

# Leadership among New Testament Christians

Thomas Robinson, *Gifts for Spiritual Leadership 2*, February 25, 2018

## Romans 12:4-8

<sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many different body parts, and not all the parts have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. <sup>6</sup> We have gifts of grace (*charisma*) that differ according to the grace (*charis*) given to us: if it's proclaiming encouragement (*propheteia*), in proper relation to faith; <sup>7</sup> if it's ministry (*diakonia*), in that ministry; if you're one who teaches (*didaskhein*), in the teaching; <sup>8</sup> if you're one who exhorts (*parakalein*), in encouraging; the one who shares resources, in simple generosity; the one who stewards/leads (*proistanai*), in diligence; the one who shows mercy, in gladness.

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## 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Cf. Titus 1:5-9

<sup>1</sup> The word is faithful (*pistos*): "If anyone aspires to oversight (*episkope*), they desire an excellent work. <sup>2</sup> Therefore the overseer/supervisor (*episkopos*) must be without reproach (*anepileptos\**), husband of one wife (\*), moderate in drinking (*nephalios\**), self-controlled (*sophron*), respectable (*kosmios\**), a lover of strangers (*philoxenos*), an able teacher (*didaktikos\**), <sup>3</sup> not addicted to wine (*paroinos\**), not pugnacious (*plektes\**), but gentle/tolerant (*epieikes*), not contentious (*amachos\**), not loving money (*aphilarguros*). <sup>4</sup> being a good steward (*proistanai*) of their own house (*oikos*), having children in subjection (*hypotage*) with all dignity (*semnotes*). <sup>5</sup> But if anyone does not know how to be a steward (*proistanai*) of their own house, how will they take care of God's assembly (*ekklesia*)?

<sup>6</sup> They must not be a new plant/recent convert (*neophytos\**) in order that they may not, having become puffed up, fall into a judgment (*krima*) of the accuser (*diabolos*). <sup>7</sup> but they must have a good testimony (*martyria*) from those outside in order that they may not fall into a disgrace (*oneidismos*) and a trap of the accuser/prosecutor (*diabolos*).

<sup>8</sup> Servants (*diakonos*) likewise: dignified (*semnos*), not double-tongued (*dilogos\**), not given to much wine, not greedy for shameful gain (*aischrokerdes\**), <sup>9</sup> holding to the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience (*syneidesis*). <sup>10</sup> And these also must be evaluated (*dokimazein*) first and then let them serve (*diakonein*) if they have no charges against them (*anenkletos*).

<sup>11</sup> Women (servants) (*gyne*) likewise: dignified (*semnos*), not accusers (*diabolos*), moderate in drinking (*nephalios\**), faithful (*pistos*) in all things.

<sup>12</sup> Let servants (*diakonos*) be husbands of one wife, being good stewards (*proistanai*) of children and their own houses. <sup>13</sup> For those who have served (*diakonein*) well are gaining a good step forward for themselves and great boldness (*parresia*) in faith that is in Christ Jesus.

## 1 Corinthians 7:32-34

<sup>32</sup> I want you to be free from anxieties: The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; <sup>33</sup> but he who has married is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, <sup>34</sup> and he is divided. The unmarried woman or one never married...

## 1 Timothy 5:17-18

<sup>17</sup> Let elders (*presbyteros*) who are good stewards/leaders (*proistanai*) be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard in word (*logos*) and teaching (*didaskalia*). <sup>18</sup> For the scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," [Deut 25:4; 1Cor 9:9] and, "The worker deserves his pay." [Luke 10:7; 1Cor 9:14]

## 1 Timothy 5:9-10

<sup>9</sup> Let a widow be selected/enrolled (*katalegein*) when she has reached at least sixty years old, wife of one husband, <sup>10</sup> testified to by good works, if she has nourished children, if she has welcomed strangers,

if she has washed feet of holy ones, if she has gone to the aid of those suffering, if she has followed as a disciple in every good work.

### Hebrews 10:32-34

<sup>32</sup> But remember ... when you endured a harsh conflict of suffering <sup>33</sup> At times you were publicly exposed to abuse/reproach (*oneidismos*) and afflictions, at other times you came to share with others who were treated in that way. <sup>34</sup> For in fact you shared the sufferings of those in prison, and you accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy ...

### Hebrews 13:17

<sup>17</sup> Have confidence (*peithein*) in those who lead (*hegesthai*) you and defer to them, for they are keeping watch over your lives (*psyché*) as those who give account, in order that they may do this with joy and not groaning, for that would be of no benefit to you.

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## Developing Leadership in Early Christian Communities

The NT has a range of *descriptions* for leadership in the early communities of believers. There is an interplay between everyday and church language (*episkopos*= supervisor, overseer, into “bishop”) (*presbyteros*= elder, later transmuted into priest) (*diakonos* = servant, deacon). Jerusalem: apostles, elders, presided over by James, Jesus’ brother. Antioch: prophets and teachers. Paul appointed new converts as “elders” (Act 14:23). Philippi used the language of supervisors/overseers and servants (bishops & deacons). Many assemblies were evidently led by those in whose house they met (Mary, Lydia, Priscilla & Aquila, Titius Justus, Chloe). Paul usually describes leadership in terms of gifts of grace (*charisma*) with a range of functions (Rm 12). He never speaks of elders till 1 Timothy and Titus, near the end of his life.

## Paul’s Instructions to Timothy and Titus.

In our own tradition, the descriptions of elders in 1Tim and Titus have often been the law, a kind of checklist, discussed and debated but controlling. We looked for a binding pattern and these texts were explicit enough to override descriptions of leadership in other letters. It is important to ask what Paul intends in these texts. They’re very important as they show Paul dealing very explicitly with situations in Ephesus and Crete. What are we to learn? Puzzles: Why write this to Timothy and Titus, who have worked with him for 15-18 yrs and served as his representative in many difficult situations? Don’t they know? Why must elders be married, when Paul earlier urged Corinthians to remain unmarried? Who is the “*diabolos*”? Why must pagans speak well of the overseer? The church faced dangers on two fronts, from heresies forbidding marriage, denying resurrection, etc., and from growing danger from the state under Nero. They were vulnerable to accusations of abuse/disgrace (*oneidismos*) by outsiders. Paul faced this in Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, but it became a general danger. Paul assumes Timothy and Titus know the spiritual gifts needed for leadership like Rm 12:4-10. He is listing the particular needs he sees in the troubled groups in Ephesus and Crete. They face outside danger and need leaders who present a face to the threatening world that can protect the life/existence of the community, thus husband, good family, praised by pagans. Diversity of leadership came in round-about ways: widows who manifested pastoral gifts.

## Restoring New Testament Christianity

Our challenge is to do as Paul did for Ephesus and Crete: to evaluate the situation and need of the community in the light of the Gospel and specific life. Restoring NT is not to treat 1Tim as a checklist law, but to do what Paul did for NYC with our gifts, challenges, possibilities.