes one class from another, pointing to the category of overseers while emphasizing the importance of the role.¹⁷ Therefore, the singular article can still allow for multiple overseers within a local church, which is a necessity for the position of this paper that ἐπίσκοπος (overseer) and πρεσβύτερος (elder) are synonymous terms, because it is clear that multiple πρεσβύτερος

¹⁵cf. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 153.

¹⁶Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 1 Ti 3:2.

¹⁷For discussions on the article in τὸν ἐπίσκοπον, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 229; James A. Brooks, and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1979), 75. cf. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 246-247; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 155; Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 31.

were the norm in New Testament city-churches.¹⁸ The opening phrase of this verse, δεῖ οὖν τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνεπίλημπτον εἶναι, is the driving force behind the entire passage. All of the phrases concerning overseers (vv. 2-7) explain the broad qualification: *the overseer must be irreproachable*.¹⁹ Furthermore, δεῖ ... εἶναι, *must be*, is the assumed verbal phrase for the qualifying lists of both deacons and women continuing into vv. 8-11.²⁰

Much controversy exists over the next phrase, μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα. A literal rendering could be *a man of one woman*, or *a husband of one wife*, or even *a one-woman man*. However, the Greek wording is rather ambiguous and open to a variety of interpretations, including requiring that an overseer 1) not be a polygamist, 2) not be married more than once, 3) not be re-married following a divorce, or 4) be faithful to his wife.²¹ The phrase certainly does not require an overseer to be married,²² because if that interpretation applied, the overseer would be required to have multiple children as well.²³ Although option 1) can be easily assumed in the text, it is unlikely that Paul was speaking specifically against polygamy because, during this era, Roman and Jewish polygamy was

¹⁸Regarding multiple elders, see Acts 20:17, Titus 1:5, Phil 1:1. Regarding the synonymous nature of ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος, see Acts 20:17, 28, Titus 1:5-7. cf. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 163, 186-192; Montague, *First and Second Timothy, Titus*, 73; Risto Saarinen, *The Pastoral Epistles with Philemon & Jude*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 61; Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 32, 117; Robert James Utley, *Paul's Fourth Missionary Journey*, Study Guide Commentary Series, (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2000), 38.

¹⁹cf. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 241.

²⁰cf. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 249.

²¹Utley, *Paul's Fourth Missionary Journey*, 40-41.

²²cf. Utley, *Paul's Fourth Missionary Journey*, 40-41; Saarinen, *The Pastoral Epistles with Philemon & Jude*, 62.

²³Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 157.

hardly an issue.²⁴ Furthermore, Paul uses the same phrase, reversed, in 1 Timothy 5:9, regarding the qualifications of widows. Primarily prohibiting polygamy in chapter 3 would require chapter 5 to primarily prohibit polyandry, a problem not at all present in that culture.²⁵ Option 2) is primarily supported by the analogy of Christ and the Church to a husband and his wife. As Christ has only one bride, clergy ought to have only one wife as well.²⁶ However, this would be more than is required for a lay Christian, who is free to marry or remain single following the death of a spouse.²⁷ Next, option 3) is both compelling and difficult. It is compelling because God hates divorce²⁸ and Scripture consistently shows that marriage after divorce is sinful (as long as the former spouse still lives).²⁹ However, it is difficult because it excludes otherwise qualified men from serving in ministry, whose prior marriages may have ended many years before—perhaps prior to conversion—and have little demonstrable effect on their lives today. The final option, *an overseer must be faithful to his wife*, is the position I defend for many reasons—primarily because the other options are untenable. While option 2) requires an overseer to be held to a demonstrably higher standard than laity, option 3) presumes that remarriage after

²⁴cf. Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 84; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 158.

²⁵cf. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 171; Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 250.

²⁶cf. Montague, *First and Second Timothy, Titus*, 75.

²⁷cf. 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, 39, 1 Timothy 5:14, Romans 7:1-3.

²⁸cf. Malachi 2:16.

²⁹cf. Luke 16:18, Mark 10:11-12, 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

divorce is a permanently disqualifying sin for candidates.³⁰ Philip Towner notes that “this kind of specificity is not at all obvious from the phrase.”³¹ Plainly, the text does not support such a dichotomy between requirements for laity and clergy. Furthermore, the other character qualifications in this passage coincide with expectations held for all believers and focus on the recent history of the candidate.³² Holding overseers to a higher standard in marriage or treating remarriage as permanently disqualifying sets up a dichotomy between the marriage qualification and the rest, and between clergy and laity. Regarding the phrase *μᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα*, Towner discovered that “there is no first-century evidence of its use in connection with divorce.”³³ Beyond the lack of tenability with the other options, the phrasing of *μᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα* is positive, not negative; while the first three options are negative requirements, only option 4) is written in a positive form. I. Howard Marshall is correct when he writes that this phrase “is positive in tone and stresses faithfulness in marriage, rather than prohibiting some specific unsanctioned form of marriage.”³⁴

The remaining character qualifications in v. 2 are relatively straight-forward. While *νηφῶλιον*, *self-controlled*, can be used in reference to moderation in consuming

³⁰cf. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 158, on #3.

³¹Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 251.

³²While sinning as a Christian is trampling on the grace of Christ, believers must be allowed to grow into maturity. Therefore, sin in a maturing Christian’s life should not disqualify him from future ministry (or, past post-conversion sins should not disqualify an otherwise qualified candidate). By contrast, Knight holds that the qualifications are in “reference to a man’s status and conduct from the time of his conversion” (Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 159.) I humbly disagree.

³³Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 85.

³⁴Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 478; cf. Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 85.

alcohol, it is more likely referring to restrained and controlled conduct, particularly because drunkenness is covered later in the passage. The word can also be used to describe someone who is well-balanced, temperate, or level-headed.³⁵ Next, σόφρονα, *thoughtful*, is nearly synonymous with νηφάλιον, but lacks any reference to alcohol. Both *prudent* and *self-controlled* would be valid translations for σόφρονα, which also follows “the Hellenic model [in] avoidance of extremes and careful consideration for responsible action.”³⁶ Following, is κόσμιον, *honorable*, which is a word “pertaining to having characteristics or qualities that evoke admiration or delight.”³⁷ The next requirement, φιλόξενον, *hospitable*, is interesting indeed. While BDAG only provides *hospitable* as a translation, many commentators noted that the form of hospitality in view is far greater than having someone over for dinner.³⁸ For a candidate to be hospitable often meant hosting traveling Christians, ministers, and the poor, due to a lack of trustworthy inns and establishments.³⁹ Towner offers a helpful reminder to Christians today by writing, “Hospitality, like most of these qualities, was a practice required of all believers in general, which leaders were to exemplify.”⁴⁰ The final qualification in v. 2 (διδασκτικόν, *able to teach*) is by no means the final qualification, nor is it positioned in such a place as

³⁵Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. [BDAG] (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “νηφάλιος.”

³⁶BDAG, s.v. “σόφρων.”

³⁷BDAG, s.v. “κόσμιος.”

³⁸cf. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 119.

³⁹cf. BDAG, s.v. “φιλόξενος.” Utey, *Paul’s Fourth Missionary Journey*, 42; Saarinen, *The Pastoral Epistles with Philemon & Jude*, 63.

⁴⁰Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 252. cf. Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:2, 1 Peter 4:9.

to be considered supreme, as it is often considered in evangelicalism. While valid translations would include *able to teach* or *skillful in teaching*,⁴¹ it would be inappropriate to treat this qualification as “skillful in *preaching*.” This is because the verbal root of διδακτικός is διδάσκω, which encompasses teaching in both formal and informal settings.⁴² Therefore, *able to teach* describes a candidate who is skilled in teaching in some settings, though not necessarily in all settings. This is the first qualification that is based on ability, rather than character, and it is also one that is notably missing from the requirements for deacons. It is thus reasonable to deduce that one of the distinguishing duties between overseers and deacons is the expectation that overseers teach the church, and thereby exercise authority.

Verse 3

μη πάροινον μη πλήκτην, ἀλλὰ ἐπεικῆ ἄμαχον ἀφιλάργυρον,⁴³

not a drunkard, nor a bully, but yielding, peaceable, generous with money,

The list of qualifications continues in v. 3. While the first two phrases in this list are negative, starting with μη, *not*, the final three are contrastingly positive. The first is μη πάροινον, *not a drunkard*, which is consistent with the biblical message of the sinfulness of drunkenness.⁴⁴ However, by implication, it allows for alcohol consumption

⁴¹BDAG, s.v. “διδασκτικός.”

⁴²BDAG, s.v. “διδάσκω.”

⁴³Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 1 Ti 3:3.

⁴⁴cf. Proverbs 20:1, Ecclesiastes 10:17, Luke 21:34, 1 Peter 4:3 for a few examples.

by officers and laity alike.⁴⁵ In fact, considering the whole of Scripture, the consumption of alcohol is not merely tolerated; it is celebrated.⁴⁶ At the same time, because Scripture consistently condemns drunkenness, alcohol must be used wisely by the candidate, in a manner beyond reproach. The next qualification, *μὴ πλήκτην*, *not a bully*, may be related to the preceding requirement against drunkenness; either way, the candidate may be neither a bully nor pugnacious.⁴⁷ Following these negatives is a series of positives, beginning with *ἐπιεικῆ*, *yielding*. BDAG helpfully clarifies this term, indicating that it connotes “not insisting on every right of letter of law or custom.” Valid translations include *gentle*, *kind*, *courteous*, and *tolerant*.⁴⁸ A candidate may not be a legalist, but must consider the flock with a gentle understanding of their struggles. Furthermore, the overseer must not demand respect as a right or privilege, but must be courteous to all. Next, the overseer must be *ἄμαχον*, *peaceable*. He must seek peace in hard situations and not antagonize his brothers and sisters. Finally, the overseer must be *ἀφιλάργυρον*, *generous with money*. While this term could be translated *not loving money* or *not greedy*,⁴⁹ *generous with money* fits the context better because the phrase is grouped with positive qualifications and stands in contrast to the earlier negative requirements. With the exposure that overseers have to money, both in the church’s finances and

⁴⁵cf. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 120; Utley, *Paul’s Fourth Missionary Journey*, 42.

⁴⁶cf. Deuteronomy 7:12-14, Psalm 104:14-15, Isaiah 25:6, Matthew 11:18-19 for a few examples. See also Utley, *Paul’s Fourth Missionary Journey*, 42-44, for a summation of the use of alcohol in the Bible.

⁴⁷BDAG, s.v. “πλήκτης.”

⁴⁸BDAG, s.v. “ἐπιεικής.”

⁴⁹BDAG, s.v. “φιλάργυρος.”

personal income, this is an important and pragmatic qualification indeed.

Verses 4-5

4 τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου καλῶς προϊστάμενον, τέκνα ἔχοντα ἐν ὑποταγῇ, μετὰ πάσης σεμνότητος (5 εἰ δέ τις τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου προστῆναι οὐκ οἶδεν, πῶς ἐκκλησίας θεοῦ ἐπιμελήσεται;),⁵⁰

4 *leading his own family well by holding his children in submission, with all dignity,*
5 *(for if someone does not know how to lead his own family, how will he care for the church of God?),*

Of the 13 qualifications listed in vv. 2-7, only two are explained (here and below in vv. 6-7). This is appropriate because most of the qualifications in vv. 2-3 do not require much argument or explanation to sustain them. However, the purpose of the final two qualifications is less obvious. All of vv. 4-5 explains one phrase, τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου καλῶς προϊστάμενον, *leading his own family well*, which itself is a qualification in the list begun in vv. 2-3. Therefore, *leading his own family well* is a continuation of the explanation of ἀνεπίληπτον, *irreproachable* in v. 2. Because the term οἴκου, *family*, can also be translated as *house* or *household*, some commentators look to the broader definition of household in Greco-Roman society, which for some social classes included servants, staffs, and property. From that interpretation, they assume that overseers were expected to be “men of sufficient means to have houses, to run them, and manage their affairs.”⁵¹ However, the assumption of higher economic status for the candidates is not required by the text. Furthermore, προϊστάμενον, *leading*, is not only associated with

⁵⁰Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 1 Ti 3:4–5.

⁵¹Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 254.

ruling and headship, but also with concern and care for those being led.⁵² The overseer must not merely manage or lead his family, but he must care for it as well. Liefeld puts it well when he writes, “Disaster may await the church whose leaders see themselves primarily as managers.”⁵³ The next phrase in v. 4 explains how a candidate will lead his family: τέκνα ἔχοντα ἐν ὑποταγῇ, *by holding his children in submission*. Because the quality of a man’s leadership can be seen through his parenting, unsubmitive children bring serious doubts to a candidate’s readiness. The only children in view are those who are currently part of the candidate’s οἶκος, *family or household*. This verse does not appear to require submission from adult children who are no longer in the household of the candidate.⁵⁴ The last phrase of v. 4 explains that the candidate must hold his children in submission μετὰ πάσης σεμνότητος, *with all dignity*. The term σεμνότης, *dignity*, describes behavior which shows that someone is worthy of special respect, and can also be translated *seriousness* or *holiness*. The submission of the candidate’s children must come through holy, dignified parenting rather than intimidation and abuse.

In v. 5, Paul pauses to explain the purpose of the requirement in v. 4 by pointing to the similarity of leading a family and a church. This aside is in the form of first-class conditional in the framework of a question.⁵⁵ The protasis (“if”) clause points back to v. 4, essentially repeating the first phrase, τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου καλῶς προϊστάμενον, *leading his own family well*, by turning it into a prompt, εἰ δέ τις τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου

⁵²BDAG, s.v. “προΐσταμαι.”

⁵³Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 120.

⁵⁴cf. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 161.

⁵⁵For an overview of first class conditions, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 690-694.

προστῆναι οὐκ οἶδεν, *for if someone does not know how to lead his own family*. This leads into the apodosis clause (“then”) which asks the important question: πῶς ἐκκλησίας θεοῦ ἐπιμελήσεται; *how will he care for the church of God?* The assumed answer to this question is not that he will be unable to care for the church of God, but that he will care for the church in the same manner that he cares for and leads his family. While the term προΐσταμαι, *to lead*, (which requires care and concern on the part of the leader) is used for the candidate’s leadership in his family, the term ἐπιμελέομαι, *to care for*, (which has no sense of ruling) is used to describe the overseer’s relationship in the church. Thus, the leadership in the family comes from the primacy of place—as the head of the household the father is the authority and ruler and should therefore properly care for and love his family. However, for the church, the primacy of place belongs to God alone; it is his church. The overseer’s responsibility to the church is to care for her, guide her, and lead her, but not to rule over her. Although overseers have authority within the church, supreme authority belongs to God and the emphasis of the effort of the overseer should be to shepherd God’s church, of which he is a steward.

Verses 6-7

6 μὴ νεόφυτον, ἵνα μὴ τυφωθείς εἰς κρίμα ἐμπέση τοῦ διαβόλου. 7 δεῖ δὲ καὶ μαρτυρίαν καλὴν ἔχειν ἀπὸ τῶν ἔξωθεν, ἵνα μὴ εἰς ὄνειδισμὸν ἐμπέση καὶ παγίδα τοῦ διαβόλου.⁵⁶

6 not a recent convert, so that he may not be puffed up and then fall into the devil’s condemnation, 7 (but he must also possess a confirmation of good character from those on the outside, so that he may not fall into disgrace, also a snare of the devil.)

The final qualification for overseers listed for the church at Ephesus is expressed in the first clause of v. 6, μὴ νεόφυτον, *not a recent convert*. This clause, like

⁵⁶Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 1 Ti 3:6–7.

those before it, explains ἀνεπίλημπτον, *irreproachable*, from v. 2. The remainder of v. 6 provides the purpose of this qualification and v. 7 offers a counter-qualification.

Interestingly, the requirement that a candidate not be a new convert is missing from the similar list of candidate qualifications offered by Paul to Titus. However, as Robert Utley helpfully explains, “1 Timothy was written to Ephesus, which was an established church, while Titus was written to Crete, which was a new work. They were all new converts [in Crete].”⁵⁷ Therefore, it is important to note that this qualification may only be intended in mature churches or Christianized communities. Similarly, one should note that the reason a new convert should not be an overseer among mature Christians is because he may become *puffed up* or *conceited*. The problem of pride is at the heart of this requirement, which further explains its absence in the context of Titus at Crete; a newly converted overseer among new Christians should have no more of a struggle with the pride of position than a mature overseer among mature Christians. The particular conceit in view seems to be that which arises from a new Christian overseeing mature Christians. The consequence of being puffed-up is established at the end of v. 6: the conceited overseer would *fall into the condemnation of the devil* (εἰς κρίμα ἐμπέση τοῦ διαβόλου). The *condemnation* or *judgment* in view is a reckoning from the sin of pride in the overseer’s life. However, the phrase τοῦ διαβόλου, literally translated *of the devil*, is rather ambiguous. Philip Towner offers two options for interpretation: 1) using the objective genitive, the “conceited overseer is headed from the same condemnation ‘as the devil’,” or 2) using the subjective genitive, the devil pronounces condemnation after “having

⁵⁷Utley, *Paul’s Fourth Missionary Journey*, 45.

successfully tempted the overseer.”⁵⁸ Considering the devil’s active role in v. 7, option 2) seems to be the best reading.

While v. 6 requires that overseers cannot be new converts, v. 7 offers a counter-point which maintains that the candidate must still have a good witness with non-Christians, even though he has been a Christian for some time. Sharing a similar format to v. 5, v. 7 is an aside because it does not fit into the δεῖ εἶναι, *must be*, structure which governs v. 6 and continues into v. 8. Because v. 7 is an aside, vv. 6-7 are tightly coupled by necessity. The logical connective between the two phrases is δὲ, which can be used to connect clauses to express a simple continuation or a “scarcely discernable” contrast.⁵⁹ In this instance, δὲ is contrastive because a mature Christian might have to make a concerted effort to create relationships with outsiders, while a new Christian would easily be able to maintain prior relationships with non-Christians and have a good, new witness with them. The contrast is perhaps difficult to discern because the impetus of v. 7 is on the character witness, rather than the creation and maintenance of outside relationships. Next, the term μαρτυρίαν has several definitions in various contexts, including *testimony*, *approval*, and *martyrdom*. However, in the context of v. 7, the phrase can be clearly defined as an “attestation of character or behavior.”⁶⁰ The good character witness required comes from τῶν ἔξωθεν, *the outside*, that is, people outside of the Christian community. The outside world will disagree with a Christian on many issues, but the qualified overseer is known

⁵⁸Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 257-258.

⁵⁹BDAG, s.v. “δὲ.”

⁶⁰BDAG, s.v. “μαρτυρία.”

for his good character and not merely his beliefs. The purpose for this requirement is established in v. 7b, ἵνα μὴ εἰς ὄνειδισμὸν ἐμπέσῃ καὶ παγίδα τοῦ διαβόλου, *so that he may not fall into disgrace, also a snare of the devil*. The disgrace in view is the sort that comes from a Christian leader being known to have poor Christian character—a problem experienced both in Ephesus and today. Just as conceit is a temptation from the devil (in v. 6), public disgrace from poor character is also a snare of the devil. The public sin of an overseer heaps disgrace upon both the overseer and the Church.

Conclusion

First Timothy 3:1-7 offers a non-exhaustive list of qualifications for an overseer in a church within a mature Christian community. The passage focuses on the person, rather than the office, and accordingly on character attributes, rather than duties and abilities. The majority of the passage is governed by the δεῖ εἶναι,⁶¹ *must be*, of v. 2 and all of the qualifications listed explain the meaning of ἀνεπίληπτον, *irreproachable*. Of the 13 qualifications for overseers, only two contain explicit explanations and statements of purpose. The requirements in this list overwhelmingly describe positive characteristics, with only two negatives mentioned (μὴ πάροινον μὴ πλήκτην, *not a drunkard, nor a bully*). Furthermore, the character qualifications for overseers describe mature Christians as well,⁶² indicating that the overseer is not a super-Christian but rather a faithful Christian. Indeed, the introduction of this passage recommends that mature

⁶¹The governing δεῖ εἶναι, *must be*, actually continues to govern the qualifications of Διακόνου, *deacons*, and γυναῖκας, *women*, in vv. 8-11. However, due to restrictions of time and space, that half of the pericope will not be discussed in this paper.

⁶²Notably, this does not include διδακτικόν, *ability to teach*.

Christian men be inclined to become overseers. Overall, the qualified overseer should be a mature, honorable, and respected man who is actively living a healthy Christian life.

APPENDIX

STRUCTURAL OUTLINE

1 Εἴ τις ἐπισκοπῆς ὀρέγεται,

If anyone aspires to a position of responsibility,

καλοῦ ἔργου ἐπιθυμεῖ.

he desires important work.

2 δεῖ οὖν τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνεπίλημπτον εἶναι,

Accordingly, the overseer must be irreproachable:

μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα,
faithful to his wife,

νηφάλιον
self-controlled,

σώφρονα
thoughtful,

κόσμιον
honorable,

φιλόξενον
hospitable,

διδασκικόν,
able to teach,

3 μὴ πάροινον
not a drunkard,

μὴ πλήκτην,
nor a bully,

ἀλλὰ ἐπιεικῆ
but yielding,

δεῖ εἶναι

ἄμαχον
peaceable,

ἀφιλάργυρον,
generous with money,

δεῖ εἶναι

4 τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου καλῶς προϊστάμενον,
leading his own family well

τέκνα ἔχοντα ἐν ὑποταγῇ,
by holding his children in submission,

μετὰ πάσης σεμνότητος
with all dignity,

(**5** εἰ δέ τις τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου προστῆναι οὐκ οἶδεν,
(for if someone does not know how to lead his own family,

πῶς ἐκκλησίας θεοῦ ἐπιμελήσεται;) ,
how will he care for the church of God?),

6 μὴ νεόφυτον,
not a recent convert,

ἵνα μὴ τυφωθείς εἰς κρίμα ἐμπέσῃ τοῦ διαβόλου.
so that he may not be puffed up and then fall into the devil's condemnation,

7 δεῖ δὲ καὶ μαρτυρίαν καλὴν ἔχειν ἀπὸ τῶν ἕξωθεν,
(but he must also possess a confirmation of good character from those on the outside,

ἵνα μὴ εἰς ὄνειδισμόν ἐμπέσῃ καὶ παγίδα τοῦ διαβόλου.
so that he may not fall into disgrace, also a snare of the devil.)

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