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ORDAINED SERVANT

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Statement Of Purpose

Ordained Servant exists to provide solid materials for the equipping of office-bearers to serve more faithfully. The goal of this journal is to assist the ordained servants of the church to become more fruitful in their particular ministry so that they in turn will be more capable to prepare God's people for works of service. To attain this goal Ordained Servant will include articles (both old and new) of a theoretical and practical nature with the emphasis tending toward practical articles wrestling with perennial and thorny problems encountered by office-bearers.

Editorial Policy

1. Ordained Servant publishes articles inculcating biblical presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of Ordained Servant or of the Church.

2. Ordained Servant occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Ordained Servant does not intend to take a partisan stand, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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Contents: Vol. 3, No. 4

EDITORIAL

In this issue of *Ordained Servant* we consider what has been called, historically, 'the fencing of the Lord's Table.' And we acknowledge at the outset that there is a considerable diversity of opinion—and practice—with regard to this in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. This should not, however, be allowed to obscure the fact that there is also—in spite of that diversity—a large measure of agreement. We are agreed, it seems to me, that it is the *Lord's* table. It is not *our* table. For this reason we have always resisted any view which denies that bona fide Christians who are visiting with us ought to be kept from the Lord's table. At the same time, and without contradiction to the above, we also hold that

> *"all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with* [Christ], *so are they unworthy of the Lord's table; and*

cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto" (WCF 29:8).

For this reason it sometimes becomes necessary for Sessions to suspend *"from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a season"* (WCF 30:4).

It is clear, then, that the differences arise—not as to the *what,* but—as to the *how!* How are we going to best ensure that all who *should* be admitted to the Lord's table *are* received, and that all who should *not* be permitted to come to the Lord's table are *excluded*. It is our hope that the material presented in this issue will contribute to a constructive reconsideration of our OPC traditions and, perhaps, to a greater consensus as to the best way to honor the principles professed among us in our present-day context. The first article (by the editor) seeks to address the current situation in American society. The second and third articles set forth the manner in which two of our Orthodox Presbyterian Churches fence the table. These are not intended to be the last word on this subject. It is our impression that there may be yet other ways of seeking to properly fence the table. We therefore hope to present more articles, in future issues of *Ordained Servant,* in hopes that out of it we may come to as much unity as possible with respect to the 'how.'

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At the recent General Assembly a questionnaire relating to this publication was circulated among the commissioners by a member of the Christian Education Committee. The purpose of this survey was to seek to find out what ruling and teaching elders of our churches think of *Ordained Servant* and the results were not such as to make us feel at all complacent. Of the 75 who responded 42 said this publication is worth the cost. But 8 said it was not, 10 said they were not sure, and 15 did not give any opinion at all—which is certainly no ringing endorsement. Various opinions were offered concerning ways to make the publication more effective, and these will be evaluated by the committee at the fall meeting. But what about you? Perhaps you were not at the General Assembly, and would like to express your opinion, one way or the other, as to the usefulness of *Ordained Servant*. If so please send your comments to Mr. David Winslow, 10130 Stilbite Ave., Fountain Valley, CA 92708. If you want a copy of the 'Reader Survey' questionnaire prepared by Mr. Winslow—and used at the General Assembly—you can write to him, or call him, and ask for a copy to be sent to you. His telephone number is—714-775-7770 (voice) or 714-775-7494 (fax). It would be of great help to our committee if we could hear from more of you by the end of the year. This will enable sub-committee members to consider your input before the spring meeting of our committee.

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In this issue we are pleased to present part one of an exegetical study of 1 Timothy 3 by the Rev. Archibald Alexander Allison. This study, by one of the younger ministers in the OPC, grew out of assignments given to Archibald while he completed studies for the ministry at Bethel Church in Carson, NorthDakota. It was the opinion of Session members there that there was considerable value in this series of studies, and so they were recommended for publication in *Ordained Servant*. It is our hope that they will help to guide sessions—and church members—in the selection of godly elders. We also believe that it will do us all good—all of us who are already teaching or ruling elders—to review these careful studies in order to take a good look at ourselves in the light of them.

"The need for extensive reading must be stressed…Office-bearers should have a good library of theological books, reference material and also subscribe to several Christian magazines to be well-informed. Regular study is a requirement. It is strongly advised that every office-bearer should resolve to read at least 15 mintues a day; he will find that such an effort will make itself felt at the end of the year." — from the *Church Order Commentary* by D. G. Vanderpyl of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand

ON A MORE ADEQUATE FENCING OF THE LORD'S TABLE

by
G. I. Williamson

In my early ministry I relied entirely on the spoken word to fence the Lord's Table. I did this with complete sincerity and earnestness. Yet I found out—I could almost say 'against my will'—that this is inadequate. It was quite a shock to learn that people could listen to all the fine words that I had spoken without comprehending them. Yet I found that this was the case. This was even confirmed, in some instances, by the honest testimony of those who came to see later on that they had acted in ignorance, participating in the sacrament when they ought not to have done so. This led me to do quite a bit of soul—and scripture—searching. In the following paragraphs I will try to state the reasons why I believe this method fails to satisfy the requirements of the Bible—and our Confession of Faith—in our present-day context.

(1) Reliance on the word of warning from the pulpit, and on that alone, fails because it introduces a double standard respecting the sacraments—one standard to qualify for permission to receive the sacrament of *baptism,* and another standard to qualify for permission to receive the sacrament of the *Lord's Supper.* Before a person is allowed to present himself, or his children, in a worship service of the church for baptism, he must satisfy the Session as to his faith and life. He may well be asked to examine himself, of course, but he is also examined by the Session. Before a person is allowed to come to the Lord's Table, however, he is only asked to examine himself (thus the Church administering the sacrament does not have equivalent assurance with respect to the two sacraments).

(2) Reliance on the word of warning from the pulpit, and on that alone, fails—in the second place—because *it assumes competence to judge spiritual matters on the part of those who are complete strangers.* It is our conviction, on the contrary, that Sessions would be closer to the truth (in the present-day U.S., at least) if they assumed the opposite, unless—and until—they have obtained adequate information. To express it another way, our present practice does not do justice to the profound ignorance of many nominal Christians in present-day North American society. It is my firm conviction that there are many people today who define themselves as Christians, without a biblical understanding of what a genuine Christian is.

(3) This method also fails to uphold the proper disciplinary authority of other churches which are striving to be faithful. It is by no means unheard of that a person who has been placed under discipline by a faithful church still thinks that *he* is right and that his *church* is wrong! And, of course, in the abstract that is possible. But it should never be our policy to make it easy for a person to find a way around the censures of his own Church. Yet with the method that we are critizing here it is left up to the individual to judge his own case. Without any due process he can annul the disciplinary sentence. To express it another way, our present practice does not do justice to the sinful propensities of men, or to the seriousness of church censures.

(4) It is my conviction that this purely hortatory method fails because *it unintentionally panders to the rampant individualism in our society.* There is, today, little understanding of—or concern about— corporate responsibility. Many people belong to what the Belgic Confession defines as a false church, and yet they entertain the mistaken idea that this has nothing to do with their own personal faith. In fact, it is not at all uncommon for people in precisely such a situation to have a strongly entrenched notion that no one—including the elders of the church—should presume to tell them what they ought to do, or where they may have gone wrong. The result, then, is that we fail to minister to their number one need because of our faulty method.

(5) To put the matter in a slightly different way this method also fails because *it passes up rich opportunities for a ministry that people desperately need.* Here I give an example to illustrate. A young man was visiting our church a few years ago when the Lord's Supper was to be observed. It was our practice to announce, through the Bulletin, that any visitor who desired to take the Lord's Supper with us should first meet with the elders. When this meeting took place none of us anticipated the problem that emerged. But it soon came out that he thought he belonged to a faithful church when, in actual fact, he did not belong to any church at all. He only took part in family worship

(without any administration of the sacraments). We realized right away that it was our duty to refuse his admission to the table. But it also gave us a fine opportunity to help him understand why!

(6) Tradition is a wonderful thing *if* it is scriptural. But it is very deterimental when it is *not*. Tradition as such is therefore no standard by which to test things, but must itself be tested. Yet it is worthy of note that *the method of fencing the Lord's table being criticized here is a distinct deviation from an earlier practice that was virtually universal among the Reformed Churches.* In earlier days in Scotland—and in such places as Canada, Australia and New Zealand—Presbyterian elders used small metal tokens as a means of fencing the Lord's Table. The tokens were given out to all communicant members in good and regular standing a Sabbath before the celebration of the Sacrament. Only those who presented one of these tokens to the elders at the time of the Sacrament were admitted. In those days admission to the table was viewed as proper only when the elders had sufficient knowledge of the communicants to judge them to be worthy receivers. In the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, however, persons are commonly admitted of whom the Session know nothing. I have never been able to see how this common practice can be reconciled with the clearly stated requirement of our Confession which says:

"…ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with [Christ], *so are they unworthy of the Lord's table; and cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries,* ***or be admitted thereunto****"* [our emphasis].

(7) I do not claim to have found the ideal method of fencing the Lord's table. But I have found a way to overcome at least some of the deficiences mentioned above. I place an announcement in the Sunday bulletin the week before—and on the Sunday of—the Lord's Supper. Visitors are thereby requested to speak with the pastor or an elder to obtain permission to come to the table. If we find that the person concerned belongs to a denomination we know to be sound in doctrine and discipline they are given permission to participate. But in cases where we do not have such a basis of certainty they are asked to meet with the Session. Sometimes this results in such a clear testimony that they are admitted. But sometimes it results in a clear indication that they—to say the least—need further instruction to enable them to understand these things. It is true, of course, that some will find this offensive—particularly those of a strongly individualistic frame of mind, and no concept of corporate responsibility. But even in such cases we have often seen a positive—even if delayed—effect as people are brought to face the seriousness of what it means to partake of the Lord's table.

"RESTRICTED COMMUNION IN ONE OPC CONGREGATION

by

Rev. William Shishko — Franklin Square, New York

"…or be admitted thereunto." So ends the Westminster Confession of Faith's chapter on the Lord's Supper (XXIX). The Westminster Standards do not teach that people admit themselves to the Lord's Supper, but that they are to "be admitted" to it. "All ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with (the Lord), so are they unworthy of the Lord's table, and cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto." (section VIII, emphasis mine). We demonstrate our allegiance to this confessional standard by not admitting covenant children or new Christians to the Lord's Table until they have publicly professed their faith in Christ, c.f. OPC Directory for Worship, V:4. We also apply this standard by the step of church discipline known as "suspension", c.f. OPC Book of Discipline, VI:B:3.

But how do we apply the confessional standard "...be admitted thereunto" with respect to visitors at a service when the Lord's Supper is being observed as part of our worship? A warning is read, c.f. OPC Directory for Worship, IV:C:2, and the elements are distributed indiscriminately by Session members across the pews, etc. The decision is left to the visitors (adults and children) as to whether or not they may partake of the elements. They "admit themselves thereunto." Over

against the old Scottish tradition which took the confessional standard so seriously that "communion tokens" were issued to those who were permitted to come to the Lord's Supper, the hallowed American tradition is that "it's left up to the individual". Which tradition is closer to the pattern of both the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions?

Over a decade ago the Session of the OPC, Franklin Square considered this question, and came to the conclusion that what is commonly called "restricted communion" was decidedly more in line with the standard implied in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Larger Catechism #173. We were struck with the fact that our church visitors were treated with a different standard than our own covenant children, who often knew more about the Gospel than many visitors! We were also convicted that the traditional American practice of "letting people make the decision for themselves" eviscerated any upholding of the discipline of other churches (a situation we would periodically face). From that time we have applied our conviction with this practice:

1. The week prior to the Lord's Supper (which is observed monthly) we announce in the church bulletin that: "The Lord's Supper will be administered next week as part of our morning worship service. The Lord's Supper is for those who have been baptized in the Name of the Triune God, have publicly professed their faith in Christ, and are members of an evangelical church. Those visiting with us who desire to partake of the Lord's Supper should speak with one of the church elders before doing so." A similar announcement is placed in the bulletin on the Sunday of the Lord's Supper.

2. Regular visitors (who have not already done so) speak with one of the elders either during the week prior to the Supper, or on that Sunday morning. We try to have one or more elders available near the entrance of the church so that visitors may consult with an elder. In most cases we know enough about the churches people come from so that individual elders may represent the Session by either giving permission to visitors to partake of the Lord's Supper with us, or asking that they refrain from partaking with us "this time". We see even the denial of permission to partake of the Lord's Supper as an opportunity for ministry.

3. The standard warning is given prior to the administering of the Lord's Supper, along with a statement such as this: "In order to preserve the integrity of our oversight of the Lord's Table, if any of you visiting with us have not spoken with one of the church elders regarding your participation in the Lord's Supper, we would ask that you refrain from partaking today."

4. During the actual distribution of the elements the session members withhold the respective plates from those who have not spoken with of the session members.

I hasten to point out that this system is not "foolproof." We frequently have many visitors, and it is difficult to enforce this as we would like. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that people do not actually come up to the communion table to be served, and also because the plates with the elements must, of necessity, be passed down entire pews from person to person. It would be far better if the elders gave the elements personally to each person "admitted" to the Lord's Supper...but that's hard to do in a congregation of over 200 people seated in pews!!! It's also sometimes difficult to discern whether the congregation the visitor is from is genuinely "evangelical". The term itself is becoming meaningless in our day. But, as with every other area of church discipline, we keep on working to be faithful to the standard of the Word of God. Our view has been to give a judgment of charity and admit persons who profess to be members of churches that are in some way conformed to a biblical pattern of doctrine and life.

What are the responses to this practice? Some take umbrage and (in true New York fashion!) let the elders know it. Others are more or less bothered by it, or are simply unfamiliar with it, and submit (the OPC is different than other evangelical churches in a number of ways, isn't it?). Still others will say that even if they didn't fully understand why we do things this way, they appreciated the care we had to preserve the integrity of the Lord's Table. I'd like to think that's the response that is the most genuinely sensitive to the administration of holy things in an unholy world.

How does your Session grapple with the phrase "...or be admitted thereunto"? Ponder the question and honestly ask yourself if the American evangelical pattern most of us are familiar with really squares with our confessional standard and the historic practice of the Reformed churches. For further reading on the question, see Professor John Murray's thought provoking little article entitled "Restricted Communion" in his COLLECTED WRITINGS (Banner of Truth Trust), volume 2, pps. 381-384.

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Fencing the Lord's Table

by

Pastor Jack J. Peterson

The Biblical Data

The central passage dealing with the Lord's Supper is 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Paul there describes the chaotic conditions in the Corinthian Church as they relate to the Supper. Each dove in and ate without waiting for the others. Some ate large amounts and others got none. Some drank themselves drunk. Chaos! Incredible! Wicked! Sinful!

He tells them and us "…whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord." Partaking "in an unworthy manner."

So what do you do? What does the inspired apostle tell them? Verse 28 and following,

> "a man ought to ***examine himself*** before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment to himself. This is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we ***judged ourselves,*** we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment [emphasis added]."

Paul tells them and us to examine and judge ourselves. Self-examination. He individualizes the responsibility. This is what is done in the warning that accompanies the administration of the Supper.

And he adds that it is the Lord who directly superintends the Supper and administers the needed discipline.

The Supper and the Covenant

He deals with the Supper in terms of the covenant. That covenant comes with the promise of the Lord— "I will be your God, and you will be my people, and I will dwell with you." Specifically here the promise of blessing from the Lord—eating the body of the Savior—brings life; drinking the blood of the covenant brings forgiveness of sins. That covenant, however, along with the promise, always demands our response—faithful obedience and obedient faith. To partake of the Supper demands that we come in faith and come with a cleansed, forgiven conscience. To come in that way brings blessing and fulfilled promise. To come in any other way brings not the blessing but its curse. Specifically, that curse is spelled out in the verses quoted above.

You see, *the Lord keeps his Table pure.* Men may partake in an unworthy manner, but when they do, the curse of the Lord comes on them, and the Table is not profaned, but kept pure by the Lord. It is, after all, his Table.

That is how Paul 'fences' the Table of the Lord in this passage. And how do we do that when we celebrate the Lord's death through the Supper? Just like Paul did, you tell them! You declare the parameters of participation—believers only, but all believers who have been forgiven—you warn them not to partake if they don't qualify—an d you command them in the name of the Lord to examine themselves by his word and Spirit.

The Power of the Proclaimed Word

Oral, verbal, proclamation of the Word. Proclaiming the word in the power and demonstration of the Spirit. Declaring God's word. "The Spirit of God maketh the reading but especially the preaching of the word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation" (Shorter Catechism 89). Attacks on the oral, verbal "fencing" of the Lord's Table are in danger of depreciating the power of the oral, verbal word.

Outside the Fence

I have had two experiences with the more "restrictive" "fencing" of the Table. Several years ago a brother minister of a Reformed church which practiced a very restrictive "protection" of the Table, with which he was uncomfortable, finally explained it this way: "Jack, you could preach and serve the Lord's Supper, but you couldn't partake." The other experience was shared with several others in a committee meeting in which our church and another were discussing coming closer together as churches. To save our church money, we stayed over a Saturday night and worshipped with the other church on the Lord's day. If the Lord's Supper had been served in some of their churches we would not have been welcomed at the Lord's Table without letters from our governing session/presbytery. Biblically, I do not understand that. Talking about coming closer together and yet unable to sit down at the Lord's Table and enjoy the fellowship and communion that it expresses.

Because it is the Lord's Table, all of the children of the Lord belong to the Table. The celebration is "a bond and pledge of

our communion with him and with each other as member of his mystical body" [from the form for administration of the Lord's Supper in our Directory for the Public Worship; of God].

OPC History

The 50th General Assembly [1983] of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church faced this question as it dealt with a complaint. I commend that report to you for your reading to learn what that GA did regarding the fencing of the Table [Minutes, 50th GA (1983), pages 120-130]. Let me quote a few sentences from those Minutes.

> Presbyterian government has always respected the authority of the Session of the particular church to order the worship of the congregation in a manner that takes account of the circumstances of the church [p. 122].
>
> Permitting those who seek admission to the Supper to identify themselves as meeting the qualifications established by the Session cannot be said to be contrary to the teaching of Scripture regarding the keys of the kingdom…The Spiritual hospitality of welcoming love may be imposed upon or abused, and the complainants are properly sensitive to the judgment that may be incurred [p. 123].
>
> But there are other dangers that the complaint does not recognize: dangers of a denominational exclusivism in practice, if not in principle, an exclusivism that may compromise our witness to the Table as the Lord's [p. 123].
>
> …we may risk abuse of the Supper in limiting our requirements for visitors to members of evangelical churches, but we may do so in order not to deny the Supper to those who are joined to Christ and to His church visible [p. 123].
>
> The privilege of offering to visitors the Sacrament of [the] Supper…is rather a proper and requisite expression of the catholicity of the church and the character of church government presented in the New Testament [p. 123-124].
>
> Christians visiting in another area can claim the ministry of those gifted and recognized as church officers, and church officers ought to recognize in turn their obligation to minister to those who come within the practical scope of their ministry and who respect their calling [p. 124].
>
> [Commenting on the charge]…that the holy may be desecrated. Of course desecration cannot properly be said to affect the sacrament as such…The 'great sin against Christ' of the ignorant and ungodly when they partake is to their own condemnation [p. 124].
>
> …what is required is good standing in a true church…sessional procedures may differ as to attestation that is requested or required, but a session may not be censured for determining to honor self-testimony expressed by voluntary participation in the Sacrament in response to clear and sufficient instruction and warning [p. 124].
>
> …does the participation of one who is unworthy invalidate the Sacrament or involve others in sin? [The report quotes Calvin, Institutes IV:1:10, with an "unequivocal" no; p. 125]. In 1 Corinthians 11:29 the scope and character of the Lord's chastening for an unworthy manner of participating in the Supper is said to be condemnation of the guilty individual. There is no indication that the Supper itself is polluted so as to be made invalid, nor that others who partake with the offender are also brought under condemnation. This is the more striking in view of the fact that the unworthy manner that Paul has been speaking of is outward, publicly observable behavior.
>
> Since the Supper is a sacrament ordained by the Lord and since he commands us to observe it till He come, no error or impropriety in its administration can excuse our rejection of the Table unless the nature and meaning of the Sacrament itself is altered [p. 126].
>
> Despite the glaring laxity and abuse of the Lord's Table at Corinth, Paul never counsels withdrawal from the Supper. Rather, he continues to advocate eating and drinking with self-examination (I Cor. 11:28)…[p. 126].

Danger

There is a danger of sacramentalism in dealing with the Lord's Supper. That danger is elevating the sacrament(s) above the Word and especially the *preached* word. When it takes a series of services or even one preparatory service to get ready for the sacrament, then, it seems to me that we have or are in danger of loosing the Biblical perspective. When we are willing to exclude from the Table of communion visitors who are God's children, but don't arrive soon enough on Sunday morning for an interview with the elders, we face the same danger. When we fear the desecration of the Table by unworthy partakers, becoming protectors of the holiness of God when he has told us that he would take care of that, things are getting out of perspective.

The oral, verbal fencing of the Table of the Lord does not rise, at least on this writer's view, from "a strongly individualistic frame of mind, and no concept of corporate responsibility," but rather from the Lord himself as he gives the church instruction about his Supper. Is is the LORD'S Supper.

Rev. Jack J. Peterson is Pastor of Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church of San Antonio, Texas. He is also a member of the OPC Committee on Christian Education.

BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS

by

Rev. Archibald Alexander Allison

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:2 - "blameless"

Translation:

The overseer then must be blameless, ...

Structure:

The apostle Paul begins this list of qualifications for the office of overseer with a general requirement, followed by specific areas in which the overseer must be blameless.

Comment:

In Scripture the word overseer refers to both ruling and teaching elders. In other words, the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3.2-7 apply to both ministers of the Word as well as the other elders who shepherd the flock under their care. The word "must" means that these qualifications are essential. They are not merely helpful guidelines. All of these qualifications are mandatory. They are requirements which God has laid down for the office of elder in his church. No man may be an elder in the church of God unless he meets all of these qualifications. We confess that Christ is king of the church. That means that the rules for the church which Christ sets down in his Word must be followed. It is the church's God-given duty to keep all unworthy men out of the office of ruling and teaching elder. Should a man already in office show himself unqualified for the office he holds, the church must be diligent to remove him from that office. In so doing the church will uphold the honor of Christ and insure that the church is edified unto greater peace, purity, and unity.

By "blameless" the Scripture does not mean that a man must be sinless in order to be an overseer in the church of God. To be blameless is to be irreproachable. No one should be able to lay a charge against an overseer and make it stick. To be blameless does not mean that one is able to evade accusation or conviction. Rather, a man is blameless or above reproach when his words and conduct conform to the holy commandments of God in Scripture so that he cannot justly be accused or convicted of any sin.

The Scripture says that Job was "blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1.1). The people of God should be able to say that about every elder in the church. The overseer's reputation should be above reproach. No one should be able to lay hold of him or assail him or reproach him because of his sins, whether in speech, conduct, or doctrine. Every Christian sins until the day he lays down this body of sin at death. Daily sins that are common to all men do not bring reproach and blame upon a person from others because they too are guilty of the same sins. An overseer must have and maintain a good name. There should be no question as to his integrity or upright character.

John Calvin explains it this way: An elder "ought not to be marked by any disgrace that would detract from his authority. There will certainly not be found a man who is free from every fault, but it is one thing to be burdened with ordinary faults that do not hurt a man's reputation, because the most excellent men share them, but quite another to have a name that is held in infamy and besmirched by some scandalous disgrace. Thus, in order that the bishops may not lack authority, he gives charge that those who are chosen should be of good and honorable reputation, and free of any extraordinary fault. Also, he is not merely directing Timothy as to the sort of men he should choose but he is reminding all who aspire to the office that they should carefully examine their own life" (Commentary on 1 Timothy 3.2).

Conclusions:

1. Every minister of the Word and every ruling elder must be a man of mature character and integrity before God and men so that he is irreproachable.

2. Only a man of such maturity, character, and integrity can be a godly example to those under his care in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity (see 1 Timothy 5.12).

3. Any man who has a stain upon his character or does not live a consistent, godly life does not meet this qualification and should not be an elder.

4. A man in the office of elder whose character and reputation are not above reproach, or whose authority is undermined by a recurring pattern of sinful behavior in

his life, ought to be removed from office.

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3.2 : "husband of one wife"

Translation:

The overseer then must be blameless, husband of one wife (or: man of one woman), ...

Structure:

The first qualification Paul sets forth is that the overseer must be blameless or above reproach. The subsequent qualifications address specific areas in which the overseer must be above reproach. "Husband of one wife" is the first specific area the apostle addresses.

Comment:

Peter begins his first letter identifying himself as "Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ." Though he is an apostle, he also calls himself a fellow elder in I Peter 5.1: "Now the presbyters among you, I, who am fellow presbyter and witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker of the glory that will be revealed, exhort: shepherd the flock of God among you, being overseers...." From these two passages it is clear that the apostles were also elders (called both presbyters and overseers who were to oversee and shepherd the flock of God). We know from I Cor. 7.8-9 that the apostle Paul who wrote both 1 Timothy and Titus was unmarried. Yet he was "apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Saviour and the Lord Jesus Christ..." (I Tim. 1.1). As an apostle Paul was also an elder, an overseer among the flock of God. He is writing this letter to Timothy, his "true son in the faith," in order that Timothy may know how he ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (I Tim. 3.15). Paul often gives himself as an example of what Timothy ought to be doing as an overseer. This being the context, one has to twist the Scripture to derive from the stipulation "husband of one wife" that an elder must be a married man.

This requirement means that if a man is married or has been married, he must not have two wives in God's sight. This is an express prohibition of polygamy for an overseer at a time when many had more than one wife (see Chrysostom and Calvin on this). The New Testament confirms God's command from the time of creation that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and the two shall become one flesh (Gen. 2.24; Mt. 19.5; Eph. 5.31). Those who divorce their wives and/or marry another wife so that before God they have more than one wife at the same time, contrary to the precepts of God's law, may not be office bearers in the church which is the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. The point here is that the elder must be blameless before the law of God concerning marriage (and divorce). If a man can justly (keeping the precepts of Scripture) put away his wife with the approval of God and/or remarry, then he is still qualified to bear the office of overseer.

Paul is not barring from office ipso facto anyone who is remarried (cf. I Tim. 5:14). 4.3; Rom. 7.2-3; I Cor. 7.8-9). If a man's wife dies and he marries another, he is still qualified to be an elder in the flock of God. Whether married or unmarried the elder must be an example to others of faithfulness and chastity in obedience to the seventh commandment. A married elder must be faithful to his one wife as long as she lives. Sexual immorality and marital infidelity can not be tolerated among office bearers in the church. If there are two or three witnesses that a man has committed such sins, he may not hold office in the church.

Paul assumes that the elder will normally be married. That is generally the case both with office bearers and with all men, though to some it is given to be eunuchs 1) voluntarily for the sake of the kingdom of God, 2) by birth, or 3) by act of men (Mt. 19.12).

Conclusions:

1. It is important to know what the law of God forbids and allows concerning divorce and remarriage. In some cases that will be decisive as to whether a man who aspires to the office of teaching or ruling elder has only one wife.

2. It is normal for man to marry and to gain experience governing his household so that he may know how to take care of the church of God (I Tim. 3.4,5).

3. Men who are unchaste, who are unfaithful, who divorce unlawfully, who marry unlawfully, or who do not shepherd their wives as they ought, should not become or remain an overseer.

4. Women are excluded from the office of overseer.

5. It is not normal nor is it commanded that overseers remained unmarried. "Marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled, but whore-mongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13.4). Marriage is holy and ordained by God. The office bearers of the church ought to live in the married estate in holiness and obedience to God as an example to all the flock. Their experience as the head of their home will be useful in their oversight over congregation.

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:2 : "temperate"

Translation:

The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, ...

Structure:

Temperate is the first in a series of three character traits.

Comment:

The Greek word can mean: sober, not intoxicated, clear-headed, self-controlled, moderate, frugal, continent, sober-minded, prudent, reasonable. The King James Version translates this Greek word as "vigilant." There are good reasons to believe that by this word Paul is not speaking of an elder's restraint in using intoxicating drink, but rather of how an elder thinks and reacts in general.

First, in the next verse (1 Tim. 3:3) Paul specifically states that an elder must not be given to wine. This same qualification regarding the use of wine is in Titus 1:7 also. Since Paul later deals specifically with the use of wine, it would seem that "temperate" does not focus on the same point.

Second, "temperate" is at the beginning of a list of qualities that have to do with the general character of an elder's behavior, thinking, and attitudes. Temperate is followed by sober-minded. The translators of the New King James Version used these two English words interchangeably in the New Testament. For example, in Titus 2:2 we read: "that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience." The word translated as "sober" is the word we are discussing (temperate). The word translated as "temperate" in Titus 2:2 is the same word as "sober-minded" in 1 Timothy 3:2. Notice that the translation of these words has been interchanged in Titus from what we have in 1 Timothy 3:2. If the words "temperate" and "sober" were two totally different ideas, clearly distinguished from one another, then it would be erroneous to interchange the translation. These two (Greek) words are closely related and have almost the same meaning in the New Testament.

In Titus 2:2 and Titus 2:6-7 Paul uses the word "temperate" and the word "sober-minded" (same word as "sober") in the context of a man's general character. The context of these passages show that by these words Paul is not talking about a man's restraint in drinking wine.

watchful in all things..." (2 Tim. 4:3-5). The qualification we are discussing means to be watchful and on guard against turning aside to nice stories and fables in place of the truth of the Gospel of Christ.

Paul uses this same verb in 1 Thessalonians 5:6, "Therefore let us not sleep, as others, but let us watch and be sober or be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation." The qualification we are discussing means to be on guard, to be diligent in faith, love, and hope, to pay attention to the things of God in order that we might persevere until the Day of the Lord (cf. Hebrews 2:1; 6:11,12). This is why the King James Version uses the translation "vigilant" instead of "temperate" in 1 Timothy 3:2.

The apostle Peter uses this same verb several times in his first letter. In 1:13-14 he writes: "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance." The idea in this verse is that we must pay attention, be serious, and think clearly. We must be able to give diligent heed to the truth of God's Word and consequently obey with determination. In 4:7 we read: "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful unto prayer." The command to be watchful is parallel with the command to be serious. The end of all things is about to come. Be alert! Be wide awake! A drunkard and an indifferent man pay little attention to what is going on. Their senses and faculties are neither sharp nor keen. This is the opposite of what it means to be vigilant or clear-headed or sober. When warning the saints of the Devil who walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, Peter says: "Be sober, be vigilant..." (1 Peter 5:8).

Conclusions:

1. The sense of the original word is better conveyed by the translation "vigilant" which is found in the King James Version.

2. An elder must be on guard and alert just as a shepherd must always be watching for wolves and anything else that might endanger his flock. An elder must have a sound, incisive mind to discern the times, truth from error, the needs of the sheep, etc. He must watch carefully over his own life and heart lest there arise any root of bitterness; unbelief; sinful patterns of life, speech, or thought; neglect of the things of God; or

disobedience to the commands of Scripture. His senses must not be dull, but exercised by reason of use (Hebrews 5:14). This is required of deacons' wives (1 Timothy 3:11), older men (Titus 2:2), and all God's people (1 Peter 5:8).

3. This character trait is central to the work of the office of elder, for Paul charged the elders from Ephesus: "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.... For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:28-31).

4. An elder who is not vigilant over his own life, both in private and in public, will not be able to be watchful over and care for the people of God. His senses and discernment will be dulled. He will be as one who is asleep or drunk. In the first place, an elder must constantly be vigilant in his own life lest he fall into sin. He must keep the law of God ever before his eyes. Second, an elder must constantly be vigilant in caring for the flock.

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:2 : "sober-minded"

Translation:

The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, prudent, ...

Structure:

This qualification is very closely related to the previous one, vigilant. It is the second in a series of three character traits.

Comment:

The Greek word can mean: prudent, thoughtful, self-controlled. The word refers to wisdom, good sense, a sound mind, good judgment. Whereas the previous qualification is that an elder must have a clear head and a sound mind in order to be alert in watching himself and the flock, this qualification is that an elder must have a sound mind and wisdom in order to exercise good judgment. When Festus charged the apostle Paul with being beside himself because of too much learning, Paul replied: "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and sound judgment" (Acts 26:25). The word translated "sound judgment" is related to the word we are discussing. Paul was in full control of his mind and was using his mind to speak the truth. Paul's testimony before Agrippa and Festus was based on sound thinking and good judgment.

Conclusions:

1. An elder must be guided by wisdom in his work. He must have good judgment in dealing with people and their problems. He must know right from wrong and be able to give good advice in the situations people encounter.

2. An elder must be characterized by self-control. He must be reasonable, sympathetic, and yet straightforward and serious.

3. One of the tasks of an elder is to judge in disputes. This requires wisdom and seriousness. It also requires that the judge be in control of himself so that anger or personal prejudice does not cloud his thinking and rob him of discernment and good judgment.

4. A person who is fickle, unstable, without wisdom and sound judgment, or unable to deal with issues does not meet this qualification.

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:2 : "of good behavior"

Translation:

The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, prudent, respectable, ...

Structure:

This qualification for the office of overseer is the third in a series of three character traits that God requires an overseer to have.

Comment:

The New King James Version (just like the King James Version) does not translate the original Greek word literally when it says: "of good behavior." In the first place, the original word is in the accusative case, not in the genitive; nor is it the object of a preposition. Secondly, the Greek word means respectable or honorable. The word may be used in reference to men as well as to impersonal things connected with men. We find this word used in an honorary inscription for a man. The apostle Paul uses it to describe the kind of clothes that a woman should wear. 1 Timothy 2:9 says that women should adorn themselves with respectable cloth-

ing; one could also translate it by "proper clothing" or "modest clothing." This is the only other time that this adjective is used in the New Testament.

This adjective is related to a verb which can mean to put in order, such as to trim one's lamp (cf. Mt. 25:7). However, the usual meaning of the verb is to adorn or decorate.

Conclusions:

1. The sense of the original word is better conveyed by the translation "respectable" (which is the translation found in the New American Standard Version and the New International Version).

2. Respectable and honorable are broader in meaning than "of good behavior," but a man whose behavior is bad can not be respectable or honorable.

3. A respectable man deserves being treated with deference, esteem, high regard, or honor because of his qualities and his honest, decent character.

4. This qualification means that a bishop must have his life in order. He must adorn his character so that it shines with truth, honesty, justice, purity, loveliness, and virtue. A respectable man is a model of godliness because he keeps God's commandments; he is a man who has wisdom from above and understanding from the precepts of Scripture like our Lord Jesus did; he is a man who has humility, love, compassion, and self-control like our Lord Jesus Christ. Proverbs has much to say about the respectable or honorable man:

3:16 — has wisdom and understanding (cf. 8:18)

5:9 — avoids the strange woman

15:33 — is humble (cf. 18:12, 22:4, 29:23)

20:3 — ceases from strife

☐21:21 — follows after righteousness and mercy

22:4 — fears Yahweh

26:1 — not a fool (cf. 26:8)

Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:15-26 that the man who departs from iniquity and purges himself from every evil thing will be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and fit for the master's use, prepared unto every good work.This is a sample of what Scripture teaches about the respectable or honorable man.

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:2 : "hospitable"

Translation:

The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, prudent, respectable, hospitable.....

Structure:

This is the first of two abilities or gifts that God requires an overseer in the church to have.

Comment:

The Greek word for hospitable is a compound word. The first part of the word means "a friend," or "one who loves;" the second part of the word means "a host." Although the second part of the word can also mean "a stranger," I think the meaning "host" is used in this compound word meaning "hospitality." A bishop must be "one who loves to be a host." Paul commended Gaius in Romans 16:23 for hosting him and the whole church. This quality is required of all God's people. Peter writes: "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.' Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:8-10). In Romans 12:13 the apostle exhorts God's people to pursue hospitality. The writer to the Hebrews also commands Christians not to forget hospitality, for thereby some have received angels without knowing it (Heb. 13:2).

Being a host does not necessarily involve providing a meal for guests. Gaius opened his place to the apostle Paul and the church, presumably for meetings. In many of the examples of hospitality in the Bible, the host offered his guests a place to rest, food, and provision for their animals. The passage in I Peter 4 teaches that hospitality is one way we are to express our love for the people of God. It is something we are to do cheerfully and willingly. It is a means through which we can use our gifts to minister to others, whatever they may be, to others in the body of Christ. In the broadest sense, hospitality is sharing what God has given us with other Christians for their edification and mutual encouragement. It is friendly, generous reception and treatment of guests or strangers.

Conclusions:

1. Every Christian must be hospitable, but especially an overseer in the church. An overseer is to be an example to the people of God in this area and should teach the people under his care to be hospitable.

2. Christ has given elders to the church for the edification and equipping of the people of God. Elders should be willing and glad to share their gifts with others, especially those under their care. That could mean providing food or lodging, using one's place for

meeting, or even making one's self available for visitors or those in need of counsel.

3. All the people of God, and especially the elders, are not to be cold toward strangers and visitors, but warm, gracious, friendly, and kind, endeavoring to meet their needs and in this way show the love and compassion which our Lord Jesus showed when he was on earth, and which he still daily shows in his faithful, gracious provision for all our needs and the needs of all his creatures (cf. Ps. 104).

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:2 : "able to teach"

Translation:

The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, prudent, respectable, hospitable, skilful in teaching.....

Structure:

This is a second gift or ability that an overseer in the church must have.

Comment:

This qualification is an important gift or ability that God requires an overseer in the church to have.

1. Who Is An Overseer?

The question arises: does this qualification refer only to a minister of the Word or also to all the elders who oversee the flock. I stated earlier that the word "overseer" refers to both ministers of the Word and ruling elders. This becomes evident when we examine the text of Scripture itself.

It is clear that an overseer (episkopoV = overseer or bishop) must be able to teach. In Titus 1:5 Paul writes to Titus: "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders (presbuterouV = presbyters) in every city as I commanded you-if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For an overseer (episkopoV = overseer or bishop) must be blameless, ..." Paul commanded Titus to appoint presbyters in every city. A presbyter is an elder. The word is used sixty-two times in the New Testament with the meaning of "elder." The flow of the text in Titus just quoted is: If anyone is blameless..., Titus may appoint him to be a presbyter; for (i.e., because) the overseer must be blameless.... Paul refers to the same people, using the word "presbyter" in verse 5 and "overseer" in verse 7. One could say that Paul commanded Titus to appoint ministers of the Word (because they too are elders) in every city, but the evidence in the whole of the New Testament is against this understanding.

First, the pattern shown in the New Testament is several elders in a particular congregation to shepherd the flock. Paul says that some of those elders labor in the Word and in teaching (i.e., in instructing, the act of teaching), while others only rule (1 Tim. 5:17). Titus appointed more than one elder in each city. Certainly, when Paul commanded Titus to set in order the things that are lacking, he at least wanted Titus to appoint elders to rule and shepherd the flock, just as the Ephesian church had elders to watch over the flock (see Acts 20). That means that a presbyter (elder) is an overseer (episkopos) and that the qualifications in Titus 1:5-9 apply to all elders.

Second, the New Testament uses the word elder (presbuteros) for the Old Testament office of elder among the people of Israel. You see this often in the Gospels and Acts. The Old Testament office of elder was closer in function to the ruling elder than to the minister of the Word, the elder who rules plus labors in the Word and in the work of teaching. This is evidence that a presbyter is an elder who shepherds the flock and rules in the congregation.

Third, in the book of Acts Paul and Barnabas appointed presbyters in every church at the end of their first missionary journey (14:23). In Acts 15 Paul and Barnabas and certain others went up to Jerusalem to the apostles and presbyters (v. 2). They were received by the church and the apostles and the presbyters (v. 4). The apostles and presbyters came together to consider the matter brought to them (v. 6). The apostles and presbyters, with the whole church, decided to send chosen men back to Antioch (v. 22). The apostles, presbyters, and brothers wrote a letter to the Gentile brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (v. 23). The apostles and presbyters made the decision in Jerusalem (16:4). At the end of the last missionary journey as Paul travelled back to Jerusalem, he stopped in Miletus and sent to Ephesus and called for the presbyters of the church. When they had come to him, Paul charged them to take heed to themselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (episkopous) to shepherd the church of God. Paul exhorted the overseers to watch carefully because savage wolves will come into the flock (20:17-38). When Paul had come to Jerusalem, he reported in detail to all the presbyters in Jerusalem those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. We see in the book of Acts that the presbyters are the same people as the overseers; that there are many presbyters/overseers in one congregation; that the presbyters/

overseers are commanded to watch over the congregation and to shepherd the church (rule and guide them) so that the people of God are preserved from wolves and errors.

Fourth, James mentions the presbyters of the church as serving the people of God by visiting the sick, praying over them, and anointing them with oil. We would classify this more as part of shepherding and ruling over the sheep, more than as laboring in the Word and in the work of teaching (which is the special work of the minister of the Word).

Fifth, the apostle Peter, who was a fellow-presbyter, exhorted the presbyters among those to whom he wrote his first epistle to shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint, but willingly,...eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (5:1-4). Peter does not exhort the presbyters to shepherd the sheep by publicly preaching and teaching the word, but by being examples to the flock and by not ruling over them as lords. The specific work of public preaching and teaching is only a part of shepherding the sheep. This shows that by shepherding and overseeing Peter primarily has in mind the work of ruling and caring for the sheep. That work does not exclude teaching or preaching, but that is certainly not Peter's focus.

Sixth, the apostle Peter uses the terms Shepherd and Overseer for God: "For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25). We were like sheep going astray, but now we have returned and are like sheep who live under the rule, guidance, and care of God, who is the great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. 13:20). This shows that to shepherd and oversee is to care for, rule over, and guide the people of God, more so than public preaching and teaching. Many who preach and teach publicly do not care for the people of God. They do not take the time, effort, and patience to guide and rule over them. That is one reason why the church in America has fallen into the weak condition that it is in today. There have been plenty of preachers and teachers, but few who shepherded and watched over the people of God as Scripture requires the presbyters/overseers to do.

Seventh, when Paul writes to the church at Philippi, he addresses them as follows: "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons." It would be strange indeed, if Paul had specifically mentioned the believers, the ministers of the word and the deacons, but ignored the presbyters/overseers in the congregation, for the elders are an essential and important part of the church. They are a part of those to whom God has given gifts and his authority to lead, shepherd, teach, correct, and preserve his people in the way of truth. It is more likely that Paul refers to all the elders in the church at Philippi with the one plural word "overseers"-both the teaching and the ruling elders.

Lastly, if the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are not the qualifications for the office of elder in the church, then what are the qualifications for this office? Why would Scripture give the qualifications for deacons and ministers (who are also elders in the church), but not give any qualifications for the office of elder, especially since the office of elder is one of the most important special offices for the well-being of the church?

We should also note that much of the work of the ruling elders and the minister of the Word is the same. The New Testament makes one important distinction between the work of the ruling elders and the work of the minister. The special task of the minister of the Word is to labor in the Word and in the work of teaching. Along with that the minister has the task of administering the sacraments. Otherwise, all the presbyters/overseers (ministers and ruling elders) of a church are lumped together with the same names and the same duties. They both have the duties of shepherding and ruling the church.

Our conclusion is that the New Testament uses both the words "presbyter" and "overseer" to refer to all the elders, both those who rule and those who rule plus labor in the Word and in the work of teaching. It follows, then, that the inspired apostle, in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, sets forth the qualifications of an overseer, which refers to both ministers of the Word and ruling elders.

The Difference Between Teaching and Preaching

To be skilful in teaching is not necessarily the same as being skilful in preaching. In the New Testament teaching is a much broader word than preaching. Preaching is the public proclamation of the Word of God. All preaching should teach the congregation. But teaching includes many things that are not preaching. Let me give some examples: Jesus says that his Father taught him the things he spoke to the Pharisees (John 8:28). The man born blind taught the Pharisees about Jesus Christ (John 9:34). Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would teach us all things (John 14:26). Paul says that he taught the Ephesian elders from house to house (Acts 20:20). In 1 Cor. 11:14 Paul says: "Does not even nature itself teach that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?" In Eph. 4:20,21 Paul writes: "But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus...." Paul commands all believers to teach one another with spiritual psalms, spiritual hymns, and spiri-

tual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord (Col. 3:16). Paul tells the Thessalonians to stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle (2 Thess. 2:15). Teaching someone by writing a letter is not preaching. When Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:12 "And I do not permit a woman to teach," he is not referring exclusively to preaching. When Hebrews says: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God," it does not mean that all believers should be preachers. Further, parents teach their children, and teachers teach their students, none of which is preaching.

I am not saying that Paul means all these things when he says that an overseer must be skilful in teaching. My point is simply that teaching is not equivalent to preaching. An overseer may be skilful in teaching and not even be able to preach. Since the Great Reformation, reformed churches have insisted that the preacher of God's Word should be able to read the original languages in which the Bible was written in order that he might rightly divide the word of truth. Ruling elders do not need to meet this standard because they are not ordained to preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments.

3. The Meaning Of This Requirement

The requirement of Scripture for every elder is not that he be able to preach, but that he be skilful in teaching. The Greek word for "skilful in teaching" is used twice in the New Testament. The other place is 2 Tim. 2:24, also written by Paul. There Paul commands Timothy to avoid foolish and ignorant disputes. Instead of quarrelling, the servant of the Lord must be gentle to all, skilful in teaching, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they might know the truth and come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil. This passage is not about preaching the Word of God, but about patiently and humbly correcting those who oppose sound doctrine by teaching them the truth. Timothy is to do this, rather than embroiling himself in foolish and ignorant arguments with people.

We see the same thing in the qualifications for presbyter/overseer given in Titus 1:5-16. An elder must hold fast the faithful word according to the teaching he received, in order that he may be able both to convict and exhort by sound (lit.: healthy) instruction those who speak against the truth. "For," continues Paul, "there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain" (1:10-11). Paul says: "Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:13).

We know that those who are going astray and have come to the point of speaking against the truth and subverting whole households, need more than just the public preaching and teaching of God's Word. That is still important for them to hear, but if that was all that they needed, there would be no need for the elders to visit the people in their homes, just as a shepherd goes after a straying sheep (see Psalm 199:176 and Luke 15:3-10). When a person opposes the truth as described here, he urgently needs the elders to come to his house with sound doctrine and convict and exhort him to turn from his error. The elders may need to rebuke him sharply. This is the work of watching over the flock and shepherding them so that they remain in the truth and are not destroyed by wolves or false teaching. The elders must seek out those who stray and seek to restore them by exhorting them and teaching them the truth. The elders must also teach and exhort the faithful sheep so that they do not go astray.

In order to do this, an elder needs to know well what Scripture says about doctrine and life. He needs to be able to discern error in doctrine or life. He needs to be able to show a man his error from Scripture and teach him the truth in a simple way. That does not require the gifts necessary for preaching, or even public teaching, yet that is the essence of the work of a shepherd overseeing the church of God which he purchased with his own blood. That is the most essential part of ruling in the church. The apostle Peter is very clear that the elder's rule is not like that of the factory boss. Rather, it is the rule of a shepherd who sets a good example both in doctrine and life and who patiently and gently cares for the individual needs of the sheep.

Although Acts 20 does not specifically refer to teaching, the work which Paul lays out for the Ephesian elders fits precisely with what I have described as the principal ways in which ruling elders are to use their skill in teaching. In Acts 20.17-38 Paul does not charge the elders to preach the Word, but to take heed to themselves and to all the flock, to shepherd the church of God, and to watch and warn the people (including themselves) lest savage wolves rise up, speak perverse things, and draw away disciples after themselves.

To this we may add John Calvin's comment on "apt to teach": "Those who are charged with governing the people should be qualified to teach." Rather than gifts for public speaking, Paul is "commending wisdom in knowing how to apply God's Word to the

profit of His people." In the words of Lawrence R. Eyres, "an elder must be able to deal with people on a one-to-one basis, applying the Word to the needs of the individual."[1]

Conclusions:

1. Presbyter and overseer are synonyms for a person whom we more commonly call an elder.

2. The qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 apply to all elders in the church, both those who rule and those who rule plus labor in the word and in the work of teaching.

3. There is a difference between teaching and preaching. To be skilful in teaching does not mean that one is also skilful in preaching. "Apt to preach" is not a qualification given in 1 Tim. 3 for all elders.

4. This in no way denies that God has gifted, called, and set apart some men to preach his word. For example, Paul commanded Timothy to preach the word (2 Tim. 4:2). Jesus and the apostles also preached the word of God. The truth is that some elders rule and also labor in the word and in the work of teaching (1 Tim. 5:17). Such men are ministers of the Word or teaching elders.

5. God has not called all elders to preach, or even to teach the Word publicly. He has gifted some for preaching and some for public teaching, and these he calls to that work. The congregation must call men to work according to the gifts that God has given them.

6. God calls all elders to rule, to shepherd, to oversee, to watch out for, to care for the church. The elder's rule (and all that goes with it) in its very nature involves teaching. That is why Scripture requires that an elder must be "skilful in teaching." To rule over the people of God is not merely to set the times of meeting, but, more importantly, to encourage and exhort God's people to believe and live according to the Bible and to warn and convict those who stray of their error. That requires skill in teaching the people privately with patience and gentleness. The elders must see to it that the congregation not only hears the public preaching and teaching of God's Word, but also lives in obedience to God's Word. That requires skill in teaching. An elder must be able to discern false teachings, whether by his own minister or by others, both inside and outside the church. He must be able to stop them with the truth of God's Word. He must be able to teach the people how their ideas contradict Scripture. An elder should be able give biblical counsel to the people of God in matters of faith and life. He should be able to make decisions at meetings and judge matters according to biblical principles.

[1] Lawrence R. Eyres, *The Elders of the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1975) p. 34.

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:3 : "not given to wine"

Translation:

2) The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, prudent, respectable, hospitable, skilful in teaching,

3) not given to wine....

Structure:

Verse 3 contains primarily things that must not characterize an overseer. The first of these negatives is "not given to wine."

Comment:

An elder must not be given to wine. A man who is given to wine drinks too much wine; in the words of Proverbs 23:29, he tarries long at the wine. That includes a man who has only occasional bouts of excessive drinking, as well as the man who regularly drinks too much. Wine takes an inordinate place in his life, becoming more important to him than it ought to be. In that sense, he is enslaved to drinking. Such a person is not qualified to be an elder in the church. The Scripture says that a man who tarries long at the wine, who goes in search of mixed wine, has woe, sorrow, contentions, complaints, wounds without cause, and redness of eyes. He who longs for wine and is captivated by it will see strange things and will utter perverse things. He will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea or on top of a ship's mast, having lost his senses and resting only to awake for another drink (Proverbs 23:29-35).

Paul does not say in 1 Timothy 3.3 that an elder must not drink wine. Those who require elders to abstain from drinking any wine on the basis of this verse, have twisted this qualification to say something that it does not say. We know from the rest of Scripture that just as God causes the grass to grow for the cattle and vegetation for man to eat, so God gives wine to man. "Wine makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread strengthens man's heart" (Psalm 104:14-15). Jesus used wine as one of the elements of the Lord's Supper, and we are to continue using wine in the Lord's Supper until Jesus returns. A little later in 1 Timothy, Paul tells Timothy: *"No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities"* (5:23). The Scripture ex-

presses the covenant blessing of God in this way: *"Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the first fruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine"* (Proverbs 3:9-10). Wine is one of God's good gifts and is to be used to the glory of God.

In this verse, the Lord of the church disqualifies from the office of elder anyone who is given to wine. That includes all who drink excessively, including the drunkard. Scripture condemns drunkenness, saying that no drunkard will inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9,10).

In general, an elder must not let wine govern him, but must be able to use wine wisely and in moderation unto the glory of God. Although wine is specifically mentioned by the text, I think the principle here applies to any food or drink which has mastery over a man, especially those things which impair a man's judgment and his ability to control his speech and actions.

Because wine can impair a man's judgment and ability to control his speech and actions, God commanded Aaron and his sons: "Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die" (Lev. 10:8-9). Scripture states the reason in these words: in order that you (Aaron and his sons) might "distinguish between holy and unholy, and between clean and unclean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses" (Lev. 10:10-11). Similarly, civil magistrates, just like elders in the church, are also not to be given to wine: "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted" (Proverbs 31:4,5). Compare also Isaiah 5:20-25; 28:7; and Ezekiel 44:21.

Conclusions:

1. Wine is a good thing given by God, but must be used rightly to the glory of God.

2. An overseer must not be given to wine. He must not use wine unwisely in any way, nor be enslaved by it or any other food or drink that impairs his judgment. Addiction to wine disqualifies a man from office. A man who becomes drunk also fails to meet this qualification for office.

3. In the words of John Calvin, "Excessive drinking is not only unseemly in a pastor, but usually results in many things still worse, such as quarrels, foolish attitudes, unchastity, and others there is no need to mention" (Comm. on 1 Tim. 3:3). Compare also Paul's exhortation to all believers in Ephesians 5:18. No believer, but especially no elder (for he is to be an example to all the flock), should be drunk with wine. Rather, they should be filled with the Holy Spirit.

4. From this qualification we can infer that an overseer, just like civil magistrates (especially judges), should neither be "given to," or under the control of any food or drink or drug which has the same kind of effect as wine on a man's speech, conduct, and judgment.

5. An elder must show his ability to rule himself in the way he uses God's gift of wine. He must be able to use wine wisely and in moderation unto the glory of God; he must never "give himself to wine."

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:3 : "not violent"

Translation:

2) The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, prudent, respectable, hospitable, skilful in teaching,

3) not given to wine, not a violent man (striker)....

Structure:

This is the second of five negative requirements in verse 3.

Comment:

The Greek word which I have translated "a violent man" occurs only twice in the New Testament, both times as a requirement for the office of overseer (1 Tim. 3:3 and Titus 1:7). The Greek word is a noun which refers to a person who strikes or smites another person. This is the reason why the King James Version translates this word "striker." The word used here is related to another Greek noun which means 1) "blow, stroke," or 2) "wound, bruise" as the result of a blow (see Acts 16:23, 33; Luke 10:30).

This is clearly referring to men who are wont to strike others out of anger with their hand or foot, or even with some instrument in their hand. Such men are not qualified to hold the office of overseer. Neither anger nor violence should characterize an overseer. He must not strike his family, nor people outside the family. The only exceptions are striking that is specifically permitted by God in Scripture (e.g., punishment by the civil magistrate - Exodus 21:23-25; discipline by parents - Proverbs 23:13-14).

God forbids all men (not just overseers) to strike one another when there is an argument or fight (Exodus 21:18-19). Children are forbidden to strike their parents (Exodus 21:15). There is even a penalty when a man strikes the eye or tooth of his servant or maid and destroys it (Exodus 21:26-27). Jesus teaches us in Matthew that God abhors the root of violence and striking one's fellow man, namely, anger (Matthew 5:21-26).

Conclusions:

1. An overseer must have such control over his mind and body so that he does not hit other people and is not swift to anger.

2. This means that an overseer must be gentle, peaceable, and able to keep his body under control so that no one can say that he is a striker or a violent man. A man who gets into violent arguments or fist fights is not qualified to be an overseer.

3. A man who physically abuses his wife, his children, or anyone else, is disqualified from the office of elder.

4. A man who is not able to control his anger, who has outbursts of anger, or who lashes people with his tongue ought not to bear the office of overseer, since uncontrolled anger is bound to erupt in violence.

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:3: "not greedy for money"

Translation:

2) The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, prudent, respectable, hospitable, skilful in teaching,

3) not given to wine, not a violent man (striker), not fond of shameful gain.....

Structure:

This is the third of five negative requirements in verse 3.

Comment:

Not all Greek manuscripts of 1 Timothy contain this word in 3:3, but the "Byzantine" manuscripts (the minuscules) which form the vast majority of the extant manuscripts of the New Testament) and "a greater number of" manuscripts, "also out of other groups" (*al* in Nestle's critical apparatus), have this word. Since the vast majority of manuscripts attest to the authenticity of this word, we should accept it as rightly part of this verse. The argument against accepting this word is that it is a conflation from the similar passage in Titus 1:7.

In Greek Paul uses a compound adjective composed of the words for "shameful" and "gain." Its meaning is best conveyed by the translation "fond of shameful gain." Shameful gain is anything that a man gets by dishonest means, or which is itself shameful or wicked.

Peter speaks of the same thing in I Peter 5:2 when he exhorts the elders to "shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain, but eagerly." Peter is saying that a man's motivation to serve as an overseer should not be dishonest gain. He should not seek to exalt himself by the office of overseer among the flock of God. He should not try to garner to himself power, control, or authority over others. His desire should not be to puff himself up with pride because of the honor, respect, prestige, or flattery that may come to him. His motivation to be an overseer should not be some advantage that he can get by this office. Rather, a man's motivation should be an eager desire to serve Jesus Christ and further his kingdom.

This qualification should be broadly applied. It applies to money and material goods. A man who just wants riches should not be an overseer. One's goals in defending oneself or others from criticism or accusations should not be self-serving. This qualification also applies to the shameful gain of non-material things, such as power, honor, and praise.

Conclusions:

1. This qualification forbids an overseer to acquire money or material possessions in any dishonest way.

2. It also disqualifies from office a man whose primary goal is to get power, control, authority, honor, prestige, respect, or flattery, rather than to glorify God and edify the church.

3. A man who is unscrupulous in getting his way is also fond of shameful gain and therefore, is not qualified to be an overseer.

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:3 : "but gentle"

Translation:

2) The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, prudent, respectable, hospi-

table, skilful in teaching,

3) not given to wine, not a violent man (striker), not fond of shameful gain, but gentle.....

Structure:

This requirement stands in contrast to the five negative requirements which surround it in verse 3.

Comment:

The word means: gentle, yielding, or kind. The apostle Paul ascribes gentleness to our Lord Jesus Christ in 2 Cor. 10:1 when he pleads with the church at Corinth "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." James tells us that the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable and gentle.

Gentleness should characterize every Christian. Paul writes: "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men" (Titus 3:1,2); and in Phil: 4:5: "Let your gentleness be known to all men."

Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, singles out gentleness as a necessary quality in an overseer. In contrast to a man who is given to wine, violent, or fond of shameful gain, an overseer must be gentle. Gentle is the opposite of abrasive, caustic, or oppressive. The apostle Peter admonishes servants to be submissive to their masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh (1 Peter 2:18). In this verse Peter sets gentle over against harsh. We learn in the next verses (2:19-24) that a harsh master causes his servant to endure grief, and suffer wrongly, that is, suffer for doing good. Peter points to Jesus Christ who is our example. He committed no sin and yet was reviled by harsh men and suffered at their hands for us.

An overseer is not to be a harsh man. He is not to revile people and make them suffer for doing good. A man who makes others endure grief unnecessarily lacks this important qualification for the office of overseer. An overseer must not get rough and angry, even when people oppose the truth. Rather, he must have a forbearing spirit toward all, even in the midst of disputes and opposition, seeking to avoid strife, not incite it. Paul wrote to Timothy: "But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they might know the truth..." (2 Tim. 2:24).

Conclusions:

1. All Christians should be gentle, but especially an overseer.

2. Often young and inexperienced men lack this quality; they tend to be impetuous and rash. They may be very zealous for the truth, but offend others by their harsh manner. Or they may lack a forbearing spirit and get easily offended by what others say or do.

3. It is often in the midst of controversy that a man shows whether he has the gentleness which Scripture requires for overseers. It is a natural tendency for a man to lose his forbearing spirit and gentle manner when something is not right or when there is disagreement or criticism.

4. A man who loses his forbearing spirit and gentle manner when there is controversy ought not to be an overseer.

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:3 : "not quarrelsome"

Translation:

2) The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, prudent, respectable, hospitable, skilful in teaching,

3) not given to wine, not a violent man (striker), not fond of shameful gain, but gentle, not quarrelsome.....

Structure:

The fourth negative requirement in verse 3 follows the positive requirement that an overseer be gentle. There are three closely related requirements in this verse which all have to do with a man's disposition. The particularity in this area shows the importance God places on the necessity of an overseer having a right disposition.

Comment:

The word means: not given to disputes or quarrels or strife. From this follows translations such as: uncontentious, not a brawler, peaceable, and not quarrelsome. The adjective itself is used only one other time in the New Testament in Titus 3:2. There Paul tells Titus to remind the congregations "to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be **peaceable**, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another"

(Titus 3:1-3). Translated peaceable in Titus, the word means that one does not have sinful hatred toward others for any reason; one does not speak evil of others or hold grudges against them; one is not lifted up in pride as though he were better than others. All these sinful things show that a man has a contentious, quarrelsome spirit.

A man who lacks this qualification will continually find fault with people, continually pick apart what they say and do, and will always have a bone of contention with someone. Consequently, he will find it hard to get along with others and will tend to have many grievances, disputes, and quarrels. He will always be finding something that is not right. Such a disposition will make a man very unhappy.

Several passages containing the related verb or noun support this interpretation. In John 6:52 the Jews quarreled about Jesus' statement that he is the living bread which came down out of heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that Jesus would give was his flesh. In 2 Timothy 2:23,24 Paul exhorts Timothy to "avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must **not quarrel** but be gentle to all, ...in humility correcting those who are in opposition...." In Titus 3:9-11 Paul tells Titus: "But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and **strivings** about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned." In James 4:1-2, the apostle asks: "Where do wars and **fights** come from among you? Do they not come from your pleasures that war among your members?"

Instead of being quarrelsome, an overseer must avoid disputes, quarrels, and strife. He must correct those who stray without quarrelling. He must be gentle (see the exegesis of "but gentle" in 1 Tim. 3:3), humble, peaceable, long-suffering, forbearing, reconciliatory rather than antagonistic and divisive. John Calvin comments that this verse requires an overseer to be a man "who knows how to bear injuries peacefully and with moderation, who excuses much, who swallows insults, who does not make himself dreaded for his harsh severity, nor rigorously exact all that is due to him. The man who is not contentious is he who avoids disputes and quarrels...."

Conclusions:

1. In 1 Timothy 3:3 Scripture emphasizes the need for a godly disposition in an overseer.

2. One aspect of that is that an overseer must not be given to quarrels. Rather than continually being disgruntled about something, an overseer should be peaceable, reconciliatory, thinking more highly of others than of himself, long-suffering, and forbearing.

3. It is typical of sinful human nature to find something wrong, something to quarrel over, some point to contend, just for the sake of contention. A man who is qualified for the office of overseer must have overcome this sin by the grace of God. Until he does, he ought not to bear office in the church.

4. This qualification does not mean that an overseer ought to ignore or whitewash sin, claiming that he is avoiding contention. Rather, as Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:23,24, in humility an overseer must correct those who err and oppose the truth, while at the same time not quarrelling. It is sinful for an overseer to ignore or whitewash sin.

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3.3 : "not covetous"

Translation:

2) The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, prudent, respectable, hospitable, skilful in teaching,

3) not given to wine, not a violent man (striker), not fond of shameful gain, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not loving money....

Structure:

This is the fifth negative requirement in verse 3, and the last single-word characteristic in this list of qualifications.

Comment:

I think that "not covetous" is too imprecise for a translation of this word. A literal translation of the Greek word is "not loving silver." Since silver was commonly used as money in Paul's day, we should not restrict the word to its literal meaning. That is why I have followed the lexicons' translation: not loving money. The broader idea of covetousness is usually conveyed by other Greek words (e.g. Romans 13:9).

This same adjective is used in Hebrews 13:5 where all Christians are exhorted to live without loving money, being content with what they have. This qualification is not unique to elders. Scripture gives some examples of the sin of loving money. One example is found in Luke 12:13-21 where we read that a man said to Jesus:

"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." After replying directly to the man, Jesus warned the crowd: "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Then Jesus told them a parable about a rich man who built bigger barns to hold his plentiful crops and goods with the attitude: "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But God rebuked the rich man: "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." A second example is Luke 16:1-14 where Jesus told the story of the unjust steward, concluding with this statement: "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (v.13). "The Pharisee, who were lovers of money, also heard these things, and they derided him" (v. 14).

These examples show that loving money means serving money or placing one's confidence and deep affection in money. To think that life consists in the abundance of wealth and possessions is to love money. To live as if money were the most important thing in life is also to love money. Paul warned Timothy: "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness." (1 Tim. 6:9-11). Again, in 2 Timothy 3:2 Paul warns: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying its power." Loving money, self, pleasure, or anything else competes with loving God, which is the first and great commandment.

Some people who are untaught and unstable twist the Scriptures to their own destruction when they say that it is wrong for Christians to have more than the bare necessities of life. To the contrary, the Scriptures teach that a good increase, wealth, and possessions are the blessing of the Lord to those who honor him (e.g. Deut. 8; 28:1-14; Prov. 3:9-10). The love of money can not be equated with the amount of wealth a man has or the money he receives.

Conclusions:

1. This qualification is more specific than just "not covetous." It requires that elders not be lovers of money.

2. All Christians, and especially an elder, must love God above anything else. Nothing else should ever take the number one place in a man's life.

3. A poor man may be a lover of money, while a rich man is not, or a rich man may be a lover of money, while a poor man is not. Anyone who lives for his money or places his confidence and deep affection in money loves money.

4. A man who loves money will inevitably be drawn away from serving the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:4-5

Translation:

2) The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, prudent, respectable, hospitable, skilful in teaching,

3) not given to wine, not a violent man (striker), not fond of shameful gain, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not loving money,

4) ruling his own house well, having his children in submission, with all reverence

5) for if one does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?

Structure:

This is the first of three lengthy requirements which conclude the list of qualifications. While most of the requirements concern a man's character or status, this is one of the few that require certain abilities.

Comment:

One of the main duties of an overseer is to take care of the church of God. The Greek word translated "take care of" is used only three times in the New Testament. In addition to this verse, it is used in Luke 10.34-35 where the good Samaritan took care of the injured man by binding up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and hiring the innkeeper to care for him. Just as a shepherd cares for all his sheep, so an overseer must care for the people of God. He must feed the people from God's Word, protect them from enemies and wolves, and lead them in

doctrine and conduct that is according to Scripture, comforting, admonishing, and censuring as needed.

In order to be qualified to take care of the church of God, a man must first know how to rule his own household. The Greek word translated "house" has a wide range of meanings. In this verse it refers to several aspects of a man's household. First, an overseer must rule himself well. This is foundational to good government because, ultimately, good government is based on self-government. A man who does not rule himself well, but seeks to rule others or expects them to govern themselves, is a hypocrite. He will lose the respect of others and will be unable to rule over anything well. Proverbs 16:32 says: "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." Proverbs 25:28 says: "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls." Second, an overseer must rule his wife and children well, having them in obedience and submission, according to the law of God. There must be reverence, respect, and good order in the home. Third, an overseer must govern his servants, employees, property, and business affairs well.

This means that an overseer must show that he has the ability to run his own affairs properly. He must show good judgment and discipline in his daily life. If this is deficient, a man will not be able to take care of the church of God. He will lack both the abilities and the respect and authority that are necessary. The argument is from the lesser responsibility to the greater responsibility. He who is faithful with a few things will be put in charge of greater things. Compare the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30.

Conclusions:

1. Part of the elders' task is to take care of the church of God, just as a shepherd takes care of his sheep.

2. Before a man can be trusted to care for the church of God, he must rule his own household well, including himself, his family, and his daily affairs.

3. If a man does not govern himself well, if his children are unfaithful, insubordinate, or lead dissolute lives, or if his wife is rebellious, he is unsuited to govern in the church of God.

4. Paul does not require that an overseer be without experience in the ordinary life of men. Contrary to the Roman Catholic ideal, a man experienced in ordinary life and well-practiced in the duties that human relationships impose, is far better trained and fitted to rule in the Church than a man who leads a hermitic life (Calvin, Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:4).

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:6

Translation:

2) The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, prudent, respectable, hospitable, skilful in teaching,

3) not given to wine, not a violent man (striker), not fond of shameful gain, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not loving money,

4) ruling his own house well, having his children in submission, with all reverence

5) for if one does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?

6) not newly converted, lest being puffed up he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Structure:

This is the second of three lengthy requirements which conclude the list of qualifications. This one is worded negatively, while the other two are worded positively.

Comment:

Paul uses a Greek adjective (neofuton) that is not used anywhere else in the New Testament. Literally, it means "newly planted." In Christian literature this adjective is used of those who have been newly planted in the Christian church. I have translated this word as "newly converted," since that clearly conveys its meaning. There are several other passages of Scripture which use the metaphor of a plant for believers (e.g. Mt. 13:1-23; John 15:1-8; Rom. 6:5; 1 Cor. 3:5-9).

Paul adds a reason for this qualification. If a new convert were an overseer, he would be too easily puffed up or conceited. In the perfect tense the Greek word can also mean "beclouded," "deluded," and "becoming blinded *or* foolish." This verb is used in two other places in the New Testament, all in Paul's letters. In 1 Timothy 6.4 the word is translated "he is proud," which fits well with the context. One could translate "blind" or "foolish," but the context suggests that the man is puffed up: he refuses to teach and consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness (6:3). You could say that his pride blinds him to the truth and gives him poor judgment. The other text where Paul uses this word is 2 Timothy 3:4, where it is translated "haughty." This

fits the context here also, for arrogance and pride are mentioned in several ways in verses 1-5. Although not used in the New Testament, the noun related to this verb means delusion, conceit, or arrogance. A further indication of the meaning of this verb is in the consequence: fall into the condemnation of the devil (1 Tim. 3:6b; see below). Taken together, the evidence is fairly convincing that by this verb Paul means be puffed up or conceited.

If a new Christian suddenly received the responsibility of watching over the congregation, teaching, and ruling in the church, he could easily become puffed up with pride and foolish self-confidence. It takes the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit with the word of God to sanctify a sinner. Humility, knowledge, wisdom, self-control, and all the other things an overseer needs do not come overnight. It takes time for a man to learn and practice these things, to put off the deeds of the flesh and put on the fruit of the Spirit. Scripture also teaches that God sends trials and chastening to work these things in his people (cf. Heb. 12:10,11; James 1:2-8). A new convert must go on from the milk to the solid food of the mature Christian before he is ready to be an overseer. He must by reason of use have his senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

The consequence of being puffed up with pride is that a man might fall into the condemnation of the devil. Since the Lord Jesus Christ is the Judge, we must understand Paul to be speaking of God's condemnation of the Devil for lifting himself up in pride against God. According to 2 Peter 2:4 God cast the angels who sinned down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment (cf Jude 6). God condemned the devil to everlasting punishment in hell. Paul is saying that pride leads to destruction (cf. Prov. 16:18-19).

Hendriksen suggests that the apostle Paul did not appoint elders in new churches immediately (NT Commentary 128). However, it does not appear that Paul waited very long before appointing elders on his first missionary journey (see Acts 14:23). The reason for this is that not all the members of these new churches were newly converted. Many Jews who had learned the Scriptures as a child and had served the Lord all their life also believed in Christ and became part of the Christian church. Since these Jews were not new converts, there were many men in these new congregations who were qualified from the start to bear office in the church.

Conclusions:

1. Whether young or old, one who is a new Christian should not be an elder. A man's maturity as a Christian is more important for the office of elder than his age in years.

2. Even outstanding human abilities and learning are not sufficient to qualify a newly converted man for the office of overseer.

3. Making a new believer an overseer in the church may lead to pride which may lead to his fall and even to his eternal destruction.

4. It takes time before a congregation of new believers has men that are qualified to be elders in the congregation.

5. New Christians should show maturity in the faith before they are called to be ministers of the Word of God.

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:7

Translation:

2) The overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, prudent, respectable, hospitable, skilful in teaching,

3) not given to wine, not a violent man (striker), not fond of shameful gain, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not loving money,

4) ruling his own house well, having his children in submission, with all reverence

5) for if one does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?

6) not newly converted, lest being puffed up he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

7) Moreover, he must also have a good testimony from those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Structure:

This is the last of three lengthy requirements which conclude the list of qualifications for the office of overseer. This last requirement has to do with a man's reputation outside the church (i.e. among unbelievers). Verses 2-6 form one long sentence in which Paul lays out all the qualifications, except the last one. The last one is in a sentence by itself. Part of the reason for this is that the main verb in verses 2-6 is a form of the verb "to be," while the main verb in verse 7 is a form of the verb "to have."

Comment:

Although Paul begins a new sentence, he connects it closely to the preceding verses in order to make it clear

that this is just as much a necessary qualification for the office of overseer as the things in verses 2-6.

A man who is qualified for the office of overseer must live in such a way that even unbelievers (those outside the church) give a good testimony for him. They should be forced to acknowledge that he is an upright and wise man because he behaves honorably and innocently among them in his daily life. An overseer must not be a hypocrite who does and says the right thing around Christians, but does not walk worthy of his calling in Christ in all his daily affairs. Often a man spends many hours a day working with unbelievers. Their assessment of him is important. They may hate his Christianity, but they should not be able to prove any just charge against him. He must be a man of character and above reproach. Paul exhorts all Christians in Colossians 4:5: "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time." In writing to the Thessalonians, Paul says: "But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing" (1 Thess. 4:10-12). Every Christian, including an overseer, must conduct himself properly among all men, including unbelievers.

Daniel is a good example of this quality which elders must have. Daniel "distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him, and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm" (Daniel 6:3). The king of the Medes and Persians, though an unbeliever, was forced to speak highly of Daniel and entrust him with great responsibilities. "So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him" (6:4). Daniel's unbelieving colleagues could find no fault with his daily work or life, except his devotion to the living God.

If an elder does not have a good testimony among unbelievers who know him, he is in danger of falling into reproach and the snare of the devil. This is not the reproach of Christ (cf. Hebrews 11:26), but reproach for misconduct. Unbelievers will heap insults and disgrace upon a man who behaves improperly and yet is placed in the office of elder in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only will they revile such a man, but they will also blaspheme Christ and his church because of him. Unbelievers are always looking for an occasion to mock Christ and his church.

To fall into the snare or trap of the devil is to fall back under the power and control of the devil. Paul tells Timothy to correct in humility "those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:25-26). To fall into the snare or trap of the devil means to do the devil's will instead of God's will. It could involve a serious sin or simply neglecting one's duty as an elder. To take a bad stand and set oneself against the truth, good judgment, and the good of the church is another way in which an elder may fall into the snare of the devil.

A man without a good testimony from those outside has a divided heart. He is not serving the Lord with all his being. The church should not trust him to lead and shepherd the sheep in the paths of righteousness. To make such a man an elder only increases the dividedness of his life. It tends to increase his hypocrisy and the tension in him between obeying the Lord and doing his own will. This only sets him up for a great fall. An elder who does not have a good testimony from those outside is in danger of being taken captive by the devil so that instead of standing for and defending the truth (as a faithful elder should), he opposes the truth and needs to repent.

Conclusions:

1. Even unbelievers should be forced to testify that an elder lives honorably in his daily life.

2. This qualification excludes hypocrites whose daily life contradicts their confession of Christ.

3. This qualification excludes any who do not conduct themselves properly among unbelievers. How a man acts at work and in his business dealings is an important indication of his qualification for the office of elder.

4. It is important that an elder conduct all his daily affairs well so that unbelievers have no occasion to reproach him or the church of Christ.

5. An elder who gives unbelievers occasion to be justly displeased with him, is in danger of being trapped in error by the devil.

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