



# TRUTH ON TOUGH TEXTS

EXPOSITIONS OF CHALLENGING SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

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A MINISTRY OF GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

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## MISUNDERSTOOD QUALIFICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

### 1 TIMOTHY 3:2, 4-5; TITUS 1:6

**A**MONG THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD PASSAGES OF Scripture are the two that specify the qualifications for leadership in the Church (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-8). For example, one of the most well-known pastors of our day teaches that these are “the ideal,” that is, no one can measure up to all of them, so we must simply find as many as possible in each candidate. That, however, is a catastrophic error, as has been demonstrated countless times in unqualified leaders through the ages. These are not the *ideal*; they are the *standard*. Paul places God’s standards against what the Ephesians had allowed the leadership to degenerate into in the approximately six years since he had written the Ephesian letter to them. As is true in our own day, some of those leaders were teaching false doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3; 4:1-3, 7; 6:3-5), engaging in “fruitless discussion” (1:6), misusing the law, and even misunderstanding the gospel (1:7-11). Still others were guilty of sin and needed public rebuke (5:20). There were also some women in leadership (2:12) even though this was forbidden by God’s Word, which Paul also notes in verse 11 (we addressed this issue in a previous TOTT).<sup>1</sup>

These two passages list no less than 24 such qualifications. I like to view them in four categories. There is one “vocational” qualification (his calling, 1 Tim. 3:1), which we have also addressed in a previous TOTT because it, too, is quite misunderstood.<sup>2</sup> We then see five “social” qualifications (husband of one wife, hospitality, ruling his house, good report, faithful children), four “spiritual” (able to teach well, not a novice, lover of good men, holding fast the Word), and finally 14 “personal,” that is, having to do with his character.

In addition to his calling, there are four other qualifications that are often misunderstood or misapplied.

#### “Blameless” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6)

Topping the list of qualifications is this one overarching, all-embracing one. And what a word it is, although many people are not clear on its meaning. The Greek is *anepilēptos*, a compound of the root *epilambáno*, “to seize,” and the alpha negative. So, the literal idea is “not to be seized,” or “not to be laid hold of.” There must be nothing in his life that anyone can take hold of and criticize *justly*. Every pastor has had an

accusation hurled at him, but the question is: was it just, truthful, and accurate? One Greek expositor provides an excellent application: “It is not enough for him to be not criminal: he must be one against whom it is impossible to bring any charge of wrong doing such as could stand impartial examination.”<sup>3</sup> A different word is used in Titus 1:6 but means basically the same. In addition to “blameless,” this can also be translated “above reproach” (the ESV and NASB) and “beyond censure,” which I personally like very much.

Now, being above reproach obviously implies that he is of the highest moral *standing* and holy *state*. Daniel is perhaps our best example. When his opponents sought to discredit him by finding something in his life they could use to scandalize his name, they found nothing (Dan. 6:4).

So, if I may put it this way: No, we cannot be *perfect*, but we can be *pure*. No, we are not without *failing*, but can be without *fault*. It is, therefore, from this first overarching principle that Paul goes on to specify the other 13 characteristics of moral character.

#### “Husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6)

*First*, before addressing this statement, it needs to be re-emphasized in our day like never before that all the adjectives (qualifications) in these passages are *masculine*. Likewise, the Greek words for “elder” (*presbuteros*), “bishop” (*episkopos*), “pastor” (*poimēn*), and “teacher” (*didáskalos*) are all masculine. Again, as we have addressed before in this publication, the inescapable truth is that a woman cannot be an elder (bishop, pastor), preacher, or public teacher. Many today need to face the incontrovertible fact that women are disqualified from leadership in the church. This is a very unpopular view, but it is what Scripture everywhere teaches. The plain and simple fact is that we find not a single woman pastor-teacher, evangelist, bishop, or elder. Also like the OT, no NT author was a woman, nor do we find a record of even one sermon or even a single teaching by a woman.<sup>4</sup>

*Second*, we turn now to this qualification: **Husband of one wife**. This also shows that this office is for men only—how could a woman be the husband of one wife (although this too has been blatantly redefined in recent years)?

Many have problems with this verse simply because they are not honest with the language. The Greek phrase *mias gunaikos andra* literally means “a one-woman man” or “a one woman’s husband.” Contrary to a common misconception, divorce is not the issue here. In fact, Paul is not referring to a leader’s marital status in any way, as there is no definite article in the Greek. The issue is much broader than that, as Paul addresses a man’s basic moral character in general and his sexual behavior in particular. Just because a man is married does not automatically make him a one-woman man. Many men are unfaithful to their wife. It is certainly admirable that he is married to one woman, but sexual purity is not assured, rather it is a matter of the will.

It is interesting that Paul actually begins his list with this quality (after “blameless”), because it is here that more men have failed than in any other area. In one way or another, many have fallen far short of the one-woman man standard and thereby harmed or even ruined their ministry.

So pivotal is this requirement, that several interpretations of **husband of one wife** have been used to soften this standard. By far the most common view is that this man cannot be a polygamist. Historically, however, this simply was not the case. Polygamy was not a problem in Ephesus. As one Greek authority states: “Even though we may find numerous traces of polygamy . . . in the Greek myths, monogamy predominated in the Greek world in the historic period. Morality in marriage was strict. . . . Greek marriage was monogamous.”<sup>5</sup> Greek literature, in fact, bears this out. Odysseus, the hero of Homer’s writings, had only one wife and they were devoted to each other. Since a divorce was easy to obtain, and because most sexual activity was outside marriage anyway, polygamy was rare in Roman society and rarer still among first century Jews. Added to that, a polygamist could not even be a *member* of the church, much less be a *leader*. All this was so obvious, that for Paul to make it a qualification would have made no sense to Timothy.

Not only is the polygamy view wrong historically, but it is also refuted by the language. Greek born and educated scholar Spiros Zohhiatas wrote:

The total context speaks of the moral conduct of the bishop and the deacon.

The [expression] *mias gunaikos*, of one wife, is attributive [genitive], a husband who pays attention only to his wife and not to others, a one-woman husband. This has nothing to do with having been the husband at any time in the past of a woman other than one’s present wife. The opposite expression is found in 1 Tim. 5:9 and is in reference to a widow worthy of the church’s help, “having been the wife of one man,” not having been flirtatious while her husband was alive.<sup>6</sup>

Another view that has been offered here is that Paul is forbidding a man to remarry after the death his wife. But remember, Paul is not talking about marital status but rather moral character. Besides, Scripture unambiguously states that, “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39). In some cases, in fact, Paul not only condoned remarriage but even encouraged it. He expected and encouraged younger widows to remarry and raise a family: “I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house,

give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (1 Tim. 5:14). As for men, Scripture likewise nowhere forbids proper remarriage.

Still another view offered here is that this qualification forbids a divorced man from spiritual leadership, whether it be a pastor or a deacon. But once again, everything about this context clearly speaks of moral character, not marital status. While this has been a debate through the ages, the Bible simply does not forbid all divorce or remarriage. In Matthew 5:31–32 and 19:9, our Lord inarguably permitted remarriage when a divorce was caused by adultery.<sup>7</sup> By inspiration, Paul added another valid reason for divorce and remarriage, namely, desertion by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:15). Even though God hates all divorce (Mal. 2:16), in these two situations, His loving grace is upon the innocent party. So, while this issue will arise only rarely, if a divorce was based on one of these two grounds, it is not in itself a stain on a man’s moral character and does not disqualify him. Any other grounds, however, most certainly does.

*So, a one-woman man is a man devoted in his heart, mind, and body to that one woman who is his wife and the love of his life. His devotion, delight, and desire is her alone, and he stays sexually pure in both thought and behavior.*

This was especially significant in the context of Ephesus, where sexual sin permeated not only the social life but also the religious life via the pagan cults. Most of the congregation, in fact, would have been converted out of that sexual cesspool. So, as long as that behavior was a thing of the past before conversion, the man would be qualified for leadership. If he fell back into that while a leader, however, he disqualified himself and be permanently removed from leadership.

How many leaders have we seen in recent years who have fallen into sexual sin but have either continued on in ministry without interruption because they “repented” or have been removed only temporarily but back in leadership soon after? Scripture is clear that the reproach of sexual sin never goes away: “The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; he who would destroy himself does it. Wounds and disgrace he will find, and his reproach will not be blotted out” (Prov. 6:32–33). Writing to another church that was surrounded by sexual sin even more severe than Ephesus, Paul wrote, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27). The man who cannot control the most basic bodily drives permanently disqualifies himself from leadership.

### **“Ruling his own house” (1 Tim. 3:4–5) “Faithful children” (Titus 1:6)**

How a man leads his home (or fails to do so) speaks volumes about how he would lead a church. Historically, Paul has in mind the typical householder of Greco-Roman society, who ordinarily would have been a citizen. The normal authority structure of the household was strictly patriarchal, and at each level subordination to the householder was expected. Anything less than this kind of obedience to the householder was a sign of disorder and even political subversion, for the stability of the household was regarded as fundamental to the well-being of society as a whole.

The Greek behind **rule** (*proistēmi*) means “to preside, have

authority over, rule." It is extremely significant that the same word appears in I Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." This clearly shows the indissoluble link between leading the home and the church.

To further emphasize the word **rule**, Paul adds the word **well**. The Greek *kalos* is rich and can also be translated "excellently." Its full impact is displayed when compared with the common word *agathos*, which means "inherently," "morally," or "practically good." *Kalos* goes further to add the idea of aesthetically good, beautiful, and appealing to the eye. A pastor, then, must be one whose leadership in the home is not only *intrinsically* good, but also *visibly* good, *beautifully* good, a home that others would want.

**House**, then, is *oikos*, which is used here as a metaphor to picture more than just the physical structure. It indicates *everything* that pertains to the home: finances, household management, people, and resources. He must prove that he rules all these well.

Further, a church leader must keep **his children in subjection with all gravity**. **Subjection** (*hopotagē*) is a military term that speaks of lining up in rank under one in authority. A pastor's children are to be respectful, well disciplined, and believers (Titus 1:6). **Gravity** (*semnotes*) indicates dignity, seriousness, reverence, and respect. A pastor's children must bring honor to their parents. The obvious implication is that his family is ordered, disciplined, and not rebellious, as Paul adds in Titus 1:6, **not accused of riot or unruly**.

So, this principle solemnly demonstrates that it is possible for a man to meet all the moral character qualifications Paul lists yet still be disqualified because of his evident lack of control, discipline, and leadership in the home. This is also true of being a deacon, as stated in 3:12.

### "Not a novice" (1 Tim. 3:6)

Here is by far one of the most violated standards of our day. One of the most common sites in the Church nowadays is Bible teaching being carried on by anyone who simply wants to do so. Regardless of James' warning, "My brethren, be not many [teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (Jas. 3:1), many churches allow most anyone to teach a Sunday School class, or other teaching responsibility, simply because they volunteered, even if they are a new believer. Many think they are qualified simply because they read a couple of commentaries.

The word **novice**, however, quickly condemns this permissive modern trend. It comes from an interesting Greek word, *neophutos*, which appears only here in the NT. It was used in Greek to refer to a newly planted tree, hence its metaphorical use here. It is from this word, of course, that we get our English word "neophyte": a beginner, rookie, trainee, tenderfoot, greenhorn, or amateur. As John Calvin observed: "There being many men of distinguished ability and learning who at that time were brought to the faith, Paul forbids that such persons shall be admitted to the office of a bishop [pastor or elder], as soon as they have made profession of Christianity."<sup>8</sup> Why? For two critically important reasons.

*First*, a neophyte has not been adequately trained, tested, and ordained. We see this often. I have personally met

preachers whose testimony after being saved was, "I was doing my regular job one day and preaching the next." Is that not deeply troubling? Let us stop and think very seriously about this. For example, how many of us would want to hear our surgeon say, "I was doing my regular job one day and doing heart by-pass surgery the next?"—are you going to go with him or get a second opinion? Or how about this: "I was doing my regular job one day and building suspension bridges the next?"—are you going to drive on that bridge? Or even more ludicrous: would we take an army private just out of basic training and put him in command of a division?

Are these outrageous and totally inappropriate comparisons? Not at all. They are precisely the same as what Paul is saying about putting a novice in leadership. History bears this out in frightening detail.

Charles Finney (1792–1875), whom we have detailed before,<sup>9</sup> is among the most horrific examples. He was a lawyer one day and a preacher the next. With no theological training whatsoever—he was, in fact, totally unteachable, refused to attend any school where he could receive training, and totally rejected the Doctrines of Sovereign Grace—and with zero biblical qualification for ministry, Finney took it upon himself to start conducting "revivals" in upstate New York soon after his "conversion." Just one of his "new measures" was his creation of the "anxious bench," the front bench being reserved for those who were "anxious" about their souls and could come there to be exhorted (and pressured). This actually became the staple of modern evangelism we call the "altar call" (*despite the fact that there is no altar in the NT*) or "going forward," in which people are pressured to "make a decision for Jesus," "a commitment to Christ," and other clichés that have been adopted as though they were based on Scripture. "Finneyism" is, in fact, one of the major contributors to today's predominantly Arminian theology. All of this, and much more, comes right from his refusal to be trained or even listen to anyone who tried to counsel him, such as his own pastor, the godly and doctrinally sound George W. Gale (1789–1861). Further still, not only did he reject cardinal doctrines, such as justification by faith alone (*sola fide*), but in his writings on revival, he stated: "A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means, as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means."<sup>10</sup> All that, and much more, is gross heresy. To call Finney a novice is perhaps insulting to other novices.

Sadly, Dwight L. Moody (1837–99) is another example. With almost no education at all, he was a shoe salesman one day and a preacher the next. While he certainly preached the true Gospel (in marked contrast to Finney), and became one of the greatest so-called evangelists in history, and certainly saw many come to true conversion, many of his methods were unbiblical. This flowed from his theology and philosophy, which are captured by his own words, "It doesn't matter how you get a man to God as long as you get him there." Like Finney, his appeal and approach was emotionalism through music and dramatic preaching, which was driven by stories and anecdotes and devoid of doctrine. To him "the Bible was a source of simple quotes, often treated without reference to their contexts."<sup>11</sup> He was untrained, never ordained, and actually rejected theological studies. John Farwell, a Moody

supporter of that day, recounts that after an offer of ordination by the Congregational Church, Moody boasted, "I have never been through college or a theological seminary, except to go in one door and out the other. I therefore cannot accept your offer and do justice to your rules and my own judgment."<sup>12</sup> Is that not troubling? One other writer is dead on target with this summary:

Dwight Moody was a wonderful servant of God. But his work, without his intending it, added to a gradual transition in the culture of American Christianity, changing it from a theology-grounded faith to an emotion-based event. We see the long-term result in our day. Feelings rather than doctrine rule the roost in American Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

Such are the results of a novice.

Billy Sunday (1862–1935) is still another sad example. He was a professional baseball player turned "evangelist." While he was certainly anchored in the Gospel, basically theologically sound, and committed to the inerrancy of Scripture (which was under attack in that era, as it is today), he was a showman. He once

allowed chorus girls from a Broadway production to sing on stage at a revival meeting. The jazzy number and their swaying bodies caused dismay among the audience. But Sunday did not fear sensation. He even hired a circus giant to serve as an usher in one of his tent campaigns. In 1916, Sunday also appeared with Al Jolson, one of the most well-known stage acts of the period, in Boston. Jolson and his crew entertained the Sunday revival crowd for more than an hour.<sup>14</sup>

But it is perhaps Sunday's pulpit presence that is the most distressing. He gyrated, stood on the pulpit, ran from one end of the platform to the other, pretended to slide into home plate by diving across the stage, and even smashed chairs to emphasize his points. Such things often brought applause from the crowd—after all, he was the best show in town. But such pulpit antics simply cannot be condoned, defended, or justified. Nowhere does Scripture imply that kind of behavior from one who proclaims the great solemn truths of God. The pulpit is a place of *seriousness*, not *slapstick*, a sacred calling that reflects *dignity* not *disorder*. Further, applying Finney's invention of the "altar call," Sunday referred to this as "hitting the sawdust trail," since the tents and wooden tabernacles were covered with sawdust to suppress the dust of dirt floors. Further still, it cannot be ignored that Sunday went out of his way to avoid criticizing Roman Catholicism, even meeting with the famous Cardinal James Gibbons (1834–1921), Archbishop of Baltimore, during the 1916 Baltimore campaign. Worse, contact cards filled out by "trail hitters" were returned to the church or denomination the writers had indicated as their choice, including Catholic and Unitarian (another "Billy" would do the same decades later). One writer again well sums up Billy Sunday:

Sunday preached to tens of millions of people in 200 campaigns. He claimed to have won almost 100,000 people to Christ in New York in 1917 alone. In some small towns, 20 percent of the people allegedly came to Christ. But even in that age, when intense emotion was often taken as a sign of conversion, people wondered how many of Sunday's converts were genuine. God surely used the gospel Sunday preached, but many were counted merely for marching in his patriotic, anti-

booze parades, or passing through the line to shake his hand. After the show ended and the emotion faded, few joined a church or changed their lives.<sup>15</sup>

Again, such things flow from the mind of the novice.

Now, please do not misunderstand those illustrations (and, sadly, others we could cite). My intention is not unkindness, rather discernment. I readily admit that God used these men and others to bring people to Christ, but it was in spite of their methods. It simply must not be ignored that untold, incalculable damage has been done by novices in leadership, and it is still going on today.

*Second*, in addition to not being trained, Paul gives another reason why the neophyte must not be allowed to lead—**lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil**. Since one of the great dangers facing any leader is **pride**, humility is an essential qualification. Placing *any* man in a leadership role can expose him to the temptation of pride, but it is a far greater temptation for the novice. Continuing John Calvin's comment noted earlier,

[Paul] shows how great would be the danger; for it is evident that they are commonly vain, and full of ostentation, and, in consequence of this, haughtiness and ambition will drive them headlong. What Paul says we experience; for "novices" have not only impetuous fervor and bold daring, but are also puffed up with foolish confidence, as if they could fly beyond the clouds. Consequently, it is not without reason that they are excluded from the honor of a bishopric, till, in process of time their proud temper shall be subdued.<sup>16</sup>

That would be especially true, in fact, if the novice were elevated in an established, well-respected church such as Ephesus. The new (or inadequately trained) believer is more likely to see such a position of leadership as an opportunity for personal advancement and to fail to understand what church leadership is about and what God demands. So, no matter how spiritual, zealous, knowledgeable, talented, or even gifted in teaching a new convert might be, he is not spiritually mature. Maturity requires time, training, and experience, and the new convert is simply not ready. There is nothing wrong with being a new convert—that is where we all started. A leader, however, must not be.

**Lifted up** (*tuphoō*) comes from *túphos* meaning "smoke." The verb literally means "to wrap in smoke" and so metaphorically "to puff up." So, to put a new convert (or immature believer) into spiritual leadership (i.e., a pastor or deacon) will quite likely puff him up. The result of such **pride** is that he will **fall into the condemnation of the devil**, that is, the same condemnation pronounced on the devil. And what was that? The Greek construction here (the "objective genitive") simply indicates that the novice falls into the same *kind* of judgment pronounced by God upon Satan. The language is further supported by the context, which emphasizes the peril of pride. Pride was Satan's downfall. While he was the highest-ranking angel, he was not content with that "state" (cf. Phil. 4:11–13), so he tried to exalt himself. In Isaiah 14:12–14, in fact, we read "I will" five times (cf. Ezek. 28:11–19). As a result, that "anointed cherub," who was "full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty" (Ezek. 28:12, 14), was "cast . . . as profane out of the mountain of God" (v. 16; cf. Rev. 12:9). The man who is placed in spiritual leadership before he has been

called, qualified, and trained faces similar danger. Proverbs 16:18 warns, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." There is only one cure for *pride*, and that is *humility*. Note Matthew 23:11-12: "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." How tragic it is when God must tear down leaders the Church has lifted up; more disastrous still is the damage it leaves behind.

Some have wondered why this qualification does not appear in the list in Titus 1. That we do not know. It might have been that this situation was a pressing problem in Ephesus but not as much so in the churches on Crete and needed Paul's reinforcement. Whatever the reason, the principle stands as a vital requirement for leadership.

Finally, I should also interject, in an obvious reference to ordination (which we have addressed before<sup>17</sup>), Paul adds in 1 Timothy 5:22: "Lay hands suddenly on no man." A man must prove himself in His calling, character, and training. If we fail in this, we are sowing to the wind, and we "shall reap the whirlwind" (Hosea 8:7).

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**NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> TOT #45 (April 2009) "What Does Scripture Say About Women Teachers?"  
<sup>2</sup> TOT #18 (Jan. 2007) "Is There a So-Called "Call" to Ministry?"

- <sup>3</sup> William Robertson Nicoll (Ed.), *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Eerdmans, 1960; originally published, 1897), 1 Tim. 3:2.  
<sup>4</sup> In addition to note 1 above, see also TOT #19 and 20 (Feb. and Mar. 2007), "Bishop, Elder, and Pastor."  
<sup>5</sup> Colin Brown (Gen. Ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Zondervan, 1975), Vol. 2, 575.  
<sup>6</sup> Spiros Zohhiatas, *Hebrew and Greek Key Study Bible*, Revised Edition (AMG Publishers, 1991), note on 1 Tim. 3:2. Also, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament* (AMG. 1992), 177 (entry #G435).  
<sup>7</sup> Some teachers insist that divorce could only be initiated during the "betrothal period," but this is not only unsupportable biblically but also historically. See TOT #57 (April 2010) for the reader question, "Do Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 Refer to the Betrothal Period?"  
<sup>8</sup> *Calvin's Commentaries*, comment on 1 Tim. 3:6.  
<sup>9</sup> TOT #123 (Mar./Apr. 2020), "The Tragic Legacy of Charles Finney."  
<sup>10</sup> Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Leavitt, Lord, and Company, 1835), 12.  
<sup>11</sup> Timothy Paul Jones, *Christian History Made Easy* (Rose Publishing, 2009) 162.  
<sup>12</sup> John V. Farwell, *Early Recollections of Dwight L. Moody* (The Winona Publishing Company, 1907), 21.  
<sup>13</sup> Rick Cornish, *5 Minute Church Historian* (NavPress, 2005), 245.  
<sup>14</sup> Josh McMullen, *Under the Big Top: Tent Revivalism and American Culture, 1885-1925* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 172.  
<sup>15</sup> Cornish, *5 Minute Church Historian*, 269.  
<sup>16</sup> *Calvin's Commentaries*, comment on 1 Tim. 3:6.  
<sup>17</sup> TOT #130 (May/June 2021), "Ordination to Ministry."

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