

Leadership for a Community Under Challenge

Thomas Robinson, *Life Together in a Difficult World 3*, March 1, 2020

1 Timothy 3:1-7

¹ Faithful (*pistos*) is the word: "If anyone aspires to **oversight** (*episkope*), they desire an excellent work. ² Therefore the **overseer** (*episkopos*) must be

without any reproaches (*anepileptos**),
husband of one wife (*),
moderate in drinking (*nephalios**),
self-controlled (*sophron*),
respectable (*kosmios**),
a lover of strangers (*philoxenos*),
an able teacher (*didaktikos**),
³ not addicted to wine (*paroinos**),
not pugnacious (*plektes**),
but gentle/tolerant (*epieikes*),
not contentious (*amachos**),
not loving money (*aphilarguros*).

⁴ being a **good steward** (*proistanai*) of their own house (*oikos*), having children in **subjection** (*hypotage*) with all **honor** (*semnotes*) – ⁵ if anyone doesn't know how to be a steward (*proistanai*) of their own house, how will they take care of God's assembly (*ekklesia*)? –

⁶ not a **new convert** (*neophytos**) in order that they may not, having become puffed up, fall into a **criminal charge** (*krima*) of the **accuser** (*diabolos*).

⁷ It's necessary to have an **excellent testimony** (*martyria*) **from those outside** in order that they not fall into an **accusation of shame** (*oneidismos*) as a **trap** of the **accuser** (*diabolos*).

1 Timothy 5:9-10

⁹ Let a **widow** be selected (*katalegein*) when she has reached not less than **sixty years**, **wife of one husband***, ¹⁰ testified to by **good works**, if she has **reared children** (*teknotrophein**), if she has **welcomed strangers** (*xenodochein**), if she has **washed feet** of God's people, if she has gone to the **aid of those who are being oppressed**, if she has **followed** as a disciple **in every good work**.

Titus 1:5-9

⁵ For this reason I left you in Crete so that you can to set in order what's lacking and and to organize **elders** (*presbyteros*) city by city, **as I directed you**: ⁶ if anyone is **without accusations** against them (*anenkletos*), a **husband of one wife**, having **faithful children**, not under an accusation of **recklessness** or being **undisciplined**. ⁷ For it's necessary for the **overseer** (*episkopos*) to be **without accusation** against them, as a steward for God, not **self-willed** (*authades**), not **prone to anger** (*orgilos**), not **addicted to wine** (*paroinos**), not **pugnacious** (*plektes**), not greedy for **shameful gain** (*aischrokerdes**), ⁸ but rather a **lover of strangers** (*philoxenos*), a lover of **good**, **self-controlled** (*sophron*), **just** (*dikaios*), **devout** (*hosios*), **disciplined** (*enkrates**), ⁹ with a firm grip on the **faithful message** according to the **teaching** (*didache*), so that he will be able to exhort people with **healthy instruction** and correct those who speak against (us).

2 Timothy 3:1-5

¹ ...In these last days difficult seasons will come. ² For people will be **lovers of themselves**, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemers, dishonoring parents, without gratitude, unholy, ³ without affection, implacable, **accusers** (*diabolos*), without gentleness, without love of good, ⁴ those who **hand over others**, **reckless**, loving their own pleasure rather than loving God, ⁵ **maintaining an outward form of piety but rejecting its power**. Avoid these people.

1 Corinthians 7:32-34

³² 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**; ³³ but **he who has married** is **anxious about the things of the world**, how he may please his wife, ³⁴ and he is **divided**. The unmarried woman or one never married...

Hebrews 10:32-34

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

Hebrews 13:17

¹⁷ 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.

Reading from a Distance – to Understand and Follow

Paul writes to Timothy in c. 67 after 2 yrs house-arrest in Rome, travel to Spain and back to Aegean area. After Rome's fire in 64, Nero's slaughter of Christians in Rome, made it illegal to be a Christian in the Roman empire. Paul urges them to stay engaged by Faith-Gospel but to pray for emperor & for quiet life with honor. Christians vulnerable to accusation & execution.

We read from our modern post-Christendom, individualism, freedom, more ignored than physically endangered. Our tradition often reads this text as a check-list of laws for church elders.

Challenges in crossing centuries: Givens of Greco-Roman society (1) Patriarchy in law (2) Honor-shame culture based in evaluation of others, (3) Patronage, (4) Polytheism. Christian faith was threatened on all these fronts. People breathed this given reality as they organized life.

Why to Timothy & Titus, who've work with Paul 15+ yrs in difficult situations. Don't they know?

Why should overseers be married? Paul earlier (1 Cor 7) urged staying unmarried, like himself.

Why so much about accusation, conflict, honor and so little about spiritual gifts as earlier.

Why must pagans speak well of the overseer? Who is the "accuser" (*diabolos*, devil, human)?

To understand the language, it helps to understand what's at stake, what Paul is trying to do.

Paul knows Timothy & Titus know the spiritual gifts needed for leadership (Rm 12, 1Cor 12...).

He focuses on particular needs for leadership in the troubled churches in Ephesus & Crete.

They face the new vulnerability to accusation, prison, execution. They face groups who want the assembly to withdraw into a private group of religious speculation & myth. They need leaders of faith who appear to an outside world as honorable members of society: husbands, family honor, not vulnerable to accusation or vice, praised by pagans, able to protect the community.

What about women? Women had spiritual gifts as men did. But women were always by law under a man's authority: father, husband. The society considered it shameful for a woman to lead or even speak. But a widow was no longer under a man's authority. Thus we watch the adoption under pressure of the role of "elder" widows (60+) with lists of qualification for that time.

The pattern of 1 Timothy and Titus did not survive long in early Christianity. Through the 2nd century the Patriarchal structure of Roman society pushed out women, enforced one overseer.

Embodying the Gospel in Day by Day Community Life

How do we follow Paul & follow the scripture. We look at the variety and diversity of structures of community life in the NT. We watch Paul's stress on Spiritual gifts. We watch how he takes very seriously the context and possibilities of the community in their society and guides them to meet the challenges, threats, opportunities open to them. We do in our time as they did.

If we simply enforce in our day their outcomes in the Roman empire (patriarchy, honor/shame) we undermine the very work that Paul is doing in making sure the Gospel is heard by outsiders.