

1 Timothy Chapter 3 (vv. 1-7)

Purpose: A word to preserve the testimony. Though Paul was now in prison, his prophetic word to the Ephesian elders some *six* years previous had come to pass (Acts 20.29-30). 'Grievous wolves' had entered from *without* and doctrinally 'twisted' men arisen from *within* with the express purpose of 'drawing away' disciples after themselves. Upon his arrival in Ephesus, Paul dealt personally with the ringleaders of the trouble (1.19-20) and stationed Timothy to teach 'sound doctrine' to help *repel* the corruption of the false (1.20). It is possible *Hymenaeus* and *Alexander* aspired to leadership. As such, these qualities would help the saints differentiate between the false (wolves) and the true (shepherds).

A word to commend the testimony. Paul's concern with behaviour that befits the house of God has turned from the *gatherings* of the saints (1 Timothy 2) to the *government* of the local church. If it is 'house of God' then its spiritual leaders must be *godly* in character and *commend* the truth by their conduct. There must also be decency and order as a reflection of the character of God. Indeed, Titus was to 'set in order' (like aligning crooked teeth) what was lacking in Crete by the ordaining of elders (Titus 1.5). In early days elders were 'pointed out' (named) for recognition by apostles or apostolic delegates like Titus. With the passing of the apostolic age, the pattern today is as follows: the risen **Head** gives the men (Ephesians 4.11), the **Holy Spirit** equips the men (Acts 20.28) and the spiritual among the **saints** recognise the men (1 Timothy 3.1-7; 1 Thessalonians 5.12-13).

Principal terms: There are three words used in the NT to describe the character and function of elders. All of these are used of the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20, indicating they are different terms to describe the same men.

- **Overseer** [*episkopos*]. Translated as 'overseer' (Acts 20.28) and 'bishop' (Philippians 1.1; 1 Timothy 3.1, 2; Titus 1.7). The LXX uses *episkopos* to describe the overseers of public building schemes (2 Chronicles 34.17). The Greeks used it to describe men appointed to regulate the affairs of a new colony. The word therefore implies the oversight and inspection of a sphere of work, not for *faults* but with a view to ensuring fitting *quality* and *behaviour*.
- Note. The AV translation of 'bishop' is faulty. *King James instructed his translators to keep certain ecclesiastical words, such as 'bishop', which were in the older Bishop's Bible. He wanted them kept because they reflected a picture of the Church of England of which James was the head.*
- **Shepherd** [*poimen*]. See Acts 20.28, Ephesians 4.11. This describes those who stand *before* and *lead* the flock as ensamples to them. It is their responsibility to 'feed the flock of God' (not themselves, cf. Ezekiel 34.2) with spiritual nourishment (1 Peter 5.2). In Ephesians 4.11 the word is translated 'pastor'. The work of a shepherd involves *preserving unity* (Matthew 9.36), *knowing* and *protecting* the sheep and *sacrificing* for the flock (John 10).
- **Elder** [*presbuteros*]. See Acts 20.17; 1 Timothy 5.17; 1 Peter 5.1. The word has a Jewish origin from the days of the Exodus. Elders presided over the worship of the synagogue and had fatherly oversight of all its affairs.

In summary: **elder** emphasises spiritual *maturity* and *dignity*; **overseer** refers to spiritual *ministry* and *duty*. In relation to the *assembly* he acts as a **shepherd**; in relation to the *Lord* he acts as a **steward** (Titus 1.7). Note. In *every* scripture that mentions elders there is the expectation of *plurality*. Unlike Christendom today, scripture does not teach *one* bishop over many churches, but *many* bishops in one church.

Practice: The local church is not a *democracy* (rule of the people), *autocracy* (one-man rule) or *oligarchy* (power in the hands of a few). Rather, the Lord Jesus is the Head of the church. Each local assembly is then governed by a plurality of Spirit identified (and equipped) shepherds who are responsible to Him. They lead and guide the flock by example, giving clear spiritual advice and direction. In return, the saints should 'know them', i.e. recognise by observation in order to 'esteem' or value them highly (1 Thessalonians 5.12-13). They should also 'obey them' which means to be so persuaded by their manner of life and teaching they confidently 'yield' to their spiritual guidance (Hebrews 13.17). Finally, elders should be 'saluted' or 'greeted kindly' without resentment and encouraged (Hebrews 13.24).

Portrait: These verses (1 Timothy 3.1-7) and the somewhat parallel statements of Titus 1 are often called 'qualifications' as if this is an exercise in self-aggrandisement. It is better to see them as a statement of spiritual *qualities*. These qualities should, generally speaking, characterise *every* believer, but the elder is **outstanding** in these things. In fact, it is delightful to trace such qualities in the person of Christ who is the example *par excellence*, being the 'Shepherd and Bishop of our souls' (1 Peter 2.25).

The Commendation of Overseers [v.1]

v.1: This is the *second* 'true' or 'faithful' saying in the epistle. There has been a saying for *sinners* (1.15), and now for *shepherds* (3.1). The statement literally reads, 'faithful the word' as being worthy of full confidence and trust. The *work* (not 'office') of the overseer is 'good', i.e. noble, honourable and excellent. Note. The AV's 'office of a bishop' translates one word in Greek meaning 'overseer', thus JND: "If anyone aspires to exercise oversight, he desires a good work." Oversight is not an official position (or badge) of authority, but a 'work', the root meaning of which is 'exhaustion'. Indeed, elders 'take care' of the church of God (v.5) – the same kind of care the Good Samaritan demonstrated (Luke 10.34-35). The word 'desire' is strong, meaning to 'set the heart on' or 'strive after'. This is no self-centred ambition, but a Holy Spirit implanted compulsion. *Hendriksen: The office should seek the man, not the man the office.* Sadly today, many brethren strive after leadership in the secular workplace, but have no interest in the responsibility of oversight in the assembly. Maybe it doesn't (in *material* terms) pay enough! But cf. 1 Peter 5.2-4.

The Character and Conduct of Overseers [vv.2-3]

vv.2-3: In Titus 1, there are *fifteen* spiritual (character) qualities. In these *two* verses in 1 Timothy, there are *two* leading qualities that encompass *ten* others (in *five* couplets). Nothing is said about physical, educational or business achievements! Note. Though mentioned in Titus 1.7, 'not greedy of filthy lucre' is not in the best manuscripts here (v.3).

The overseer 'must' (signifying moral obligation), first of all, be '**blameless**'. The word indicates a person 'above reproach'. He cannot be 'laid hold upon' by legitimate accusation. Think of the great examples of Daniel (Daniel 6.4) and the Lord Jesus – the devil could make no justifiable charge against Him (John 14.30)! The *last* quality, which together with 'blameless' encompasses the remaining couplets, is '**not covetous**' (v.3). An elder must be *free* from the love of money and *content* with his God-given portion. The intervening couplets are:

- '**Husband of one wife**' and '**vigilant**'. Literally 'a one-woman man'. This does not mean an overseer *must* be married else the text would read 'husband of *a* (rather than *one*) wife'. *If* he is married (the general expectation) then he must be a loyal husband, faithful to his one wife. In the culture of Ephesus where sexual immorality was rife and marital infidelity common, this man maintains his sexual purity. In such a world, 'vigilance' is required. The Greek reads 'unmixed with wine' and gives the metaphorical sense of 'alert', 'watchful' and 'clearheaded'. He does not engage in any excess which would deaden his spiritual perceptions.
- '**Sober**' and '**good behaviour**'. *sophrona* indicates a 'disciplined mind' and 'self-control'. He is balanced in his judgments and not prone to sudden unpredictable impulses. In the words of Ecclesiastes 3, he knows when to *keep silence* and when to *speak*, when to *weep* and when to *laugh*, when to *break down* (false teaching) and when to *build-up*. A sober, disciplined mind leads to 'good behaviour', that is, an orderly disciplined life. Such a person is not consistently late, forgetful, careless or disorganised.
- '**Given to hospitality**' and '**apt to teach**'. Literally a 'lover of strangers'. His home is open and available to every believer, like Gaius who was commended for his hospitality of itinerant preachers (3 John). If elders are inhospitable, then they will likely be indifferent to the needs of others. Hospitality links very closely with being 'apt to teach'. Whilst dividing the local church into house groups is thoroughly anti-scriptural, many a believer has been soundly instructed whilst enjoying warm hospitality in the home (cf. Acts 18.26). 'Apt to teach' does not necessarily imply a public platform but describes one who is skilful in explaining truth and feeding the flock. *Titus 1.9: Clinging to the faithful word according to the doctrine taught, that he may be able both to encourage with sound teaching and refute gainsayers.*
- '**Not given to wine**' and '**no striker**'. The Greek is 'not sitting long' at wine, i.e. addiction, resulting in drunkenness or being argumentative. Timothy obviously sought to set an example to the believers by being 'wineless' even though it was of medicinal benefit (5.23). Too much wine can result in violence – 'no striker' – the elder must not be one who is quick to threaten or use physical aggression or violence. *Spurgeon: Don't go about with your fist doubled up for fighting, carrying a theological revolver in the leg of your trousers.*
- '**Patient**' and '**not a brawler**'. Used *five* times in the NT and variously translated 'moderation' or 'gentle'. Whilst a difficult word to translate it essentially means not insisting on one's rights, forgiving when you have the right to condemn and not demanding an apology when one is deserved. If an elder is 'patient' then he will not be a 'brawler', i.e. contentious. This is the character of one who does not make mountains out of molehills and is not prepared to fight. His actions and words tend to peace.

The Children [and Home] of Overseers [vv.4-5]

v.4: The emphasis on the home life of the overseer is clear, for those who *lead* and *provide* well at home are more likely to do the same in a wider sphere. Significantly, though Eli and Samuel could serve in the tabernacle and David could fight and control huge armies, it was in the smaller sphere of the home that their limitations were apparent. The word 'rule' means to 'stand before' and 'direct' in the sense of leading and caring (cf. 5.17). This they do 'well' or

‘appropriately’, meeting high standards of excellence. There should be a visible order in the home, with children being in ‘subjection’, a military word which implies ‘lining up in rank’. They are respectful and obey the authority of their parents (Titus 1.6). The statement ‘with all gravity’ is probably descriptive of the way in which the overseer handles the family. *Allen: He exercises his authority with a firmness that makes it advisable to obey, with a wisdom that makes it natural to obey and with a love that makes it a delight to obey.* **v.5:** Arguing from the lesser to the greater, if the man cannot effectively lead his own house, he cannot possibly ‘take care’ of the local assembly.

The Christian Experience of the Overseer [v.6]

v.6: Any prospective overseer must not be a ‘novice’ or ‘newly planted’, i.e. a recent convert. This is a work that requires spiritual maturity. Too much spiritual responsibility too soon can cause ‘conceit’ and ‘pride’. The Greek contains the thought of being ‘wrapped in smoke’, and thus suggests spiritual short-sightedness and the consequent risk of ‘falling’ into the same ‘fault’ (or ‘condemnation’) of the devil. He said in his heart: *I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne...; I will be like the Most High* (Isaiah 14). As such God condemned him and ‘cast him down to the ground’ (Ezekiel 28.17) for God ‘resisteth the proud’ (1 Peter 5.5).

The Community Reputation of the Overseer [v.7]

v.7: Finally, the overseer must have a ‘good report’ or ‘testimony’ before the wider community (those ‘without’). He must *live* the gospel he preaches and professes to believe (Philippians 1.27). If his practice (in character, deed and word) does not match his profession, then he will be left open to the ‘reproach’, i.e. ridicule and scorn of the world and thus be caught by the ‘snare’ (trap) of the devil. The devil is keen to exploit any opportunity to bring Christian testimony into disrepute. *MacArthur: For one who has an unsavoury reputation in the community, to be placed by the church into a prominent place of authority would be to draw upon himself and the church the reproach of the world. Thus weakened and disheartened he might readily fall an easy prey into some skilfully laid snare of the Devil, who is here vividly pictured as a hunter of souls.*

A Comparison of Qualities Required in Elders [1 Timothy 3 & Titus 1]

Quality (AV)	Greek	Lexical meaning (BDAG)	1 Tim. 3	Titus 1
1. Blameless	ἀνεπίληπτον	Irreproachable	3.2	1.6, 1.7
2. Husband of one wife		A one-woman man	3.2	1.6
3. Vigilant	νηφάλιον	Being very moderate in the drinking of an alcoholic beverage, alert or watchful	3.2	
4. Sober	σώφρονα	In control of oneself, prudent, thoughtful	3.2	1.8
5. Good behaviour	κόσμιον	Having characteristics or qualities that evoke admiration or delight	3.2	
6. Given to hospitality	φιλόξενον	Hospitable, or ‘lover’ of hospitality (Titus)	3.2	1.8
7. Apt to teach	διδασκτικόν	Skilful. Holding fast the faithful word (Titus)	3.2	1.9
8. Not given to wine	πάροινον	Not addicted to wine	3.3	1.7
9. No striker	πλήκτην	Not a bully	3.3	1.7
10. Not greedy of filthy lucre	αἰσχροκερδῆ	Not fond of dishonest gain, greedy for money	3.3 (MSS)	1.7
11. Patient	ἐπιεικῆ	Not insisting on every right of letter of law or custom, yielding, gentle, kind	3.3	
12. Not a brawler	ἄμαχον	Peaceable	3.3	
13. Not covetous	ἀφιλάργυρον	Not loving money or greedy	3.3	
14. Ruleth well his house	προϊστάμενον	Exercises a position of leadership, headship	3.4	
15. Children	τέκνα	In subjection. Faithful, no riot or unruly	3.4	1.6
16. Gravity	σεμνότητος	Manner of behaviour that is worthy of respect	3.4	
17. Not a novice	νεόφυτον	Not newly converted (or planted)	3.6	
18. Of good report	μαρτυρίαν	Good reputation	3.7	
19. Not self-willed	αὐθάδη	Stubborn or arrogant		1.7
20. Not soon angry	ὀργίλον	Short-tempered, inclined to anger		1.7
21. Lover of good men	φιλάγαθον	Loving what is good		1.8
22. Just	δίκαιον	Upright and fair		1.8
23. Holy	ὅσιον	Personal piety, pleasing to God		1.8
24. Temperate	ἐγκρατῆ	Self-controlled and disciplined		1.8