



A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

1st Timothy 3:1-7 A Noble Task

I am reading from 1st Timothy chapter three verses one through seven. If you're using one of the pew Bibles, the passage is located on page 991...1st Timothy 3:1-7.

This is what God's Word says:

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 3:1**...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.

Let's pray.

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

This last Tuesday, October 14, 2014, Mark Driscoll, the senior pastor at Mar's Hill Church in Seattle, resigned his position at the end of a two month sabbatical. He did so after the remaining elders in the church undertook an extensive investigation into growing allegations of his own pastoral misconduct. The investigation included, **"over a thousand hours of research, the interviewing of more than fifty people, and the preparing of some 200 pages of information."**¹

After receiving Driscoll's resignation, the elders and overseers involved with the investigation thought it important to publically state the following:²

1. We concluded that Pastor Mark has, at times, been guilty of arrogance, responding to conflict with a quick temper and harsh speech, and leading the staff and elders in a domineering manner. While we believe Mark needs to continue to address these areas in his life, we do not believe him to be disqualified from pastoral ministry.
2. Pastor Mark has never been charged with any immorality, illegality or heresy. Most of the charges involved attitudes and behaviors reflected by a domineering style of leadership.
3. We found some of the accusations against Pastor Mark to be altogether unfair or untrue.
4. Other charges had been previously been addressed by Pastor Mark, privately and publicly. Indeed, he had publicly confessed and apologized for a number of the charges against him, some of which occurred as long as 14 years ago.

5. We commend Mark for acting upon the vision God gave him to start Mars Hill Church and for his ministry of faithfully teaching the Word of God for the past 18 years. We commit to pray for him, for Grace, and for their children as they transition from ministry at Mars Hill Church.

Someone, I'm not quite sure who, leaked a copy of Driscoll's actual resignation letter to the public. Religious reporter for the Religious News Service, Sarah Pulliam Bailey, posted Driscoll's letter to the service's website last Wednesday the 15th.

In his letter of resignation, Driscoll wrote this:

Prior to and during this process there have been no charges of criminal activity, immorality or heresy, any of which could clearly be grounds for disqualification from pastoral ministry. Other issues, such as aspects of my personality and leadership style, have proven to be divisive within the Mars Hill context, and I do not want to be the source of anything that might detract from our church's mission to lead people to a personal and growing relationship with Jesus Christ.³

Now the one thing I do not want to do is to spend any time at all this morning trashing Mark Driscoll. To me, his resignation is an occasion for great sadness. I have not personally followed his ministry or as far as I know ever even actually heard him speak. I have not read any of his books. I do know that he has been engaged in a number of conferences with men I respect very much and I see no reason to doubt their judgment in including him in their venues. My son, Gage, has kept me apprised over the years of Driscoll's career and influence, and of a number of the controversies in which he has been engaged. In fact, Gage has listened to a great number of Driscoll's sermons and has greatly profited from them, I think. Gage even visited the Mar's Hill church once while on a business

trip to Seattle. The fact that Driscoll has been any sort of instrument at all in Gage's spiritual life and sanctification has caused me always to want to give him the benefit of the doubt. I think it has even caused me to have a bit of affection for him. If that seems the least bit strange, that I could have affection for someone I have never read or heard let me just ask you to wait until you're an old man or woman to pass judgment. Old people just tend to like men and women of the faith that bless their children.

That having been said, there is one line from Driscoll's resignation letter that troubles me. Let me repeat it for you.

Prior to and during this process there have been no charges of criminal activity, immorality or heresy, any of which could clearly be grounds for disqualification from pastoral ministry.⁴

Here's why that troubles me. It troubles me because it fails to take into account the high standard of conduct required for the New Testament office of overseer, or elder. That is, I don't think that a lack of criminal activity, or immorality, or even heresy necessarily qualifies man to be an overseer. The standard for being a New Testament overseer is a bit higher than that, I think.

You see the New Testament views the office of overseer as a high calling, a worthy aspiration, a noble task, and because it does it gives significant attention to the kind of behavior, the kind of character an overseer in Christ's church must display and possess. Let me say it this way. **"The reason Paul thinks an overseer's behavior and character matter is because being an overseer is a noble task."**

And Paul does more than just say that simply. He wants to emphasize that point so strongly that he fires off a cannon blast right before he makes that point. That canon blast occurs in the first part of 1st Timothy 3:1.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 3:1**...The saying is trustworthy:

Now you may be thinking, **“Seriously, Tom...does that seem like a canon blast to you?”** Actually it does. It seems like a canon blast to me because Paul was a man speaking under the direction and superintendence of the Holy Spirit. Everything he said was important...every sentence...even single word...every nuance of every word. So whenever he added a phrase that had the effect of saying, **“Now this is particularly important”** I think he is firing off a canon shot to make sure he has our attention.

I think the old NIV recognizes that that is what is happening in the first part of 1st Timothy 3:1 which is the reason why they add the word **“here”** to the text. They editors of the NIV were trying to make the point that Paul is being quite emphatic when he says, **“Here is a trustworthy saying.”** You see there is no **“here”** in the original text. The phrase is quite literally, **“Faithful is the word.”** But the NIV adds the word **“here”** to give the nuance that what is about to follow really is a big deal, is really important. And what is that thing that is so important? Look at the last part of 1st Timothy 3:1.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 3:1**... If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

Now what Paul does in the next six verses is to lay out what many commentators call a duty list. That is, he lays out the requirements for being an overseer. He explains the standards for being an overseer both by listing the positive virtues required and by pointing out the negative behaviors to be avoided.

I want you to think of the passage this way.

I want you to imagine Paul shooting off a flare on a dark night...a flare that metaphorically screams out, **"Your attention please!"**

He then follows that with the important statement or principle he wants to get across which in this is this, **"If anybody desires the office of an overseer, he desires a noble task."**

He then follows that with the requirements and prohibitions related to this wonderfully noble task.

Again it's something like this: **"Boom! Your attention please. Should anyone want to be overseer, that's a very good thing. It is, indeed, a noble task. That having been said, there are a few caveats. There is, in fact, both some prescribed behavior and some proscribed behavior. There are some things such a person must do and some character traits such a person must display just as there are some things such a person must not do as well as some character traits such a person must not display."**

That is, I think, the gist of what is going on in 1st Timothy 3:1-7.

I've tried to reduce all that to one single generative idea, **"The reason an overseer's behavior and character matter is because being overseer is a noble task."**

Now that means, I think, that I am obligated to answer three questions in the time we have left. First, I think I ought to try to answer the question as to exactly what an overseer is or was. Secondly, I think I ought to try, perhaps, to answer the question as to why being an overseer was a noble task. And then thirdly, I suppose I ought to answer the question as to what the biblical standards for being such an overseer actually were and are. Still along the way I want you to keep this one idea firmly in your thought, **"The reason an overseer's behavior and character matter is because being an overseer is a noble task."**

Alright then, what exactly was an overseer?

An overseer was someone chosen or appointed to oversee a congregation in the church of God. We might do well to think of the word **"overseer"** in the same way we think of the word **"steward."** That is, we might do well to think of someone managing or taking oversight of one of Christ's flocks. Now the surprising thing about the word **"overseer"** here in 1st Timothy 3:1 is that it is not the word *πρεσβύτερος*...the word from which we get both the word **"elder"** and the word **"Presbyterian."** Rather the word here is the word *ἐπισκοπῆς* from which we get the modern word **"Episcopal"** or the modern word **"Episcopalian"** which both point to a type of church hierarchy or government that has as one of its foundational elements the prominence of the role of the **"bishop."** Now what is strange about this word *ἐπισκοπῆς* is that it seems to be Paul's preferred word for church leaders. I think I hoped Paul's preferred word for church leaders would

be πρεσβύτερος or “**elder.**” Now, it’s not that Paul only uses the word ἐπισκοπῆς to describe church overseers. He doesn’t. He also uses the word πρεσβύτερος. But when he does, he generally uses it to mean “**old man.**” Whenever he refers to a leader in the church, he prefers to use the word ἐπισκοπῆς, “**overseer,**” rather than the word πρεσβύτερος or “**elder.**”

Now let me take a minute and digress and talk about the three major forms of modern church government. Those three types are: congregational, Episcopal, and Presbyterian.

A congregational form of government is a form of church government in which everyone has an equal vote. In that sense, at least theoretically, it is quite democratic. Now there are a number of modern churches that claim to be fully congregational in terms of their church government. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a large number of Baptist churches for example have claimed to be congregational. Usually, however, they are not actually congregational because a truly congregational form of government is pretty unwieldy. That is, it makes things difficult to get done. In such cases, there always seems to be just too many cooks in the kitchen...too many people trying to direct the affairs of the church. Usually, such churches really tend to be episcopal in their government without actually knowing or admitting it. They are congregational theoretically but episcopal practically.

Now the reason that is true is because in the episcopal form of government ultimately one man winds up making the decisions. For all practical purposes, I am going to say that such churches are run by bishops. Now I am not trying to caricature what happens. I am not trying to be critical or judgmental. I am just

trying to get down to cases. In a great many Baptist churches, the ultimate decision maker is the pastor himself. Now it is true, he is chosen by the congregation, but when it gets down to cases he winds up making most of the decisions that the church faces. He, in fact, acts as a bishop...a monarchical bishop as he decides things...as he makes things happen. Now, I singled out the Baptists are usually being episcopal in their actual government, but there are a number of notable exceptions to that rule. For instance, most Reformed Baptists have adopted a Presbyterian model of government. I suspect they would prefer to say they have adopted a New Testament form of government but my point is still the same. Such churches have chosen to have elders lead the church. Both John Piper's old church, Bethlehem Baptist, and Mark Dever's church, Capitol Hill Baptist, have placed the onus of leadership where it should be...on a group of representative elders. For that matter, John MacArthur's church has done the same as well as a host of other Calvinistic, baptistic churches. Such churches are not congregational; nor are they Episcopal. Instead, they have a representative form of government, in which the congregation has selected a number of godly men to oversee and shepherd the church.

Now that having been said, there are a number of denominations that are openly episcopal. The Methodist Church, for example, is episcopal in that it is ruled by bishops, and so is the Anglican or Episcopalian Church. The Roman Catholic Church is also episcopal in its government as well. It obviously has a hierarchy of bishops. That is, it has priests and then bishops governing over them and then it has archbishops governing over its bishops, and then, of course, it has Cardinals governing over its archbishops and finally the Pope governing over all. But make no mistake about it, their form of government is Episcopal.

Finally, there is the Presbyterian form of government. The Presbyterian form of church government is essentially a representative form in which the congregation selects men to represent, lead, and govern the church. The pastor may be the principal shepherd of the church in terms of preaching and teaching and even perhaps in terms of vision but in terms of actual authority he is simply one of the elders in that his vote only counts once. That is, his vote has the same weight as the vote of all the other elders. Today, most Reformed Baptist Churches have adopted this representative or elder form of government, as have most Bible Churches, and as have, thankfully, most Presbyterian churches. It is the form of government we have here at Grace. Any Presbyterian Church that exercises a different form of government should, I think, as a matter of conscience change its name.

Now I am sure you may be asking, **“Well thank you Tom, but why bring all that up?”** The reason I bring all that up is because 1st Timothy 3:1-2 uses the word ἐπισκοπῆς which in our day tends to be associated with the modern idea of **“bishop.”** It does that instead of using the Greek word πρεσβύτερος from which we get the modern word **“elder.”** And if you add to that the fact that the Apostle Paul generally seems to have preferred to use the word ἐπισκοπῆς instead of the word πρεσβύτερος when referring to church overseers it might lead you to ask the question as to whether or not you should begin to address me no longer as Tom but as your eminence.

Oh, I do like the ring of that.

Still, let me put your minds at rest. I think it might be best for you to continue to call me Tom. I say that because the New Testament tends to use the words

interchangeably and I think I can prove it for you rather quickly. But before I do let me add that while Paul seems to prefer the word ἐπισκοπῆς over the word πρεσβύτερος Dr. Luke seems to have preferred things the other way around. That is, he seems to have preferred to use the word πρεσβύτερος instead of the word ἐπισκοπῆς when referring to church leaders and that matters because what we know of Paul outside of Paul's epistles we know principally from the pen of Dr. Luke.⁵

Let me show you what I mean.

Acts chapter 20 contains the account of Paul calling the Ephesian elders down to meet him at Miletus as he is travelling on his way to Jerusalem. I've already refereed to this passage more than once in our study. I hope you are becoming familiar with it. Anyway, look at Acts 20:17.

^{ESV} **Acts 20:17**...Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

This is Dr. Luke's account of what happened.

What follows is Paul explaining to the Ephesian elders what is about to happen. He explains that he is going to Jerusalem and that he expects to be arrested, and that he does not expect to ever see their faces again. It is a very emotional scene...with a lot of tears and a lot hugging and kissing. Anyway, near the end of the scene he admonishes the Ephesian elders to guard the treasure they have there at Ephesus and when he does, lo and behold he chooses not to use the

word *πρεσβύτερος* that Luke used in verse 17 but instead switches to the same word he uses in 1st Timothy 3...the word *ἐπισκοπῆς*. Look at verse 28.

^{ESV} **Acts 20:28** Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

Anyway I hope you can see my point, Dr. Luke calls them “**elders**” in verse 17 while Paul calls the exact same men “**overseers**” in verse 28. In both cases, they are the same men.

Now the funny thing is that even Paul does that same thing. That is, even Paul tends to call such men elders in one place and then overseers in another. Look for example at Titus 1:5.

^{ESV} **Titus 1:5**...This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders (*πρεσβύτερος*) in every town as I directed you-- ⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

You can see here that Paul is calling the leaders of the local churches that Titus has appointed “**elders.**” But if you skip down to verse seven Paul switches and uses the term “**overseers**” which is, of course, the term *ἐπισκοπῆς*.

^{ESV} **Titus 1:7**...For an overseer (*ἐπισκοπῆς*), as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. ¹⁰ For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. ¹¹ They must be

silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

Now you ought to notice that the **“duty list”** here in Titus is almost exactly the same list that we have in our passage in 1st Timothy 3.

Herein endeth the digression.

Now my point has been to explain that overseers are really elders or leaders or stewards of Christ’s church in a particular location. I have not spent anytime, whatsoever, is to differentiate between ruling elders and teaching elders. I haven’t spent any time doing that even though it is an important distinction. I haven’t done so because it is not necessary to understand or explain the text here in 1st Timothy 3. I will do so a bit down the road. Nor have I spent any time addressing the fact that it looks like in the New Testament that more often not elders or overseers were appointed either by the apostles or by apostolic representatives like Timothy or Titus rather than elected which certainly seems more episcopal than presbyterian. I haven’t done so simply because I think individual churches choosing their own elders from among their ranks is the logical consequence of the apostolic era coming to an end. I realize there are those that would disagree with that.

My point, instead, has been to try to show that the terms **“elders,” “overseers,”** and **“stewards”** are in Paul’s letters pretty much interchangeable terms.

Having done that let me return to Paul’s argument which goes something like this, **“The reason an overseer’s behavior and character matter is because being**

an overseer is a noble task.” Let me do do that by addressing the question of why the overseer’s task is a noble task.

It is a noble task in 1st and 2nd Timothy because in these two epistles such men are being entrusted with the treasure of the gospel.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:2**...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

It is a noble task in other parts of the New Testament because such men are called on to shepherd Christ’s flock in Christ’s sted. Look for example at 1st Peter 5:1.

^{ESV} **1 Peter 5:1**...So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

It is a noble task because such men are called upon to minister to those in the church that are suffering.

^{ESV} **James 5:14**...Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

It is a noble task because such men are called both to rule over the affairs of the church and to teach.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 5:17**...Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

I suppose I could go on, and yet I do not see any reason to belabor the point. Being an overseer in the church of God is a noble task. I would add one additional thing to that. Those that take up the task realize that it is also a heavy responsibility. It is a heavy responsibility for two reasons. First, such men are in a way responsible for the souls of those over whom they watch. Secondly, such men will in the end have to give an account to the Lord Jesus for just how well they perform that duty. Listen to Hebrews 13:17.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 13:17**...Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Still, it is a noble task. It is noble because such men are called to shepherd Christ's flock...to engage with their people's lives...to sit in their homes...to share their sorrows and joys. Such men are called on to confront Christ's sheep, to encourage them, to rebuke them, and even to praise them. They are called to push Christ's sheep along in their sanctification, to encourage them in family worship, to teach them, to pray with them and for them and they are to do all that in the face of both joy and gladness, and of discouragement and even death.

They are to be there to encourage and strengthen Christ's sheep when they are sick and when they die. They are to be there when they have children and when they lose their parents. They are to be there when Christ's sheep are born, are married, and even when they are buried. They are to be there when they struggle financially, and when they struggle with sin. And they are to do all that without

lording it over them or seeking to exalt themselves. They are to all that as under shepherds in Christ's stead making Christ all the more visible by making themselves invisible.

It is a noble task.

Now I find myself at time's end with one more question to answer. But that's alright. I'm not in any real hurry. I'll take up the question of the requirements or qualifications of an overseer next week.

Still, let me close with this as a picture of the nature of the noble task of being an overseer or elder or steward in the house of God. This was written by a Scot named David Dickson sometime in the late 1800's. Dickson was a ruling elder not a teaching elder or pastor. It is a simple story but profound, I think, in its impact.

One evening I received a message to visit one of my people, a man advanced in life, who had been subject to attacks of bronchitis. On going to his house, I found him sitting at his fireside. He held out his hand and said, "**Well, I am going home at last. I have been ill before, but I know that this is my last illness. I wish you to help me to set my house in order before I die. I bless God that I have a Savior and am now trying to find one. I have some money in the bank, and I wish you to draw it out and pay the expenses of my grave and of my funeral. I have no debts, but I want you to pay my landlady for a month's lodging and board; and then I want you to use whatever is left over to help poor old Christian people.**"

These were his instructions, but I hesitated to receive them, saying that I hoped he would be raised up from his present sickness. He heard me as though he heard me not, but when I spoke to him of his hope in Jesus, all seemed steady and firm. His anchor was cast within the veil, and he could say, "**My Beloved is mine, and I am his.**" He had been for many years a steady-going Christian man,

not speaking much, but very consistent and, considering his means and station in life, very liberal to the cause of God. Knowing that he had no relatives surviving, I saw it to be my duty to undertake the strange task of preparing for and paying beforehand the expenses of his funeral. I then submitted the accounts to him, and he was able to glance over them without the slightest recoil. He could face death, for to him it had lost its sting and the victory was already won. As he gave over to me the balance that remained, he said, **"I am very thankful to you; now I have no business but with my Savior only."**

My next visit found him in bed, evidently worse, and one Sabbath evening within a week of my first visit I saw he was about to depart. After my repeating to him the twenty-third psalm, he affectionately bade me **"good-bye."** Three hours after, he fell asleep in Jesus. I may add that a blessing seemed to rest on the loving bequest he made regarding the money left to the old and infirm. It lasted a long time, like the widow's cruse of oil, and many a poor person was the better off on account of it.⁶

Isn't that a lovely story...simple, profound and noble? I suppose that shouldn't surprise us too much, after all being an overseer is a noble task.

Let's pray.

¹ <https://marshill.com/2014/10/15/pastor-mark-driscolls-resignation>

² Ibid

³ <http://www.religionnews.com/2014/10/15/exclusive-mark-driscolls-resignation-letter-to-mars-hill-church/>

⁴ <https://marshill.com/2014/10/15/pastor-mark-driscolls-resignation>

⁵ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 246.

⁶ David Dickson, *The Elder and His Work* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2001), 122-3.