

# Quality Service from Qualified Servants: An Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:1-13

By, Arthur L. Faught

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Have you ever noticed the framed credentials that hang on the walls in offices of professionals, such as doctors and mechanics? No answer is necessary, right? In many of our own offices either a call certificate and/or a diploma from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary adds decoration to the room. Usually, such credentials are placed on the wall right where you can see them. For what reason? To the person coming for service that framed diploma or recognition award sends a silent but clear message: you can trust us. The credentials serve their purpose by taking away doubt and hesitation from the person who needs service.

With that in mind and from her experiences at church, a member walked into the pastor's office without delay but with trust and confidence. Because she was active at church, the gospel had had many opportunities to bring her joy and focus in Christ and to motivate her to reflect such love in various activities within the walls of her congregation and without. Her pastor preached that precious gospel. And so, today she was going to confide in her pastor and talk about the problems that had been brewing for some months and had now surfaced in her marriage. "Home Sweet Home" had become a battleground.

The first meeting allowed her to bear her soul; in the second she eagerly sought more comfort and guidance from God. But it would end shortly thereafter. Members were coming up to her and expressing their sorrow over her situation, but she had mentioned it to no one. Others would give her strange looks and seemed to become distant; they wondered what had she done (recall Job's three "friends"?). Finally, she knew without a doubt what had happened. The pastor's wife assured her one Sunday between worship and Bible study, that Jesus could overcome their difficulties in marriage with love and forgiveness. But how could she forgive her pastor for his loose lips?

Tragically, this staunch member, this model of godliness by faith in Christ, questioned God and lost faith. She quietly left the church. No one seemed to notice, though, because not one person came to visit her. She still drifts among the waves of personal guilt and hardened grudges.

Loose lips sink souls. With all due respect to God and to you, our diplomas and call certificates are only paper. They do seek to create trust in those you and I serve and to build their confidence in us; someone else did consider us qualified workers. However, they cannot guarantee quality service from us. Paper must be reinforced by the person. Such responsibility and accountability, of course, immediately disqualify us from this service because of our sin. Yet, we presented ourselves before God for the public ministry, how ever long ago that was, because our confident trust rests in our Savior - his complete forgiveness and on-going power. The apostle Paul's words to his graduated apprentice serve more than as a review of God's qualifications for a position of leadership in his church. More importantly, these words revive our zeal to serve God's people; as he has served them and us, as well, because "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Php 4:13).<sup>1</sup> May our Lord do as much and much more than we ask, so that we may offer quality service as qualified servants!

## Context

*E pluribus unum.* You can see that phrase on the face of a quarter. You can experience that truth in its fullest reality in Christ. All the promises God has written in the Bible have their foundation and fulfillment in his Son. God seeks one goal in communicating all those promises—the salvation of each individual. By the one

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*, unless otherwise indicated.

sacrifice he offered Jesus has taken away the world's sin and has transferred righteousness and eternal life to a person through faith. All sixty-six books of the Bible work together to accomplish that goal (Jn 20:31; 1 Tm 2:4).

This has the additional effect of uniting each believer to one another, to form one body—*e pluribus unum*. This spiritual body, whose head is Jesus Christ, spans across time and culture and into heaven. Before time began, we were chosen in Christ to be members of this body and to live in his name. The apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians provides the classic locus for this, while he highlights the unity that crosses over the barrier between Jew and Gentile, to further unite the members of that local body of believers.

And so, it doesn't surprise us that in the same letter Paul would briefly mention how Christ's spiritual body works in unity (Eph 4). According to his grace and wisdom Christ has portioned out gifts to each Christian, so that each believer is incorporated and serves the body. As Christians, we look at the church as our family, as a team, in which both the whole and the parts are important and necessary.

Chapter three of Paul's first letter to Timothy brings that focus to the local congregation specifically with regards to its leaders. And yet, while the letter is addressed to Timothy, the words apply to the whole congregation. In chapter one we see that Christ brings life to and keeps in motion the heart (faith) and the hands (fruits). Each believer could say along with Paul: "The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 1:14). With their focus on Christ believers will avoid false teachings and their destructive ends (Ch. 1) and will pursue the eternal and temporal good of those around them, whether they do so in worship or in personal witness (Ch. 2). We are servants of our Lord and of one another. Each of us may have different gifts or different roles but we all belong to the same body of Christ.

Nonetheless, in chapter three of 1 Timothy Paul concentrates on the leaders. Paul ties chapter two to chapter three with principles of godly character. While many of these characteristics, as listed in chapter three, to a greater or lesser degree are found in God's children, the Lord looks for these qualities in his leaders. The role and accountability require them. We now proceed to the text, to refresh our minds and hearts with God's word concerning our role as ministers of the gospel.

**Verse 1** πιστὸς ὁ λόγος. Εἴ τις ἐπισκοπῆς ὀπέεται, καλοῦ ἔργου ἐπιθυμεῖ, "Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task." (NIV translation here and throughout)

Paul began this chapter with his second "trustworthy saying" (πιστὸς ὁ λόγος). The first occurred in 1:15, and he would write another at 4:9. Two others exist—one in each of the remaining two pastoral letters (2 Tm 2:11-13; Tt 3:4-8a).

During times of frustration and conflict in the ministry these words would bring Timothy back to the basics, to remember his "first love," as the apostle John would write within several decades to the church in Ephesus (Re 2:4). (Recall that Timothy was serving in Ephesus at this time; cf. 1 Tm 1:3). These λόγοι offered more than timely advice but power to persevere and to have perspective during the problems. And Timothy could rely on (πιστός / πιστεύειν - "to believe to the extent of complete trust and reliance"; LN 31.85) these words of encouragement, because they were not Paul's but God's. God had not only inspired them to be written but in them he had also focused on what mattered and lasted - his undeserved love in action.

If people were foolishly turning to false doctrine and taking more of an interest in them than the truth, Timothy would not grumble or think himself more highly than he ought. God had spared Timothy himself from eternal destruction and sustained his faith to the present day because of his grace. If people were leaving the church, because Christ's yoke seemed too easy (Mt 11:28 - 30) and other religions offered better proof of a more "godly" life, Timothy would not follow. He had received better certainty and life; he had the words of the living Savior. With two simple words Paul drew the attention of his fellow servant of the gospel to the significant object of their trust, Jesus their Lord. With Jesus' constant strength and faithful guidance Timothy would not quit, when the going got tough, but would continue to offer quality service to those whom he served.

The ministry isn't miserable work, although Satan would like us to think as much. Instead, it is καλὸν ἔργον. (Paul will use the adjectival and adverbial forms of καλός five times in these thirteen verses.) The ministry is noble work ("occupation" vs. "deed"; BAG s.v. 1, 2) in God's sight. While our heavenly Father commends and blesses any good deed his spiritual children carry out for others, the ministry of the Word reaches far beyond what temporal benefit or relief we can offer. The Word works on souls (He 4:12). Again, it seeks to secure the eternal welfare of an individual, while it does not neglect the daily training and growing of believers, to live in appreciation of God's salvation. But it always returns to truth—we're headed for heaven on account of Jesus' life and death! Nothing can affect a person's status before God, except the gospel which we share and proclaim as his servants. An ἐπίσκοπος (Paul used the feminine noun ἐπισκοπή in verse one to denote the office) is truly an overseer in at least three ways: he looks over himself (i.e., the coming qualifications in verse 2ff); he sees the big picture of a person's life (eternity); he watches over other people.<sup>3</sup>

Ministry, then, is truly a matter of the heart. Of course, the Greeks did use ἐπιθυμεῖν to describe lust (Mt 5:28) or greed (Ac 20:33), but God always has a way of taking what man ruins and changing it to his glory and for our good. When we presented ourselves for the public ministry—beforehand, while we were studying at school—it became personal. We knew we were going to be dealing with sinful people day in and day out. More than that, God's unconditional love for you and me drives (ἐπιθυμεῖν) us to serve others in the same way, to let them know in joy and in hardship that God redeemed them and still cares for them (1 Pe 5:7); and we do, too. In whomever (τις - indefinite, masc. sing. pronoun; enclitic) the Lord has led to aspire to the public ministry a fire burns brightly and continually, a sacrifice of service burning before the Lord—a fragrance pleasing and acceptable to him. Verses 2 through 7 describe in detail what qualities in his servants please the Lord and are necessary for the work as an "overseer."

Before we proceed to verse 2, a brief comment about the two divisions in this section (vs. 2 - 7) is appropriate. While some commentators have organized their exegesis of the qualifications one by one—something that will be done in this paper, as well—I have also divided them into two groups of relationship from the viewpoint of the servant. The qualifications begin at the center, the worker himself (vs. 2, 3), and apply in his relationships to larger "family" groups (vs. 4-7). Also, within each group qualifications generally work their way outward in circles of influence (vs. 2 → 3; vs. 4 → 6 → 7). First, a qualified servant is

### Self-disciplined

**Verse 2** δεῖ οὖν τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνεπίληπτον εἶναι, μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα, νηφάλιον, σώφρονα, κόσμιον, φιλόξενον, διδακτικόν, "Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,"

δεῖ οὖν τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνεπίληπτον εἶναι - "it is necessary, therefore, that the overseer is blameless"

Psalm 119 begins: "Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways. You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed" (vs. 1 - 4). With that kind of attitude and devotion we read these qualifications. God desires to bless us, to preserve us from pitfalls, and most importantly to keep us faithful to him and his will during our ministries. While this psalm applies to all Christians, the position and privilege we have as public servants (ἐπίσκοπος: masc. sing. noun)<sup>4</sup> places more

<sup>2</sup> καλοῦ ἔργου & ἐπισκοπῆς are genitive direct objects due to the verbs; both verbs express volition: "to strive after" and "to desire" (Wallace, 131).

<sup>3</sup> Let it suffice to say that today's pastor most closely resembles the work of the ἐπίσκοπος than other forms of the ministry we have (Ac 20:17, 28). This will become clear, as we go through the qualifications in vs. 2-7 in comparison to vs. 8-12.

<sup>4</sup> ἐπίσκοπον is a predicate accusative (serves as the subject of the dependant clause; the article is generic, to describe the "class" of work) of the subjective infinitive εἶναι. The remaining nouns, adjectives, and participles that modify ἐπίσκοπον will be accusative, as well, to fit this grammatical construction.

requirements on each of us but remains on the same path all Christians travel.<sup>5</sup> οὖν connects the previous statement about the work (καλὸν ἔργον) to our will and life (vs. 2 - 7). δεῖ (impersonal verb of requirement or necessity) carries the full force of God's expectations and, therefore, we are to possess (εἶναι: present tense; state-of-being verb links the attribute to the person) these qualities everyday. Ministry is a "life-style."

ἀνεπίληματος (lit. "not be taken hold of"; ἀ + ἐπί + λαμβάνω) is the overarching lifestyle of God's servants of the Word. George Knight words it in this way: "*irreproachable*, in the sense of not open to attack or criticism in terms of his Christian life in general and in terms of the characteristics that follow in particular." Like the First Commandment, if we could keep this one, then no one would have any reason to find fault with us; our service would be of *perfect* quality. However, as people corrupted by sin from conception (Ps 51:5), we are not blameless in God's sight. With Paul we confess: "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature" (Ro 7:18). Yet, because God's arm worked salvation for the world and you and I received all the benefits of Christ's life-work through faith, we can serve as workers in God's kingdom. It's not the white Geneva or alb we wear on Sunday's that fit us for the task but Christ's robe of righteousness (Eph 4:22 - 24). As a result, our conduct and conversations will fall in line with God's will before the private and public eyes of people.

### 1) μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα - "a husband of one wife"

Commentators have presented various interpretations of this phrase,<sup>6</sup> but the thought comes through clearly: "a husband of one wife." While Scripture can use ἀνὴρ to point to a man in contrast to a woman (γυνή; 1 Tm 2:8ff), here the phrase indicates the marital relationship (γυνή is a possessive genitive to express the "belonging" in a marital relationship; cf. Gn 2:24; Ro 7; 1 Cor 7). Of course, the husband belongs to his wife (εἷς: fem. adj.; "one" in number), as well (1 Tm 5:9 – ἐνὸς ἀνδρὸς γυνή); but we're viewing the qualifications of an overseer, who is married. Although this is couched in the marriage relationship - the common status of many leaders, Paul reminds any overseer by these words that to be above reproach he must avoid any sexual violation against God's law, whether the Lord has blessed him with a spouse or not. In this way this qualification resembles the Sixth Commandment in command and application but speaks in positive terms.<sup>7</sup>

In today's society this has as much import for the ministry as it had in the apostles' day. Sexual immorality has a strong footing in our country and an open publicity in the media, such as on television and the internet. Many taboos of my grandparents' day are accepted as commonplace now with the majority. At the very least, such is the spirit in the air (Eph 2:2). We receive strength and take our stand, though, in what has not changed. The ability to shun temptations of lust comes from the same powerful source - God's Word. In it the Lord shows us the purpose and blessings of marriage along with the lifelong commitment such vows embrace and he expects. Through the Bible the Lord also guards us from fatal injuries to our soul and girds us to do battle with success.

### 2) νηφάλιον - "self-controlled"

These next three qualifications look at the worker in relation to no one else or outside influence; he stands as is. This first adjective comes from νήφειν, "to be sober" (TDNT IV, 936). While the word did refer to the opposite of being chemically intoxicated by wine, it is often used to speak figuratively about a person, whose mind is clear. Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica: "So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and *self-controlled* (νήφωμεν). For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get

<sup>5</sup> This discards the idea that pastors are "super-sanctified" but still demands the high quality of character.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. David Valleskey's article for a simple summary of these interpretations and exposition of this Scripture. Knight's commentary follows the same thought with further background and details.

<sup>7</sup> This phrase has direct application to the present crisis in the Episcopalian Church (USA) concerning a recently-elected, openly-gay bishop. God condemns homosexuality as sin, a perverse abuse of God's intended blessings within the bond of marriage (Lv 20:13; Ro 1:26 - 28). According to the Bible, then, the bishop is disqualified for the ministry, to say the least.

drunk, get drunk at night” (1 Th 5:6, 7). Spiritual stupor would also reveal itself by thinking we can play around with Satan, a roaring lion - with his teachings or temptations (1 Pe 5:8). Instead, the apostle Peter urges us to “be *self-controlled* (νήψατε) and alert.” For us that means we are clear about what God says in his Word and will not cave in, when we are confronted. We can lead the congregation in the right path (cf. 1 Tm 1).

### 3) σώφρονα - “sensible”

Peter also used this word with the foregoing in the same sentence in his first letter: “The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded (σωφρονήσατε) and self-controlled (νήψατε) so that you can pray” (4:7). We can see from this passage that they share common ground. But these two words treat different aspects of the same object. While νηφάλιος speaks of clarity of mind, σώφρων speaks of control of mind. Trench defined the noun of this verbal stem (σωφροσύνη: the suffix -συνη points to the “abstract idea of quality” of the stem; Metzger, 43) as follows: “it is properly the condition of an entire command over the passions and desires, so that they receive no further allowance than that which the law and right reason admit and approve” (70). The difference becomes obvious in the demon-possessed man Jesus healed. Before Jesus evicted the evil spirits from this man, he often had no control over his body or tongue. Afterwards, he was “sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his *right mind* (σωφρονοῦντα)” (Lk 8:35).

Sensibleness allows us to step back and think about things, before we make a hasty decision. During tough questions or situations we can control our emotions and use God’s Word to shine some light on the subject (Ps 119:105). We do not react like children to constructive or even caustic criticism. Instead we react with caution and remain calm, because Christ knows our hearts and sees our faithful work.

### 4) κόσμιον - “orderly, respectable”

When we see this adjective, another related word comes to mind – ὁ κόσμος (“world”). Both are derived from the verb κοσμέω (“to put in order” BAG s.v. 1). The first chapter of Genesis tells us how God started with nothing, but at the power of his Word he created and arranged the universe in an orderly fashion. Creation was complete and suited the purposes God desired; “it was very good” (Gn 1:31). With this in mind, we are not surprised to find the definition: “pertaining to (suffix ending -ιος; Metzger, 43) being modest in the sense of moderate and well-ordered” (LN, 88.48).

κόσμιος deals more than with organization in the office, although such neatness reflects κόσμιος. As Lutherans, we pride ourselves in the idea that we prefer and often walk down the middle road, avoiding the extremes on either side. Without a doubt this happens only when we’re centered in Christ. The Lord looks for such balance in his Christian leaders. How does this foster the relationship between pastor and member? The members we serve know they can depend on us and, in turn, we receive their respect (cf. NIV).

### 5) φιλόξενον - “hospitable”

This and the following quality affect the overseer’s relation to others (a circle of influence). We can easily understand the meaning of this word by dividing it in half: φίλος + ξένος (“friend of strangers”). Our demeanor is one of love and respect to people in general (“Love your neighbor as yourself”; Mt 22:39) and especially to brothers and sisters in Christ in particular (“We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth”; 3 Jn 8). The word also directs our attitude toward guests who visit the church we serve. We welcome them; we go out of our way for them.

We appreciate their presence and their willingness to overcome whatever personal barriers usually prevent the unchurched from sitting in an unfamiliar setting on a Sunday morning, no less.

### 6) διδακτικόν - “able to teach”

During the final year of his ministry Jesus spent more time with his disciples in seclusion. He had been teaching them the truths of the kingdom not only for their own personal benefit but also because the disciples would soon be doing the teaching, sent out by the risen Christ as his apostles. Paul would later write to Titus in a similar list of qualifications as our present study: “He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (1:9).

Again, the suffix ending of the adjective gives us insight into the meaning: -ικον expresses “the idea *belonging to, pertaining to, with the characteristics of* (Metzger, 43). The overseer not only has the will to teach others but also the characteristic or skill to do so. All the other qualifications in this chapter deal with the overseer’s qualities. This is the only qualification, which deals with a required ability.

Yet, the ability to teach does not go empty-handed, just as faith would be useless without its object of trust. Paul reminded the Corinthians: “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). The pulpit does not become a soap box; Bible class is not a forum for opinions. In every aspect of our preaching and teaching the Word—God’s message to every person of this world—dominates, because without Christ we have nothing. And so, as overseers we remain in contact with that Word, like the branch to the vine (Jn 15). David Valleskey aptly writes: “Α διδακτικός pastor, therefore, will of necessity be constantly in the Word himself, for he knows that he cannot *give* from God that which he is not *receiving* from God, that he cannot pour *out* to others that which is not being poured *in* to him” (44).

**Verse 3** μὴ πάροινον μὴ πλήκτην, ἀλλὰ ἐπιεικῆ ἄμαχον ἀφιλάργυρον, “not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.”

7) μὴ πάροινον - “not<sup>8</sup> drunken, addicted to wine”

Like νηφάλιος, πάροινος deals with wine. However, the context shows that πάροινον is talking about drunkenness (cf. the wording in 3:8: μὴ οἴνω πολλῶ προσέχοντας).<sup>9</sup> The adjective literally means “by the side of wine” (παρά + οἶνος). Perhaps, Neil Diamond’s song, “Red, Red Wine,” comes to mind: “Red, red wine stay close to me . . .” When we’re feeling down and need some comfort, we do not reach out for a bottle of Southern Comfort. We have something much better, and it will keep us blameless. We can turn to our Savior, who endured pain and sorrow even greater than ours and survived—more than that, he lives in glory to walk us through life and our ministries in a straight line. “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (He 2:18). The ministry is certainly filled with frustrations, but that is why we rejoice that our faith is founded in Jesus, our refuge and might.

And so, we will use alcoholic beverages sensibly. We want to avoid the Corinthian slogan, “Everything is permissible for me” (1 Cor 6:12), and agree with Paul by our behavior: “Not everything is beneficial” and “I will not be mastered by anything” (1 Cor 6:12). We enjoy alcoholic beverages in moderation and we forego such freedom for the sake of others, when such restraint will better reflect our Lord’s love.

8) μὴ πλήκτην - “not a bully”

This is the only other noun in the list (ἀνήρ v.2) to describe the quality of the overseer. The noun suffix -της indicates agent (Metzger, 42) as “one who strikes with a fist” (derived from πλήσσω). From the position of power we hold, pastors can be tempted to throw their weight around. We can lose the humble attitude of service, which Jesus demonstrated in washing his disciples’ feet the night before his crucifixion, and begin to proclaim: “My way or the doorway!” However, the apostle Peter encourages us: “. . . not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (1 Pe 5:3) in word and deed.

<sup>8</sup> Verse three describes the qualifications from a different angle than verse two: what we’re not (μὴ, ὄ prefix) instead of who we are. Also, the words describe the qualities in how we interact with others; the circle of influence moves outward.

<sup>9</sup> Lit., “not occupying oneself (BAG) with much wine”

9) ἀλλὰ ἐπεικῆ - “but gentle, yielding”

With the conjunction (ἀλλὰ) Paul strongly contrasts the man who is “pugnacious and demanding” (LN, 88.137) to a man who is gentle and knows when to yield his right of way to others. NIV translates ἐπεικῆς as “considerate” (Jas 3:17) in contrast to envy and selfish ambition in the previous verses. In his thorough and insightful exposition on τὸ ἐπεικῆς (neuter sing. adj.; article: substantival) of Philippians 4:5 Paul Wendland writes: “When Christ is our all in all, we humbly consider other Christians as superior to ourselves, and we willingly put our lives at their disposal, just as Christ did for us. Since we find our hope, our joy, our glory, and our righteousness in him, we fear no loss in our own status by making ourselves slaves to one another in obedience to God’s will” (48).

10) ἄμαχον - “not quarrelsome”

In Proverbs 26:21 King Solomon warns: “As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife (LXX – μάχη).” The Lord wants us to be the very opposite - “not to fight” (& + u6Xoual). Life is difficult enough for the members we serve and for us, that we don’t need to be creating additional conflicts. To revel in heated arguments, especially over minor matters, resembles the fare the television networks delight in for ratings. On the contrary, we keep our pride in check and maintain a climate of peace either by holding our tongue or by responding with a gentle answer (Pr 15:1). “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Mt 5:9).

11) ἀφιλάργυρον - “not loving money”

Once again, the Greek says it all (ἀ + φίλος + ἄργυρος)! Basically, we can fall into this trap in two ways. A servant of the Lord becomes a servant of greed and takes from what does not belong to him; we steal from the church’s bank account or we cheat on the tax forms. You and I can also lose our respect and high privilege by complaining about our finances. Do we continually crave more than we have? Jesus plainly states that we cannot serve two masters (Mt 6:24). The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod’s stewardship materials this year, “Pursuing Godliness with Contentment,” address and correct that attitude and lifestyle of covetous desire and grumbling dissatisfaction by focusing on what we have received from our gracious God and how we can properly thank him with our whole lives (1 Tm 6:6 -11).

### Family-oriented

**Verse 4, 5** τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου καλῶς προϊστάμενον, τέκνα ἔχοντα ἐν ὑποταγῇ, μετὰ πάσης σεμνότητος. (εἰ δέ τις τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου προστῆναι οὐκ οἶδεν, πῶς ἐκκλησίας θεοῦ ἐπιμελήσεται;) “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?)”

1) τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου καλῶς προϊστάμενον...μετὰ πάσης σεμνότητος. “one who stands well at the head of his own household . . . with all respect”

Paul now writes about those qualifications that have direct bearing on our relationships to larger groups or “families.” He covers them in order of the amount of contact or closeness we have with these groups of people. The first, of course, is our own household (ὁ ἴδιος οἶκος; BAG s.v. 2). Again, because the inspired apostle was writing to a broad base of people and for future generations, this qualification does not imply that an overseer must have a family but “if he does . . .” (cf. 3:2).

Paul uses an attributive participle to describe the role the overseer has within his own family. As father, the overseer not only sits in the position of authority (“at the head of the table”) but more significantly manages (present tense) his family with love and care (cf. v5, ἐπιμελέομαι where Paul argues from lesser to greater about “care management”).

The way in which an overseer manages his family can give tell-tale signs of how he will conduct the church. Members’ confidence in his abilities will soon wane or, at the very least, wonder about the apparent contradiction between the management of his house and God’s house. Recall how Eli’s sons affected the ministry at the temple and the people’s view of their father, not to mention God’s reaction to Eli’s “discipline” (1 Sm 2). However, unruly children do not call a pastor’s position of leadership into question automatically. Sadly, some children will not submit (ὑποταγή) to a father’s authority and loving, patient discipline but remain stubborn and constantly rebel.<sup>10</sup>

Also, if a pastor cannot spend quality<sup>11</sup> time with his family, how can a member expect to receive the same, when needed? The ministry makes demands on our time, but we can say again with Paul: “I will not be mastered by anything.” When we look at the coming week or months or year, we prioritize not only our schedules for the ministry but also for our family.

**Verse 6** μὴ νεόφυτον, ἵνα μὴ τυφωθεῖς εἰς κρίμα ἐμπέση τοῦ διαβόλου “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.”

## 2) μὴ νεόφυτον - “not newly-converted”

The second qualification in this “family-oriented” group addresses a person’s membership in God’s spiritual family, the church, to which Paul brings our attention in verse five. νεόφυτος draws the picture of a plant recently (νέος - “new” in time) placed into the soil; it needs time and nourishment to grow (φύω) deeper into the ground for stability and strength.

ἵνα mentions the tragic outcome that could result from allowing a recently-converted Christian to assume such an office of power and position. With fresh joy and knowledge of God’s salvation and in their zeal to serve the Lord they could succumb to a false picture of the “older” members. The struggles of Christian sanctified living could be misinterpreted for the absence of faith. Condescension could replace compassion; threatening demands of the law could be heard more than patient encouragement with the gospel. Finally, membership in God’s kingdom would be based on good works. But Jesus warns: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged” (Mt 7:1ff). Jesus doesn’t deny the presence of sin in our lives but condemns the one who thinks he is less of or not even a sinner. Wrong comparison, instant conceit.

While we may not be recent converts to faith in Christ, the warning Paul writes for this qualification can apply to any overseer. Pride can be our downfall, too, no matter how many years of ministry we have under our belt. You and I can plunge from the ἐπισκοπή and fall into judgment, as Satan did (Jd 6;2 Pe 2:4), because we

<sup>10</sup> Such behavior is the very opposite to σεμνότης, which means “reverence, respectfulness”; BAG s.v. 1. σεμνότης is derived from σέβομαι, “to worship” or “to show respect for” (BAG s.v. 2 a, b); the verbal stem -σεβ means “to fall back before” (TDNT VII, 169). Trench also reminds us that σεμνότης, like κόσμιος, not only refers to outward obedience but also inner will (346).

The question, then, remains how this prepositional phrase is construed. Does it describe how the father manages his home (3:8, 11; Tt 2:2)? Or could it tell how children regard and obey their father (NIV translation; Tt 1:6; Eph 6:1)? Or does it refer to the whole (πᾶς) relationship? Working backwards, πᾶς modifies σεμνότης and, therefore, this respect is completely filled with grace and honor (Trench, 346), not referring to the relationship between child and father. Instead, the prepositional phrase modifies the participle and describes how the father “stands at the head of his household. With love and respect he treats and trains his children and in such a way deals with his family, as well. Armin Schuetze comments: “The pastor-father, as every father, will call for obedience in a manner that is dignified, not by means of simply laying down the law or even becoming abusive in language or action” (53).

<sup>11</sup> Note: I will not define “quality,” because each of us has different talents, members in our families with specific needs, and ministerial responsibilities. Like the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30), the Lord wants us to be responsible in our time and energy with whom and what he has placed into our care.

consider ourselves superior to others and ultimately over God and his ways (1 Tm 6:3, 4a). Pride leads to such foolish thoughts, because our ego clouds up (τυφώω) our vision of what we have been given and for what purpose we have been called to this office. We are to serve not to stand above our Lord and his people.

*Verse 7* δεῖ δὲ καὶ μαρτυρίαν καλὴν ἔχειν ἀπὸ τῶν ἔξωθεν, ἵνα μὴ εἰς ὀνειδισμὸν ἐμπέσῃ καὶ παγίδα τοῦ διαβόλου, “He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.”

3) δεῖ δὲ καὶ μαρτυρίαν καλὴν ἔχειν ἀπὸ τῶν ἔξωθεν - “and it is necessary that (he) have a good standing from those outside, as well”

And finally, the community at large counts. Paul closes this section about the ἐπίσκοπος with δεῖ as a bookend (cf. v. 2). Bet also serves to continue the grammatical structure for the coming qualifications in verses eight through twelve.

Some commentators, such as Knight, have taken ἀπὸ τῶν ἔξωθεν to strictly mean “unbelievers”—“those outside of” (ἔξωθεν) the church (cf. pg 164; also LN 11.10).<sup>12</sup> He supports his interpretation in this context by viewing verses four through seven as all relating to the church. While unbelievers are included in Paul’s thought, I disagree that they are exclusively the audience of our lives here. Paul does not discuss the qualities of an ἐπίσκοπος in verses four through seven based on a division of spiritual status—faith and unbelief; church and unchurch—but on the basis of contact and interaction. This is the “catch-all” group; anyone is a neighbor to us, whether Christian or not. In this context “outsiders” are all those who are not members of our household and church family but of the community.

For example, I can claim to be a child in three ways: I am a child of the human race—a human (v7); I am an adopted child of my heavenly Father through Jesus Christ—a “Christian” (v6); I am an adopted child of my human father—a “Faught” (v4). I have arranged my membership according to association, starting with the common denominator with the most people. Paul arranges the qualifications according to connection, as well, but in order of exposure. My wife sees me seven days a week (v4); no church member can claim that (v6), especially no member of the community (v7).

With that aside, we have no disagreement that our day to day conduct affects those who witness it and, therefore, our work as leaders in God’s church. μαρτυρία (derived from μαρτυρέω—“to testify; to be a witness”) is an opinion of what people witness of us, when we walk out of the front door. Based on how we speak and act they will have an impression of us and they (ἀπό - source) will make a judgment about us, whether accurate or not with regards to our overall lives. The result will be our reputation (μαρτυρία). How important it is to watch our every step, then, especially because Satan is going to try to trip us up and not only ruin our reputation but also bring disdain to the gospel and the church!

By God’s power, though, we can maintain a μαρτυρίαν καλὴν and live as lights in this world (Mt 5:14-16). Valleskey lists several ways in which this is possible: “He will have a good reputation if, when he is out and among people, he demonstrates that he is: a man of integrity and conviction; a man whose speech and actions are above reproach; a man whose simple ‘yes’ and ‘no’ are as good as an oath; a man who always speaks the truth, even if he knows it will be met with criticism, but who does so in a gentle, loving manner (Eph 4:15); a man who, though he may not be able to pray and worship and work with the heterodox, does not look upon them as the ‘enemy,’ but rejoices over whatever of the truth of God they are proclaiming” (48).

### Summary of 1 Timothy 3:1-7

Under the command and direction of the Lord the apostle Paul has written a list of qualifications for the office of overseer. Therefore, we cannot pick and choose what to meet; the Lord has set the standard. And so,

<sup>12</sup> Paul’s letters and Scripture in general contain such clear references: Mk 4:11; 1 Cor 5:12; Col 4:5; 1 Th 4:12

you and I naturally blurt out: “Who is equal to such a task?!” (2 Cor 2:16). The Lord answers: “He who has clean hands and a pure heart” (Ps 24:4). But with Isaiah we shout out: “Woe to me! I am ruined!, For I am a man of unclean lips!” (Is 6:5). But with the perfect blood of his Son the Lord touches our hearts and wipes away the sin. We, then, can say with confidence: “Here am I. Send me!” (Is 6:8). The same powerful love, that rescued us from sin and death and gives us life and the ability to live for God as Christians, also empowers us to serve as Christian leaders and to grow in this grace and knowledge.

**Verse 8** Διακόνους ὡσαύτως σεμνούς, μὴ διλόγους, μὴ οἶνω πολλῶ προσέχοντας, μὴ αἰσχροκερδεῖς, “Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.”

Paul now moves onto another office of service in the church διακόνος. Because several qualifications for the ἐπισκοπή apply to this office, I will bypass the common ground and concentrate only on the new.

διακόνος comes from the verb διακονέω—“to serve” (BAG s.v. 2). Knight comments about this office: “Apparently the ministry of the (deacon) is so specifically and exclusively that of service that the name designating their function becomes uniquely theirs” (168). And so, the works of service that deacons would provide could include almost anything, depending on what the circumstances called for (Ac 6:1ff).

At the same time, the high standard of character God expects from the overseer he holds for these men who serve as “deacons” (masc. pl.). Paul expresses this with the same grammatical construction, found in verses two and seven (supply δεῖ εἶναι; the subject of the dependant clause is predicate accusative) and the adverb ὡσαυτως (“likewise”). As an overseer must be ἄεπίλημπος; a deacon must be σεμνός (“worthy of respect”). How a deacon would retain his reverence Paul spells out in the words that follow.

However, the list of qualifications for the deacon, although no less important, does not have the same scope of responsibility and of accountability as an overseer. We can see this not only in Paul’s treatment of this office (less qualifications in number) but also in the absence of two key characteristics διδακτικός (able to teach) and σεμνός (oversight of the church).

Yet, as we can see in Acts 6, these two offices didn’t compete against one another but complemented each other in their roles of service. The apostles could not take time away from the ministry of the Word to help the situation with the widows. And so, the church saw the problem as an opportunity. At the direction of the apostles they chose seven men to fulfill this position of service. In a similar way, the pastor and the church officers work in unity to the edification and growth of God’s family. What encouragement to pray to our Head, that he would provide capable leaders in the congregation to serve by our side in ways he has gifted them!

To maintain their σεμνός before others, among other things deacons would not be διλόγους and αἰσχροκερδεῖς. διλόγους literally means “two-tongued.” Deacons would not say one thing to a person’s face and say another behind their back. They would also avoid being αἰσχροκερδεῖς (“shameful gain”). Servants of the Lord steer clear of temptations of greed and find true contentment in Christ and his provision. Remember Judas who dipped his hand into the money bag (Jn 12:6). Money is a sensitive issue already; deacons need to serve with integrity.

**Verse 9** ἔχοντας τὸ μυστήριον τῆς πίστεως ἐν καθαρᾷ συνειδήσει, “They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.”

The ability to serve with respectfulness comes from the same source for both the overseer and for the deacon: God’s Word. Deacons can serve their Lord and fellow Christians with joy and a clean conscience (ἐν καθαρᾷ συνειδήσει). They are free from guilt and have nothing to feel guilty about because they embrace (ἔχω; present tense) in their hearts the message of the gospel; they trust in it for forgiveness and life. If God had

not revealed (τὸ μυστήριον)<sup>13</sup> his gracious plan in the Bible and had not brought them personally to faith, they would be lost, like the rest of the world who does not know God (Jn 1:10-13). Jesus and salvation remain a mystery to many. Christian servants of the church, therefore, have a different motivation and perspective about their work. It is not an obligation but an opportunity to put one's gifts to work out of gratitude, as God intended (Eph 2:10; 1 Cor 12).

**Verse 10** καὶ οὗτοι δὲ δοκιμαζέσθωσαν πρῶτον, εἴτα διακονείτωσαν ἀνέγκλητοι ὄντες, “They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.”

“Where there’s a will, there’s a way.” Some might say that about volunteers at church, such as for Sunday School staff. “We need more bodies!” While the church appreciates those who offer their time and energy of their own free will, the church takes more care in choosing and developing those who will serve on their behalf. In Acts 6 the apostles listed criteria to be met for the men to fill the job: “Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom” (6:3).

These men (οὗτοι), who met the above qualifications in verses eight and nine, would receive thoughtful consideration and evaluation by the congregation for the office of διάκονος before entering the office. The church did this not for the humiliation or failure of brothers in Christ. Such careful selection of men to serve as deacons would express their confidence in their character [ἀνέγκλητοι - lit. “not call to account” or “not bring charges against” (Ro 8:33); ἀ + ἐγκαλέω] and their gifts to carry out the work.<sup>14</sup> δοκιμάζω has the idea of a man biting on a coin to prove its genuineness (cf. God’s “test” of Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac; Gn 22). The church had observed (πρῶτον) that these men were already living as examples of Christian character in the congregation; now (εἴτα) the church asked them to serve as their leaders.

**Verse 11** γυναῖκας ὡσαύτως σεμνάς, μὴ διαβόλους, νηφαλίους, πιστὰς ἐν πᾶσιν, “In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.”

Commentators have debated about whom Paul was writing in this verse. The NIV tips its hand by translating: “In the same way, their wives . . .”<sup>15</sup> The NIV translation disappoints us, although it adds a footnote to offer an alternative, because the context makes it clear. Paul was not talking about deacon’s wives but addressing a third office in which women could serve as helpers. It goes without saying that this position followed the Lord’s order of creation principle (the role of man and woman), as Paul had just applied it to the congregation’s worship in chapter two of this letter.

The context has determined that meaning by the following:

- This section of Scripture describes the qualifications for the offices of service within the church. The office of the overseer requires good management of one’s family, because it has direct application to that particular office—the oversight of the church (v5). The same is necessary for

<sup>13</sup> πίσεως is an exegetical genitive (“that is, the faith”); it is the faith which we believe—the teachings of salvation in Jesus (BAG s.v. 3); cf. Paul’s use of μυστήριον in 1 Tm 3:16; Eph 3:3.

<sup>14</sup> ἀνέγκλητος is synonymous with ἀνεπίλημπος. Trench writes concerning ἀνέγκλητος: “It is justly explained by Chrysostom as implying not acquittal merely, but absence so much as of a charge or accusation brought against him of whom it is affirmed. It moves, like ἄμωμος, not in the subjective world of the thoughts and estimates of men, but in the objective world of facts” (381).

<sup>15</sup> God’s Word to the Nations (rev. ed.; Cleveland: Biblion Publishing, 1989) translates: “In the same way the women must. . .” but adds in the footnotes: “Or ‘wives’; Paul refers either to *deaconesses* (trained female church workers) or to the *wives of deacons*.” New Living Translation (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1996) has: “In the same way, their wives . . .” but states in its footnotes: “Or *the women deacons*. The Greek word can be translated *women* or *wives*.” New Revised Standard Version (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989) has: “Women likewise must . . .” New American Standard Bible (updated ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999) reads: “Women must . . .” but again in the footnotes writes: “I.e. either deacons’ wives or deaconesses.”

the deacon (v12), as proof of his character. But neither office mentions wives beyond the marital relationship; wives have no special qualifications to meet, in order for their husbands to serve.

- The grammar of verse eleven mirrors verse eight. Both passages are built on δεῖ εἶναι and ὡσαύτως, which leads back to the ἐπίσκοπος, to express what is required from a called servant of the Lord.
- The over-arching qualification for the διάκονοι is repeated for the γυναῖκες. Both must be worthy of respect (σεμνός).
- Finally, we know that women did serve in such a role.<sup>16</sup> Recall that Phoebe served the church in Cenchræ (Ro 16:1).

The other qualifications that are not covered previously are μὴ διαβόλους and πιστὰς ἐν πάσιν. διαβόλους means “slandering”; the ultimate authority on this is the devil (ὁ διαβόλος; vs. 6, 7). Note how in this short list faithfulness is a key quality for church workers.

**Verse 12** διάκονοι ἔστωσαν μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρες, τέκνων καλῶς προϊστάμενοι καὶ τῶν ἰδίων οἴκων, “A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.”

Paul returns to listing further qualifications of the deacons (διάκονοι), which is signaled by the repetition of their title and the use of the imperative. For commentary on this verse cross reference verses two and four above. The minor differences in verse 12 include: the third plural jussive of εἶμι substitutes for δεῖ with no less import or expectation from God; the number of ἀνὴρ coincides with the number of διάκονος; a change in word order and expression concerning the management of one’s household. The similarity of the qualifications in this verse compared to those of the ἐπίσκοπος also “indicates that the home is the proving ground of fidelity for all officers” (Knight, 173). However, the absence of the thought in verse 5 here further proves that the διάκονοι did not have the scope of responsibility and accountability as great as the ἐπίσκοποι.

**Verse 13** οἱ γὰρ καλῶς διακονήσαντες βαθμὸν ἑαυτοῖς καλὸν περιποιῶνται καὶ πολλὴν παρρησίαν ἐν πίστει τῇ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.”

Here also Paul places a bookend to close a section; he uses a word of encouragement to begin and to end the text about the qualifications for servants in the church. Because he went through the qualifications for the διάκονοι and the γυναῖκες, he concludes with a word of encouragement addressed specifically to them. γὰρ gives the reason why deacons and their helpers would protect the sanctity of their office and perform their duties to the best of their abilities. For their hard and faithful work in Jesus’ name they receive (περιποιέω - “to gain”; present tense) meaningful rewards in return.

One reward is good standing (βαθμὸν καλὸν). βαθμός (NT hapax) can mean “step” or “rank” (BAG). Louw and Nida define it, then, as “a standing in society implying rank or status” (87.3). Members take notice

<sup>16</sup> Knight agrees that these γυναῖκες had a role of service in the church. However, he believes they refer to the wives of the διάκονοι of verse 8. Knight cites that the formula μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἀνδρα/ἀνδρες in vs. 2, 12 bears too heavy a weight on v11 not to call them wives of deacons. And so, he views verse eleven as describing a “couple” team (cf. Aquila and Priscilla).

With the aforementioned reasons aside (cf. bullets above), we could easily argue against Knight that: 1) Paul doesn’t use ἡ διάκονος to refer to these women, because they serve in a role under the διάκονοι as assistants; by using ἡ γυνή Paul expresses both their proper role and their scope of responsibility. 2) Paul would couch the γυναῖκες in the middle of the διάκονοι, because they not only served as helpers to the deacons (recall how Greeks modify nouns with adjectives and participles in predicate position; here, same type of order but with complete thoughts about people) but he also wanted to “tap the potential of women workers in the church” (Valleskey, “1 Timothy Study Questions,” 14). Women are much more valuable and can provide service in more ways than for potlucks!

and respond with deep gratitude, when their leaders serve faithfully. Their reputation among a congregation stands out because of their humility and willingness to serve. In that way the servants reflect their Master, Jesus, who has given them the opportunity and ability to work in his name.

Jesus also rewards his workers with πολλήν παρρησίαν (“much confidence”). Sometimes a member will listen to a tragic story a fellow member has experienced and say, “I couldn’t do that.” Of course, not. Who could? When we rely on our Savior, however, we can do anything (Mt 19:26; Php 4:13). The more his servants come into contact and work with his Word, the more tightly Jesus draws them closer to him, so that they become pillars of strength. Both of these rewards the servants receive from their gracious Lord in whom they trust (ἐν πίστει τῇ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ).

### **Summary of 1 Timothy 3:8–13**

Deacons had a position of privilege and power along with the overseer. Women could fill significant roles in the church, as well. However, all of these servants used their position and gifts to serve the body of Christ. They were not looked down upon for their humble service but highly respected and rewarded by God and fellow believers—all to his glory.

As we began this paper, so we also conclude it—confident in Christ to control our conduct, as we offer quality service as his qualified servants.

*“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service” (1 Tm 1:12).*

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