

QUALIFICATIONS FOR OVERSEERS IN 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7

AN EXEGETICAL PAPER

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Introduction

Writing to Timothy, his apostolic assistant, Paul outlines the qualifications for church officers in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. Timothy had been charged with the spiritual oversight of the church at Ephesus, and one of his tasks was to look after the ordination of new elders and deacons. Paul begins, “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Timothy 3:1). First affirming the godly desire to be an overseer, Paul follows up with a list of qualifications for those who have this desire. The aim of Paul’s list is made clear in the wider context of 1 Timothy. Paul expresses his reasons for writing the letter in various ways: he says both that he is entrusting a charge to Timothy to “wage the good warfare” by “holding faith and a good conscience” (1:18) and that he is writing so that Timothy would know how to “behave in the household of God” (3:15). Of course, these aims correlate, as the letter’s focus on trouble in the church makes clear (1:3-4, 6-7, 19-20; 2:8-15; 4:1-3; 6:3-5, 20-21). Timothy’s work in God’s household will mean waging war against all that is out of accord with “love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1:5). This description of healthy spiritual life pulses at the heart of the letter. All that Timothy does as a pastor in Ephesus is to be done by “holding” firmly to these things (1:19). To reject them is to “shipwreck” faith—the very thing some had done in the Ephesian church already (1:19b-20). In other words, difficulty is part of life in the Ephesian church, and qualified officers are needed to shepherd and serve the flock through these conflicts and troubles. This paper will consider the qualifications for overseer (3:1-7) in light of these considerations.

Exegesis

Context

The situation at Ephesus and Paul's aim in writing to Timothy must serve to direct our understanding of the qualifications in 3:1-7. As noted above, Paul is writing to Timothy so that, in the event of his absence, he will be equipped to "wage the good warfare" according to his calling as a leader in the church (1:3, 18; 2:14-15). This calling, announced beforehand in "prophecies previously made about" Timothy, centers on his duty to teach sound (ὀγιαίνουσα in 1:10) and good (καλῆς in 4:6) doctrine. Paul reminds him that he will be a "good servant of Christ Jesus" insofar as he is "trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine" (4:6). The gifts given to Timothy for this purpose—through the "prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands" on him—pertained to reading Scripture, exhortation, and teaching (4:13). Timothy was to "immerse" (ἴσθι, literally "to be in") himself in these activities. In addition, he was to oppose those who teach "different doctrine," not agreeing with the sound words (ὀγιαίνουσιν λόγοις) of Christ (6:3).

Paul organizes the letter in a way that emphasizes the necessity of godly elders and deacons in the Ephesian church in light of the current situation. The following outline demonstrates this point:

- I. Greeting (1:1-2)
- II. Paul's charge I: wage the good warfare (1:3-20)
- III. Instructions for the charge (1:18-20)
 - A. Proper prayer (2:1-15)
 - B. Godly elders and deacons (3:1-13)
 - C. The church as pillar and buttress of truth: mystery of godliness (3:14-16)
 - D. Warning: trouble in later times (4:1-5)

- E. A good servant: teaching sound doctrine (4:6-16)
 - F. A good servant: honoring others (5:1-21)
 - 1. Honoring in rebuke: fathers, brothers, mothers, and sisters (5:1-2)
 - 2. Honoring widows (5:3-16)
 - 3. Double honor for elders (5:17-25)
 - 4. Honoring masters (6:1-2)
 - G. Warning: false teachers and contentment (6:3-10)
- IV. Paul's charge II: fight the good fight (6:11-21)

As the outline demonstrates, the qualifications for elders and deacons are among the first instructions that Paul gives Timothy regarding *how* he is to carry out his charge to “fight the good fight.” It was important that he enlist other leaders to fight alongside him.

Paul clarifies the importance of this need in the middle section of the letter (part III in the outline). He focuses first on the community at large and then on those who lead the community. In 2:1-15, he describes the need for all in the church—men and women—to pray properly. They are to pray for all people so that they “might lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (2:1-2). This kind of prayer life is “good” in the eyes of God and means that men should lift up “holy hands without anger or quarreling” (2:8) and that the women should “adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self control,” thus clothing themselves “with good works” (2:9-10). Then, in 3:1-13, he narrows his focus to those in the community of believers who “aspire” to office. In other words, Paul moves from general instructions for every person to instructions for those who are set apart to special office in the church. These offices serve the needs of the entire church. Particularly for the Ephesian church, these officers would be those who would labor alongside Timothy. He was called to immerse himself in reading, teaching, and exhorting, and the officers, too, would take up Paul's charge to “fight the good

fight” and “wage the good warfare” by ruling well, laboring in preaching and teaching, and serving (4:11-16; 5:17).

The war or fight that they would be undertaking is for the health of the church—to preserve the kind of healthy teaching that accords with godliness. The church is, after all, the “pillar and buttress of the truth” (3:15). This unique calling in the world would be challenged in “later times” as people devote themselves “to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars” (4:1-2). The way of waging war against this tendency is “the word of God and prayer” (4:5). Paul then outlines Timothy’s role in the congregation: as a good servant of Christ, he will teach (4:7-16) and he will rule (5:1-2) in ways directly opposite of the false teachers (6:3-10). Significantly, overseers and deacons share these responsibilities of teaching, ruling, and serving in the church. Based on the lists of qualifications and descriptions throughout the New Testament, it is best to regard overseers as carrying the teaching and ruling responsibilities and the deacons as assisting them in service to the congregation’s needs.¹

Timothy’s work in Ephesus would be incomplete without the co-laborers described in 3:1-13.

Such men need to be enlisted in the “good warfare.”² But who should serve in these roles? It is to Paul’s list of qualifications for overseers (3:1-7) that we now turn.

¹ For discussion of these roles as they are presented in the New Testament, see George William Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 175-177.

² It is interesting in this connection to consider the point of view of scholars who suggest that the lists of qualifications are derived from a common secular source. Knight highlights that this connection is often made by those in the history of religions school. He cites that “Dibelius-Conzelmann give examples of such lists of qualifications, especially the description of the military general in Onasander” in which eleven terms are used, two of which are found in 1 Timothy 3 and three of which are “similar to terms” used there. Knight is right to draw the conclusion that “a mere borrowing cannot explain the uniqueness and particular appropriateness of the lists respectively for the bishop and for the deacons.” Rather, “the lists seem to be constructed from a distinctively Christian and ecclesiastical perspective.” However, it is intriguing at least that Paul’s list of qualifications for leaders in the “good fight” and “good warfare” would be comparable to descriptions of military generals of the day. It is impossible to say for sure whether there is any interdependence, but the similarities at least further underline the emphasis of Paul on the need to engage in battle in the Ephesian church.

Translation and Brief Exegesis: 1 Timothy 3:1-7

The saying is trustworthy: if anyone seeks overseer-ship, he desires a good task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, a one-woman man, sober-minded, well-ordered, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not drunken, not a brawler, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must govern his own household well, keeping his children in submission with all dignity—for if anyone does not manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? Not a beginner—or else he might puff up and fall into the devil’s condemnation. And so he must be well regarded by outsiders—so that he not fall into disgrace and the devil’s trap.

The list regarding overseers (*επισκοπος*) begins with a phrase reserved in the Pastoral Epistles for the most important announcements. The phrase in question, ***“the saying is trustworthy (πιστὸς ὁ λόγος),”*** is often assumed to refer in the Pastorals only to statements of soteriological significance. If this is so in the case of 3:1a, then it is best seen as connected to the preceding discussion rather than the discussion of qualifications. As Knight notes, this “criterion . . . would be decisive were it certain.”³ Its certainty, however, is the very thing brought into question by this passage. The most decisive consideration in this case is that the abruptness of the saying in 3:1b is best understood in connection with the phrase. Therefore, *πιστὸς ὁ λόγος* best fits with the following discussion regarding the qualifications for church officers.

The saying that Paul commends as trustworthy is, ***“if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (v. 1).*** Out of the congregation of praying men described in 2:1-8 is to emerge those who reach for leadership in the church. Such aspirations, when emerging from the heart of a man with the character described in the list of qualifications, are praiseworthy. These are not the selfish ambitions that produce anger and quarreling. But Paul does not confuse the point that these men do in fact desire the office. He uses a strong word,

³ Knight., 152.

ὀρέγω, to express the desire. In the present middle indicative (*ὀρέγεται*), the word expresses the idea of “reaching out for” or “striving for oneself.” The same word is used later in the letter (the only other time in Paul’s letters) to describe the “craving” for money that has caused some to wander from the faith and experience deep pain (6:10—in this verse the word is the present middle participle). It further clarifies the meaning of the saying when it is noted that in 3:1b, Paul sets up the word “desire” (*ἐπιθυμέω*) as parallel to “aspire” (*ὀρέγω*). *ἐπιθυμέω* signifies setting your heart on something—it can even be rendered “covet.” Paul is describing anyone who *chases after* the office of overseer *in order to grasp it*. “Office” is added to render the original readable in English. The Greek is *ἐπισκοπῆς*, the genitive singular feminine form of the noun *ἐπισκοπή*. This noun, from the root *ἐπισκοπος*, is the word for the *role* of overseer and is used interchangeably with elder (*πρεσβύτερος*) in the New Testament (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-9). Perhaps “overseer-ship” would be a good one-word English equivalent. It refers not to the person (*ἐπισκοπος*) but to the person’s job. This fact is clarified in the next clause. Paul writes, “**he desires a noble task (καλοῦ ἔργου)**”—in other words, it is the task or work that is desired, not merely the status. Paul’s blessing is bestowed on those who reach out to take on good work in God’s household. This *καλοῦ ἔργου* is best equated with the work Paul charges Timothy to perform in the rest of the letter, as 5:17-21 make clear.

The next phrase closes the gap between the aspiration and the list of qualifications. He writes, “**therefore an overseer must be . . .**” (v. 2). The demands of the task are as high as they are noble, so Paul proceeds to list the things that a prospective overseer must be. *δεῖ* is the leading word in this sentence, and it expresses that all the following qualifications are non-negotiable—all are needed for the noble task under consideration. In addition, all the

qualifications are expressions of what the man must *be* rather than primarily what he must *do* (the word is *εἶναι*—present active infinitive of *εἶμι*). What qualifies a man for the noble task of the overseer? It is not accomplishments (as is true in so many other endeavors) but *characteristics*.

The first quality is “**above reproach**” (v. 2). The word, *ἀνεπίλημπτον*, like most in the list, is an adjective in the accusative singular masculine. As noted above, it describes what the man *is* (*εἶμι*), and it sums up all that follows. This characteristic means that the man must be of such impeccable character that an attack on him would fail to gain traction. He is a man who has no “skeletons in his closet.” It does not, of course, mean that he is without sin or fault. Rather, it expresses a life that has reached maturity in grace—he has learned to “say no to ungodliness” (Titus 2:12) and confesses his sins in order to forsake them. As a result, his life is free from scandal.

Particularly, his life exhibits faithful sexual conduct. He must be “**the husband of one wife**” (v. 2). This phrase (*μῑᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα*) can be literally rendered “one-woman man” and has stirred more controversy than any of the others in the list. The history of interpretation on this passage has yielded several options.⁴ But Paul’s point is that the character of an elder must be marked by sexual fidelity (see fourth option in footnote below). Several reasons lead to this conclusion. First, *μῑᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα* is constructed as an adjectival phrase. The first word, *μῑᾶς*, is an adjective in the genitive singular describing the second word, *γυναικὸς*, a noun in the genitive. Together the two words form an adjectival phrase modifying *ἄνδρα*, a noun in the

⁴ The options can be summarized as follows: (1) Paul is saying that only married men can serve as elders or deacons; (2) Paul is saying that men who have had only one wife in their lifetime can be elders or deacons—thus excluding divorced men and widowers who remarry; (3) Paul is saying that an elder or deacon (if married) must currently be in an monogamous relationship (no polygamy or bigamy); (4) Paul is saying that the character of an elder or deacon must be marked by sexual faithfulness.

accusative. This combination of adjective or noun in the genitive followed by a noun signals a common construction: the noun is the focus of the phrase and the two genitives modify it.⁵ This phrase, therefore, parallels many of the other items in the list, consisting primarily of nouns and adjectives in the accusative.

Second, the phrase is an attributive adjective, with the stress placed on *μῖς γυναικὸς* as a descriptor of *ἄνδρα*. In other words, it is a description of a certain kind of man, a kind that is characterized as “one-woman.” Therefore, the phrase could literally be rendered, “one-woman man” or “one wife’s husband.”⁶ As Glasscock observes, *γυναικὸς* is best understood “as being a genitive of quality, that is, giving a characteristic to the noun it modifies . . . to explain what kind, or to qualify the noun by attributing to him his character.”⁷ Choosing to phrase this concept uniquely makes sense given the lack of options in Greek for expressing the idea of exclusive devotion to a spouse.⁸ This idea is expressed clearly whether or not you translate *ἄνδρα* as “man” or “husband” and *γυναικὸς* as “woman” or “wife.” Given the way in which Paul chose to put it grammatically, it seems the best way to understand his intention is to describe a certain type of man. Paul stresses that the one who aspires to the noble task of an overseer be a sexually faithful man.

⁵ Max Zerwick, *Biblical Greek illustrated by examples*, English ed., adapted from the fourth Latin ed., Vol. 114. (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico., 10963), accessed November 26, 2013, Logos Bible Software.

⁶ William Hendriksen, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 121.

⁷ Ed Glasscock, “‘The husband of one wife’ requirement in 1 Timothy 3:2,” *Bibliotheca sacra*, 140 (Jl-S 1983): 250.

⁸ Sydney Page, “Marital Expectations of Church Leaders in the Pastoral Epistles,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 50 (1993): 119.

The prospective overseer must be **“sober-minded” (v. 2)**. With this word (*νηφάλιον*), Paul extends the picture of the man’s character by describing how he thinks: he is a man of unclouded and unimpaired judgment. He is marked by temperance in the use of anything that might hinder such judgment.

“Self-controlled” follows closely on the heels of **“sober-minded” (v. 2)**. The word (*σώφρονα*) is exclusively found in the Pastoral Epistles and indicates moderation in lifestyle and habit. These characteristics will lead to a man being **“respectable” (v. 2)**. The meaning of this adjective is that the person is an orderly member of society—not a person deserving ill-repute.

The list turns “from the personal to the interpersonal” with **“hospitable”** and **“able to teach” (v. 2)**. These two set the stage for the rest of the list. The candidate for the task of an overseer must be able to “relate well with others and to teach and care for them.”⁹ The characteristics preceding focused on personal traits, features of the inner life of the man. The next several turn in the direction of proper characteristics for ministry to others. A **“hospitable”** person is one who cares practically for those who are in need. It was a much-appreciated and expected trait in the Greco-Roman world. The provision of food and shelter was life-saving to travelers throughout the Empire—even more so for traveling ministers and apostles in the early church, since their travels for the gospel often entailed persecution. We also know that sharing one’s home was part of the warp and woof of daily life among the early Christian community (Acts 2:46). Like Timothy, the overseers appointed in Ephesus were to be **“able to teach (διδασκικόν)” (v.2)**. This trait refers to a basic competency in instructing others. The overseer

⁹ Knight, 156.

must labor in teaching, exhortation, and refuting those who contradict sound doctrine. To “wage this good warfare,” they must have the requisite skills of communicating the faith.

Insisting that an overseer be “*not a drunkard, not violent but gentle*” (v. 3), Paul continues to focus on interpersonal traits, but demonstrates now how the personal and interpersonal are “intertwined.”¹⁰ A defect in the man’s character, drunkenness (πάροινος) would lead to an inability to care for people well. Since he must be gentle (ἐπιεικής), he cannot drink too much, a practice associated often with violence. “**Violent**” (πλήκτης—noun accusative singular masculine) refers to a “brawler,” a “hot head” who fights senselessly. A gentle person, by contrast, is reasonable and able to work well with others. This explains how the overseer is “*not quarrelsome*” (v. 3). He is a non-combatant when it comes to meaningless arguments.

“*Not a lover of money (ἀφιλάργυρον)*” (v. 3) means that the overseer is not distracted or motivated by financial gain. Paul later notes that those who pursue riches bring pain on themselves since it is a “root of all kinds of evils” (6:10). The overseer prefers to have nothing in this world rather than lose his heavenly riches. He must be a man who values God and people over possessions. If he does not, then he will be unable to care for them well and in good conscience.

The next characteristic is described and defended at length. Again it deals with the man’s ability to relate to people—in this case, his ability to rule is under consideration. “*He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?*” (v. 4-5). The ability to manage (προϊστάμενον) is to govern, and the overseer’s ability

¹⁰ Ibid., 156.

to care for God's church is demonstrated in his ability to govern his household. The household in Greco-Roman society was significantly broader than our modern conception. The so-called "nuclear family"—parents and children—defines the term now. But in Paul's day the household often included extended family and servants. The ability to manage would certainly be tested at this level! The same holds true today even with our narrower definition of household. If a man cannot instruct, discipline, and care for his children so that they are submissive, then he clearly does not know how to manage and will not be a good overseer in the church.

Returning to personal maturity, Paul focuses on the man's progress in the faith. He urges that ***"he must not be a recent convert"*** (v. 6). The word used here (*νεόφωτον*—adjective accusative singular masculine) indicates a beginner to an activity or group. The context implies that Paul is referring to beginners in the faith. He tells Timothy to look for overseers among seasoned Christians and not those starting out in discipleship. The reason is sobering: the task is noble but dangerous. Since it involves exercising authority, the task of an overseer puts one at risk for pride. Paul expresses it memorably: ***"or he may become puffed up with conceit"*** (v. 6). Since there is an enemy bent on destroying the church, *νεόφωτον* must not risk the corrupting temptation that comes with power—it may cause them to ***"fall into the condemnation of the devil"*** (v.6). Time for personal growth in grace is needed before enlisting among the generals in the "good warfare."

In the final characteristic, Paul once again warns of the dangers of the task. He writes, ***"Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil"*** (v. 7). Paul is concerned that the church's overseers have a good reputation with the non-believing world. If they do, it will serve as a defense against attacks and as a

demonstration of Christ's power to change lives. If they do not have a good reputation with outsiders, however, this gives the world ammunition in its attack on the faith. Disgrace will engulf the elder of ill-repute, much to the dishonor of Christ and his church. Nothing would delight the devil more than this. He is busy setting snares for God's people—one of the chief of which is using the church's bad behavior to bring her into the contempt of the watching world.

Interpretation

Two Lessons

In order to make personal application of this passage, it is important to draw some interpretive conclusions from the exegesis. As noted already, Paul's burden in the letter is to help Timothy carry out his calling in the church even in his absence. The two "bookends" of the letter that express Paul's overall charge to Timothy are "wage the good warfare" and "fight the good fight" (1:18; 6:12). He would be struggling against opposition as he immersed himself in his calling. The qualifications for elders and deacons are given so that Timothy would know how to enlist faithful men to serve alongside him. There are two lessons we can derive from these qualifications. *First, we learn that a plurality of elders in the church is necessary for its health.* It was important that Timothy appoint elders since the work would grow increasingly difficult. One person cannot do the work alone. Elders need to rule and teach in community with one another. *Second, we learn that elders are to be chosen according to how well their character will enable them to lead amidst the conflict of a fallen world.* This requirement applies today as well. Certainly, the work of the church has not gotten any easier. It is not for the faint of heart, and so we should not "be hasty in the laying on of hands," ordaining men for ministry who are ill-equipped. Paul makes it clear that overseers are called to shepherd God's flock even in the face

of opposition. They are prepared for this work by *godly character, relational maturity, and competency to teach and govern*. Consider of of these three emphases in turn.

Three Emphases

First, godly character is the primary emphasis of the list of qualifications. The vast majority of the items listed refer to attitudes or characteristics of the man’s heart. This is best demonstrated by comparing the other two lists of qualifications in the Pastoral Epistles with the one in 1 Timothy:

1 Timothy 3 (elders)	Titus 1 (elders)	1 Timothy 3 (deacons)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above reproach • the husband of one wife • sober-minded • self-controlled • respectable • hospitable • able to teach • not a drunkard • not violent • gentle • not quarrelsome • not a lover of money • manage his own household well • not a recent convert • well thought of by outsiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above reproach • the husband of one wife • children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination • not arrogant • not quick-tempered • not a drunkard • not violent • not greedy for gain • hospitable • a lover of good • self-controlled • upright • holy • disciplined • hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught • able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dignified • not double-tongued • not addicted to much wine • not greedy for dishonest gain • hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience • be tested first • prove themselves blameless • the husband of one wife • managing their children and their own households well

Each of the items in the three lists—even those for which there are no parallels in the other lists—refer to a person’s interior characteristics and attitudes. These attitudes will be manifested in a person’s behavior, especially in relationship to others. The only possible exceptions to this rule are the requirements to be able to teach and to not be a new convert. But even the man’s ability to teach is a result of his “holding firm the trustworthy faith as taught”—a supremely ethical

trait.¹¹ The ability to lead well at home speaks to the man’s character as well—he is obedient to God’s command to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Also, the requirement to not be a recent convert is enjoined because of its ethical implications: so that he may not fall into the trap of the devil, implying that the reason recent converts are barred from office is their lack of mature character. This suggests that the intention of this list is to demonstrate the importance of godly character (more important than status or skills) in those who serve as officers in the church. A man without godly character will not only endanger his own soul as an overseer or deacon, but he will endanger the souls of others as well.

Second, relational wholeness stemming from godly character is the second emphasis. In all three lists, the first characteristic emphasizes the reputation of the person that follows from his character. Both lists about elders/overseers begin by stating that those who hold these offices must be “above reproach” (*ἀνεπίλημpton*). Towner contends rightly that “its placement within the opening phrase and its wide scope suggest that this is the essential requirement for candidacy.”¹² The term does not just refer to the lifestyle of the candidate; it also refers to the evaluation of that lifestyle by onlookers. In this case, it indicates the measurement by which a person’s lifestyle is perceived. Towner continues, “as a measurement it signifies that no grounds for reproach or blame have been found.”¹³ Without doubt, then, the list of qualifications comes under the banner of a “high ideal”—but it reflects a concern for the reputation of church leaders, both in the Christian community and outside it.¹⁴ The same concern is reflected at the end of the lists: elders

¹¹ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2008), 4.

¹² Towner, 250.

¹³ Towner, 250.

¹⁴ Towner, 250.

“must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace” (1 Timothy 3:7, 13).

The overall list of qualifications stresses character *and* the reputation that character forms. In other words, the items in these lists provide a basis for testing who these men are *and* how they relate to and are perceived by others.

Finally, competency in teaching and leading is the third emphasis. There are two examples of this in the passage. In both cases, the competencies listed are required in the unique task of the overseer/elder: ability to teach and ability to manage his own household. Since these—managing and teaching—are the two primary responsibilities of the elder/overseer in the church, candidates for the office should be confirmed in these skills.

To summarize, Paul teaches the necessity of shared leadership in the church among qualified elders—especially considering the difficult conditions of ministry in the fallen world. Correct qualifications for this office center on godly character, but the character must be joined with relational wholeness and competency in teaching and leading.

Personal Application

This passage has helped form and mature my sense of call to the ministry. From the time of my conversion as a young boy (around eight years old), I have believed that I was called to the ministry of the gospel. But my call has developed significantly in the years since. This passage—along with other texts of Scripture—has been a means of God’s work in my life up to this point. Specifically, there are three ways that the passage has helped me in relationship to my call to ministry.

First, it has helped me understand what it means to be called to ministry. I especially appreciate the strong language Paul uses to describe what it’s like to desire the noble task of an

overseer. As noted in the exegesis above, he says that it is a good thing for a man to “crave” this work. That is the first part of a genuine calling to ministry—a desire to do it. But, as the list of qualifications makes clear—a desire alone does not make a calling. The calling must be sincere—the man must “crave” the work for the right reasons. It cannot be out of greed because he cannot be a lover of money. It cannot be out of selfish ambition because he is called to care (give of himself) for God’s household (not his). It cannot be out of a desire to save himself through service because he must be a genuine and established *convert*—receiving and resting on Christ alone for his salvation. The only right reason to “crave” the task is love for God and love for people. As our ordination vows state, we must desire the office “from love to God and a sincere desire to promote his glory in the Gospel of his Son.” Reflecting on this has encouraged me in pursuing ministry. As a sinner, I know that my motives have been mixed. The praises of men can too often seem more tantalizing than the glory of God. But the mixture of sin in my heart compels me to go back to Christ as he is offered in the Gospel, and the joy of his salvation stokes my desire to proclaim it to others all the more. I believe that God has given me a sincere desire for ministry out of love for him, for his Word, and for his people. This passage drives me to prayer to ask God to continue to purify my motives and keep them pure.

Second, it has helped me submit myself to the examination of others in pursuit of the call.

As noted above, a call to ministry springs from a sincere desire to serve God. But this passage also shows us that a call to ministry must be cross-examined by the church. After all, Paul is instructing Timothy about the qualifications for church office so that he can help test and appoint those who fit the description. It is not enough, therefore, to desire to be an overseer. The church must issue the external call to match the internal call. This passage convinced me years ago to

pursue the call to ministry in the context of the accountability of the church. I believe that I need my life opened up to the scrutiny of my brothers and sisters. Since becoming part of Trinity Presbyterian around eight years ago, my growing sense of call has been matched by the church's call for me to serve, teach, preach, and lead. I was ordained as a ruling elder three years ago and was licensed by the presbytery shortly after. These steps were milestones in my developing call—both internal and external. In addition, working through my studies at Reformed Theological Seminary and teaching Bible at Lakeland Christian School have both sharpened my sense of calling. I firmly believe that is because this passage demands that those who desire the office of overseer submit themselves to their brothers in the Lord, letting them cross-examine their calling. I am very grateful for those who have done this for me.

Third, it continues to challenge me as I undertake my call as an elder. When I read 1 Timothy 3 or Titus 1 on the qualifications of the overseer, I am consistently challenged and humbled. I know that I fall short in both character and competency. This sense of unworthiness drives me to Christ. I bring my sins to him and ask him to take them away and clothe me in his perfect righteousness. I ask him to work by the Spirit to shape my character to be like his and to equip me to fulfill my calling. I am encouraged by Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3:4-6: "Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant." That is my conviction as I serve as a ruling elder and seek ordination as a teaching elder. The further along I get in Christ, the more aware I become of my sin. So I know that if 1 Timothy 3:1-7 describes me in any way, it is all because of his amazing grace. I am challenged to seek the work of the Spirit to bring my character and life more in line with his holy calling.

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