

OVERSEERS

1 Timothy 3:1-7

UNDERSTANDING DEACON MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

1 Timothy 3:8 introduces qualifications for Deacons in this way:

“Deacons likewise....” (1 Timothy 3:8a)

Have you thought about that word — *likewise*? It is an important word that often gets passed over! This one word raises a question as we read: *Deacons are like what?*

Deacon ministry is *one* gift from God for service in His Church, but it is not the *only* gift. As we learn and understand the different offices and ministries, we learn better the blessings and purposes of each for a thriving congregation!

The word *likewise* in 1 Timothy 3:8 tells us that the qualifications of Deacons are related in a *similar way* to qualifications of Overseers in the Church. Therefore, to understand the role and purpose of Deacons, we must first understand the role and purpose of a *similar* group — Overseers.

SECTION 1: OVERSEERS

WHAT DOES GOD’S WORD SAY?

1 Timothy 3:1–7 (ESV)

Qualifications for Overseers

3 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. **2** Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, **3** not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. **4** He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, **5** for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? **6** He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. **7** Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE TEXT AND MEANING

The word “Amen” represents a strong agreement or affirmation to what is said. It is an expression of faith to say: *truly, let it be so!*

Instructions: Read each section and accompanying interpretation. Check the “Amen!” box as a way of affirming the meaning and tracking your progress.

GOD'S WORD SAYS “The saying is trustworthy” (1 Timothy 3:1)


- 1.1 THIS MEANS The words to follow in 1 Timothy 3 are reliable and dependable. I will believe and trust them!

Amen!

GOD'S WORD SAYS “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” (1 Timothy 3:1)


- 2.1 THIS MEANS God provides for an office of “overseer” in His Church.

Amen!

 An “**overseer**” (ἐπίσκοπον, episkopos) “has the responsibility of safeguarding or seeing to it that something is done in the correct way — *a guardian, overseer or supervisor*”¹ Such a person is a servant-leader, caring for the needs of a congregation as well as directing the activities of the membership.²


- 2.2 THIS MEANS A person may “aspire” (strive for, desire) to be an overseer.

Amen!

 God’s Word supplies qualifications for a reason. Simply *aspiring* to be an overseer does not automatically qualify a person for this office! The fact that some will aspire to be overseers reveals the necessity (both spiritually and practically) of qualifications to discern whether a person is called and appointed by God for such an important work.

2.3 THIS MEANS “Overseer” is more than an office or title — it represents actual work that needs to be done (a task). This is good (noble) work.

Amen!

 Supervision is an important and essential *work* ! A supervisor works to keep the big-picture in view, the workers on task and errors at bay. The same is true in the Church!

GOD'S WORD SAYS “²Therefore an overseer must be... (1 Timothy 3:2a)

3.1 THIS MEANS “**Therefore**” - *Because* the work of overseeing the Church is a good work, a person holding such an office *must* meet standards sets forth by God to be an overseer. The qualifications are directly tied to the work to be performed.

Amen!

3.2 THIS MEANS “**must**” - Meeting all of the qualifications to follow is not optional, but a *necessity*.

Amen!

3.3 THIS MEANS “**be**” - The following qualifications must be *presently* true of such a person.

Amen!

GOD'S WORD SAYS “² ...above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.” (1 Timothy 3:2-3)

4.1 THIS MEANS “**above reproach**” - No one should have reason to criticize or find fault in an overseer.


Amen!

4.2 THIS MEANS “**the husband of one wife**” - An overseer must be a faithful husband. He is married, and a “one-woman” man.

Amen!


4.3 THIS MEANS “**sober-minded**” - An overseer must be temperate, sober, restrained.

Amen!

 This word (νηφάλιον, nēphalios) may be broadly interpreted as applying to *conduct* and would also apply more narrowly to the consumption of intoxicating drink (see v3).

4.4 THIS MEANS “**self-controlled**” - An overseer must have a moderate lifestyle (i.e., one who is not so far to one side that he may be tempted by bribes), and behave in a sensible manner.

Amen!

 A practical example for being sober-minded, self-controlled and respectable is that an Overseer does not take radical positions in support of political parties, sports teams, cultures or viewpoints so as to alienate and lose the ability to minister among people with differing views.

4.5 THIS MEANS “**respectable**” - An overseer must be modest and well-ordered, a person that others admire and have high regard for.

Amen!

4.6 THIS MEANS “**hospitable**” - An overseer must be a person that shows hospitality to strangers (without complaining).

Amen!

4.7 THIS MEANS “**able to teach**” - An overseer must be able (even skilled!) to teach.

Amen!



This qualification "able to teach" is unique to the office of overseer. It is not found in the qualifications of deacons. Why? An overseer (as supervisor, or guardian) must be able to steer the church away from false teaching by recognizing and exposing it *whenever* or *wherever* it arises (from *outside* or *within* the Church). An overseer must be able to combat and correct false teaching *by teaching the truth* and steering the Church by it!

4.8 THIS MEANS “**not a drunkard**” - An overseer must not be addicted to wine or given over to drunkenness.

Amen! <input type="checkbox"/>



This particular text does not answer the question of whether or not drinking alcohol is acceptable or prohibited. What is clear in this text is that addiction and drunkenness are *unacceptable*. Given that Overseers should be temperate, self-controlled and respectable *because of* the necessary work of oversight in the Church, it is worth considering the divisive views on the subject of alcohol consumption and the temptation that might be created on a person struggling with an addiction. An Overseer should consider how consuming alcohol would be interpreted by those under his oversight, especially those who struggle with self-control. The requirement of an Overseer to be “above reproach” (v2) supports this consideration.

4.9 THIS MEANS “**not violent but gentle**” - An overseer must not be prone to fight, demanding or combative by nature (a bully) but rather gentle, forbearing, tolerant and yielding.

Amen! <input type="checkbox"/>

4.10 THIS MEANS “**not quarrelsome**” - An overseer must be peaceable.

Amen! <input type="checkbox"/>

4.11 THIS MEANS “**not a lover of money**” - An overseer must not be greedy.

Amen! <input type="checkbox"/>



The love of money or greed impairs the ability of an Overseer to make sound decisions in accord with God’s Word. Such a person might be tempted to take a bribe and compromise on an important issue, being tempted to *overlook* rather than *oversee*. A love of money narrows an Overseer’s scope of sight and focus to the point of not being able to keep the big picture in view to watch for perils. Such a person may make decisions by what is financially profitable over what is right in the eyes of God. It is appropriate to consider the financial well being of an Overseer to avoid a trap or appearance of falling in this way.

GOD'S WORD SAYS **“4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Timothy 3:2-3)**

5.1 THIS MEANS The managing, guiding and influencing work of an overseer must *first* be demonstrated well in the overseer’s own household (with those living under the same roof).

Amen!

5.2 THIS MEANS Children of an overseer are submissive because the overseer is not domineering, but leads in a way that is worthy of that overseer’s respect (with dignity).

Amen!

5.3 THIS MEANS The church belongs to - God! An overseer cares for God’s church.

Amen!




It is a fair question to ask whether or not a person who is single and/or without children may serve as an Overseer in the church. This text teaches that in learning to manage a household an Overseer learns to manage God’s church. How will you know if an Overseer will manage God’s church well? The answer is by looking at the management (and results) of that Overseer’s management in the home that will be evident in part, by their children. This text demands that an Overseer be proven first in the home before managing God’s church.

GOD'S WORD SAYS “6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:6-7)


6.1 THIS MEANS An overseer must not be one who has recently begun to believe in Christ or is a recent member of a local congregation.

Amen!

 The word “recent convert” (νεόφυτος, neophytos) means “newly planted.” By this we may interpret that an Overseer must not be “newly planted” in the Christian faith (a recent convert). It may also be true by extension, that an Overseer should not be one who is newly planted into a local congregation (a recent member). The perils of becoming conceited (puffed up, proud) are valid perils in both cases. While some exceptions may exist to an Overseer being newly planted into a local congregation (in the case of new church plants or new pastors), the requirement that he not be a recent convert remains. This qualification protects an Overseer from the devil’s attack from *within* the Church.

6.2 THIS MEANS An overseer must have a good testimony (reputation) among outsiders to the faith.

Amen!

 Outsiders to the faith must not be able to speak poorly about an Overseer or easily make unsubstantiated claims against that Overseer’s character. This qualification protects an overseer from the devil’s attack from *outside* the Church.