

God's Glory in God's Word

Titus Part One: Guarding the Good Deposit

The title of our lesson today is not an error – our last lesson in Timothy had the same title – “Guarding the Good Deposit”. But as we will see today, the same title is appropriate for how Paul instructs in the first chapter of his letter to Titus. Today, we will consider qualifications for elders and consider how the motivation for all the qualifications is to guard the word against false teaching and disorder in Christ's church.

Very briefly, returning to 1 Timothy, we have Paul focused on false teachers:

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. (1Ti 1:3-4)

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1Ti 1:18-20)

As we move from chapter 1 to chapter 2, we have this:

First of all, then...

What follows is a set of instructions designed to maintain order in the church and prevent the false teaching that had been a problem – and continued to be a problem. And part of those instructions is chapter 3 – where Paul lays out specific qualifications for overseers and deacons.

And now, Paul has similar instructions to Titus regarding appointing elders in every town. But rather than introducing the subject of false teachers, Paul jumps right in with:

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you-- (Tit 1:5)

But the why becomes evident in verses 9 and following:

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. (Tit 1:9-14)

The context, then, in both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 is the strong need to hold firm to the word, because there are many fierce wolves who must be silenced. False doctrine cannot be allowed to remain in the body.

Having established that, let's now compare qualifications for overseers/elders from both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:

QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS (OR OVERSEERS) SCRIPTURAL COMPARISONS

1 Timothy 3:1-7

Overseer (Episkopos)

Titus 1:5-9

**Elder (Presbuteros) v5 =
Overseer (Episkopos) v7**

Common to both passages

Above Reproach
Husband of one wife
Self-controlled
Hospitable
Not a drunkard
Not a lover of money
Not violent but gentle
Able to Teach

Above reproach
Husband of one wife
Self-controlled
Hospitable
Not a drunkard
Not greedy for gain
Not violent
He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Similar Considerations

Not a recent convert (or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil)
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Not arrogant

Respectable
Well thought of by outsiders (so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil)
Not quarrelsome
Sober-minded

Not quick-tempered
A lover of good
Holy
Upright
Disciplined

Must manage his own household well with all dignity keeping his children submissive (for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?)

Children are believers (ESV) and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination

Let's first consider a few of the less controversial aspects of these requirements:

Above reproach/Well thought of by outsiders, respectable, hospitable: Reputation matters – if you are fighting a battle against false teachers in the church, how you are viewed both within and without the body can tip the scales for you or against you.

Self-controlled, not violent but gentle, not quick-tempered, disciplined, sober-minded, not quarrelsome, not a recent convert, not arrogant: The battles against false teaching will be stressful, controversial, possibly demeaning and discouraging – people who fail to meet these characteristics will be ill-equipped to fight the good fight when confrontation becomes bitter.

A lover of good, upright, holy, not a lover of money, not greedy for gain: The question is here is what drives the man – a hunger and thirst for righteousness or a love of the world. If the latter, he will lose the battle against those whose motivations are selfish – not God-centered – recall why Paul says the false teachers are teaching falsely – for shameful gain (Titus 1:11)

Able to teach, must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught: If one does not understand the word and hold to the word, how could he possibly defend the word?

Now let's touch on qualifications in which there is great debate in conservative and reformed churches:

Submissive/believing children

ESV: If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers¹ **and** not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. (Tit 1:6)

¹ or are faithful

NASB – having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion

KJV – having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly

NIV – a man whose children believe² **and** are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient² or children are trustworthy

CSB – with faithful³ children who cannot be charged with dissipation or rebellion.
³ or believing

Comment 1: The ESV and NIV do a poor job of translating the passage, as they insert a word that does not exist in the Greek – AND. A correct translation of the Greek, rather than splitting “children are believers” from “not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination”, makes clear that “not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination” describes what is meant by “children are believers”.

Comment 2: Context matters. When you continue reading Paul's letter to Titus, the reason for the qualification for not wanting an overseer's children to be open to the charge of insubordination is explained with a “For”:

*For there are many who are **insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers**, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for **shameful gain** what they ought not to teach. (Tit 1:10-11)*

Those who are insubordinate are further clarified to be “empty talkers and deceivers” – i.e. false teachers. In other words, men whose children are being accused of being false teachers are not qualified to be overseers. This also aligns with the command in 1 Timothy 3 regarding submissive children and managing one's household:

*He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children **submissive**, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? (1Ti 3:4-5)*

In summary, here is what I believe the passage means and what it doesn't mean:

What it means: An elder's children cannot rebel against the teaching of sound doctrine or be part of the groups that would spread false doctrine. If one or more of his children fit that category, then he cannot defend the truth – if he can't defend the truth in his own household, how will he defend the truth in the church?

What it doesn't mean:

1. An elder must have children
2. An elder's children must all be saved/converted/baptized/etc.

Husband of one wife

Husband of one wife in the Greek is literally translated "one woman man". A key characteristic that would point to a man's faithfulness to his flock would be his faithfulness to his wife (if married). What the passage does NOT require are the following criteria some use in considering the qualification of an elder. It does not (necessarily) disqualify:

1. Unmarried men
2. Remarried men (first wife died and he is now remarried) - this DOES NOT make him a "two woman man"
3. Divorced men not currently married (although timing and circumstances could disqualify a man)
4. Remarried men (divorced first wife and is now remarried) - What were the circumstances? Here are some general guidelines I would use:
 - a) Divorced as a non-believer and re-married as a believer - Depends on timing which would be subjective - 20 years ago maybe not the same concern as 5 years ago - and 5 years ago could make him a "recent convert" anyway.
 - b) Divorced and remarried as a believer but first wife committed adultery or abandoned him- same concerns may apply.
 - c) Divorced and remarried as a believer but reasons other than sexual immorality - i.e. physical adultery - or abandonment by the wife. This one seems to be the most difficult - it might be difficult to support an elder candidate in this circumstance - but maybe depending on the time lapse and reasons.

Ultimately, then, the focus is less on the minutiae of the exact circumstance and more on the question of will the man be faithful to the church? Similar to the managing his household question, if a man cannot demonstrate faithfulness to his wife, the danger is that he also would not be faithful to the church.

Not a drunkard

The Greek word, paroios is a compound word:

Para - meaning alongside or close to

Oinos - meaning wine

The implication of the word is that wine is driving the man - i.e. he is addicted. Another common theological term that might help you to understand what is meant is the term paraclete - also a compound word:

Para - meaning alongside or close to

Cletos - meaning called

And the idea of that word is one of counselor, encourager - one "called alongside" you to lead you in the right direction:

But the Helper (Paraclete), the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (Joh 14:26)

So, a man of God would be led by a paraclete - not a paroios. Just as Paul appeals to the Ephesians:

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, (Eph 5:18)

In summary, the qualification is one of being led by the Spirit not being led by the spirits. It does not mean “does not drink alcohol”.

Next Week: Titus Part 2 and Philemon