



# 1 Timothy

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**Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. 1 Timothy 3:7**

“Moreover” is stated to show that this is a continuation of the previous thought which began in verse 3:1. Paul has been describing the qualifications for being an overseer. He just said in verse 6 that an overseer is not to be newly planted into the faith, but there is even more than that. He is also one who “must have a good testimony among those who are outside.”

In other words, there should be a full and complete understanding by the outside world that this is a person of good character, and fully capable of leading a church of people in righteousness. This, however, cannot mean that someone who was once lacking good character is not acceptable for the position. Such a view is held among many scholars, but it is contrary to the example of Paul, who is writing this very epistle. His words testify to this –

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, <sup>13</sup> although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.” 1 Timothy 1:13

These words, among others from Paul's own hand, show that he is speaking of a present condition of things at the time of ordination (and the Greek verb for “have” is in the present tense). A person who was on the wrong path, and who makes a sudden and noted change to the right path, and who continues in that walk, is going to be noted as such by those who see the change. In due time, they will know that the individual is a true and sound convert. This is

noted of Paul in Galatians 1:23. Those who knew of Paul's past, and then saw the change in him, were amazed at the change. As Paul says, "And they glorified God in me" (Galatians 1:24).

Although Paul's words concerning himself are only describing him, and although his call was an exceptional one – especially for the apostolic ministry – the fact that he includes his details in the pastoral epistles is surely an indication that he is showing us the contrast between life before Christ, and life in Christ. One who desires to be an overseer then must have a good testimony among those who are outside, based on his character of who he is in Christ. As he is not to be a new convert, this then takes care of such a testimony being flawed by a quick, but not proper, change. Those who are outside, and who can testify of the high quality of a non-recent convert, are to be sought out for their confession of the integrity and right-standing of the person in question.

This is especially important, and Paul gives the exacting reason for it by saying, "lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." Paul presents two distinct ideas. The first is, "lest he fall into reproach." This cannot simply mean as Matthew Poole states, "lest men reproach such persons for their former infamous life, and so prejudice others against the doctrine they bring." As seen, Paul's life was surely "infamous" as he went out to destroy the Christian faith. And yet, his teaching – based on his conversion – brought glory to God. And so the idea of falling into reproach must be a turning back to the old ways and bringing discredit upon the Lord. This is why the candidate must not be a new convert. He must have a proven record of a change that has taken hold, grown deep roots, and which demonstrates that he will not be swayed by the many challenges which come from holding the position of overseer.

The second thought is falling into "the snare of the devil." This is tied into falling into reproach, but it is also the thing which causes it to be magnified. The devil lays traps to break believers. Each person has weaknesses which must be guarded against. A snare does not reflect the result of a person's failings, but rather the cause of them. When the devil lays a snare for an overseer, it is to entrap him and cause his destruction. In order to hopefully ensure that an overseer will not be so snared, his record is to be evaluated carefully. If he is prone to weakness before ordination, how much more so when he assumes the position and is pursued relentlessly by the devil. The devil then is portrayed as a patient hunter who sets his traps. When he sees an overseer's falling into reproach, he will use that failing, which has led him to disgrace in the eyes of others, to drag him further from the straight path. Instead of acknowledging his sin and stepping down from the position, he will be dragged into further apostasy because of the pride which takes over. The church which he leads will be one which goes off onto a completely misguided path.

Life application: How many times have leaders of churches fallen from favor because of past sins, but who then come back to leadership positions again. Quite often their doctrine ignores

the failings which brought them to reproach in the first place, leaving a void in their ability to fully adhere to the word of God in regards to the lives of the congregants. As an example, a leader divorces and remarries, but stays in the leadership position. He now has a void in his own ability to counsel those in the church about this issue. The congregation's idea is, "It was OK for Pastor Newpartner, and so it must be OK for me." One such flaw can lead to a total turning from sound doctrine. Paul's instructions are intended to stop this before it can occur.

**Likewise deacons *must be* reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 1 Timothy 3:8**

Paul now turns from the position of overseer (aka elder, lead pastor, etc.) to that of the deacon. The requirements for a deacon are likewise set in Scripture to ensure that only qualified men are ordained to such a position. The Greek term is *diakonos*, coming from two words which indicate "through" and "dust." Thus, this is a subordinate position to the overseer. The deacon will carry out the necessary tasks which will assist the overseer. He will scurry through the dust, kicking it up as he goes, assisting in whatever manner he can in order to ensure the effective working of the church. In the gospels, the word is translated as "servant."

At a very early time in the church, deacons were selected to meet the needs of the church. The selection of seven men to assist the apostles is recorded in Acts 6:1-7. Thus, the office of deacon within the church goes back to its very inception. The position is then noted at various times in Paul's writings. His words help define some of the things that deacons were to do. Here in Timothy, he defines the character they are to possess, beginning with the note that they must be "reverent." The word signifies that which is honorable, or which bears dignity. HELPS Word Studies says that it indicates, "deeply respected because viewed as majestic (having gravity)."

Next he notes that deacons should not be "double-tongued." It is a word used only here in the New Testament. It carries the same meaning as "forked tongued" does today. It is a person who is deceitful because he says one thing at one time, and then says another. It is literally "two-sayings." When a person is noted as such, he will take different sides of the same issue whenever it is convenient. Such should never be the case. When dealing with the word of God, we are to stand on it without equivocation or manipulation. The same is true when dealing with others at all times.

After this he notes that they should not be "given to much wine." The words obviously speak of someone who drinks too much; a drunkard. It is sad that not being "given to much wine" has been manipulated by many scholars to mean "total abstinence." Such is not to be inferred from the words, and it is wholly inappropriate to the entire tenor of both Scripture and the

verse itself. Even a clumsy study of the word of God will reveal that the prohibition of alcohol is found in only two specific instances in Scripture, both in the Old Testament, and neither having any bearing on New Testament theology. Obviously, one “given to much wine” is wholly unsuited to serve in a leadership position, either in the church or in society at large. It is a state which is harmful to an individual, and it can only be harmful to the ministry if someone with such a proclivity is installed as a deacon.

Paul’s words of this verse finish with, “not greedy for money.” This has already been said of the position of overseer in verse 3 (at least in some texts). Those greedy for money have their priorities in the wrong place. If money is the objective in one’s life, then they will never be effective in the ministry. The heart must be devoted first, foremost, and with the greatest zeal to being an effective helper, not one concerned about getting rich off of the flock.

Life application: When a church is big enough to select men as deacons, they should be well-known already, carefully evaluated for the greater responsibilities, and not set on pedestals in the church. Each has a position which is to be filled, and none should be exalted over another. If the overseer is leading through hard work and dedication, how much more should those who are appointed to help him do so as well.

### **...holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 1 Timothy 3:9**

The words here are still referring to requirements of being ordained as a deacon. Not only are such men to be outwardly exemplary in nature, but they are also to have that coupled with a particular inward qualification. The external orthodoxy of an individual may cover over and hide a corrupt mind towards the gospel itself. And so Paul says that such a person is to be one who is “holding the mystery of the faith.”

The “mystery of the faith” is the subject. It is that which was concealed in God until it was revealed in Christ – that a person is saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ. It is called a mystery because it was hidden from man’s knowledge until it was revealed at the time which was divinely appointed by God. And it remains a mystery until it is revealed to the soul who has not heard it. In other words, it cannot be deduced apart from special revelation. And this mystery-revealed, although sufficient to save, does not necessarily save. It must be received as truth. Thus Paul says that he is to hold to the mystery “with a pure conscience.” As Vincent’s Word Studies says, “An intellect, however powerful and active, joined with an impure conscience, cannot solve but only aggravates the mystery; whereas a pure and loyal conscience, and a frank acceptance of imposed duty along with mystery, puts one in the best attitude for attaining whatever solution is possible.”

It is not appropriate to ordain someone simply because he meets the external qualifications, and who also has a mental understanding of the gospel. These things must be coupled with a pure conscience towards the gospel. In essence, "I have heard the gospel, and I believe it to be the truth of God. I am saved not by any works, but by faith alone in Christ Jesus. Now I desire to be a deacon who works out that knowledge through a life dedicated to Him."

Life application: If you have the most intellectually grounded pastors and deacons in the world at your church, it doesn't mean that they have a true heart towards the gospel. True men of God will be willing to defend the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus above all else. External works are wonderful to see in our leaders, but they must be men who will hold fast to the heart of the gospel at all times. It is Christ, and Christ alone, who brings salvation – apart from any merit of man.