QUALIFICATIONS FOR OVERSEERS (ELDERS)

I Timothy 3:2&3 Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

Verse 2

“Above reproach” translates a Greek word that means there is nothing in the person’s life that could be proved against him. The word translated “blameless” in Titus 1:6&7 is even stronger. It means that there is nothing in the person that could even be brought up as a charge against them. Neither word means perfect.

“Faithful to his wife” is a paraphrase of the Greek which is literally “the husband of one wife” or “a man of one woman.” If forbids polygamy, which the Old Testament allowed, and extramarital affairs.

Jesus’ words quoting Genesis in Matthew 19:5&6a, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh,” seem to clearly indicate that the ideal is one man and one woman married for life.

In Matthew 19:7&8 when the Pharisees asked why did Moses command “that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away,” Jesus replied “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard.”

Remarriage after the death of a spouse or after a divorce for legitimate reasons is not portrayed as sin in other passages and does not seem to be in view here. The fact that Paul encourages widows under 60 to remarry in I Timothy 5:9-15 would seem to support this, as would a literal translation if I Corinthians 7:27&28a (NASB), “Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you have not sinned;”

*“Nephalios,”* the Greek word translated “temperate,” comes from *“nepho,”* which Vine’s Dictionary of New Testament Greek words says means, “free from the use of intoxicants.” The fact that *“nephos”* is translated “sober” in I Thessalonians 5:6&8 would seem to confirm this.

I Thessalonians 5:6-8 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

The fact that Ephesians 5:18 says “be not drunk with wine” indicates that there were other means of intoxication available, although wine was the most common, and is dealt with in detail later.

The word translated “self-controlled” in the NIV is translated “prudent,” “sensible,” or “of good judgment” in other translations. Proverbs 16:32 (NASB) says, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.”

“Respectable” essentially means orderly. It is translated “of good behavior” in several translations. The NIV translates it “modestly” in describing a woman’s clothing in I Timothy 2:9.

“Hospitable” translates *“philoxenos,”* literally “loving (*“philos”*) “strangers” (*“xenos”).* Hebrews 13:2, “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers (*“philoxenos”),* for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to *(“xenizo”)* angels without knowing it.” The primary idea seems to be willing to put yourself out for (to love) people you don’t know.

Able to teach” translates *“didaktikos”* which Vine’s says means “skilled in teaching.” The King James says “apt to teach.” Merriam-Webster defines “apt” as “unusually fitted or qualified.”

Titus 1:9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who contradict.

An overseer must be settled in what he believes, be able to encourage others with sound teaching, and be able to point out to people who contradict sound teaching why they are wrong.

Verse 3

“Not given to drunkenness” here and in Titus 1:7 is, according to Vine’s is *“paraoinos,”* literally, not “tarrying at wine.” That Paul is not absolutely forbidding the drinking of wine is obvious from I Timothy 5:23, “Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and frequent illnesses.”

Without refrigeration, grape juice would ferment naturally, with a relatively low alcohol content. My research indicates it was normally mixed, one part wine to four parts water, and was the usual drink at meals. The alcohol would kill the things in the water that were harmful.

To drink weak wine mixed with water was better for one’s health than drinking just water but sitting around drinking wine with one’s friends could lead to drunkenness and the things that go with it. The Revised Standard Version translates *“paraoinos”* as “brawler” because that seemed to be the normal consequence of “tarrying at wine.”

“Not violent” here and in Titus 1:7 is literally “not a striker.” Other common translations are: not pugnacious, not a bully or not someone who likes to fight.

“Gentle” is in contrast to being violent and is a quality of wisdom James 3:17 (NASB), “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.”

“Not quarrelsome” is *“amacho,”* literally, not a fighter in Greek. It is most commonly translated: not quarrelsome, not contentious, or not argumentative.

“Not a lover of money” is a Greek word made by combining the Greek words for: not, loving and money. The only other time the word is used is in Hebrews 13:5, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ “

The qualification in Titus 1:7 is “not pursuing dishonest gain” (KJV “filthy lucre). This translates a Greek word simply meaning gain with the Greek word meaning shameful attached in front. The admonition is not that all gain is shameful, but that the method of gaining it should not be.

Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Things to Remember

An overseer should be blameless in the following areas:

He should be married to one woman and faithful to her.

He should not use wine or other drinks to get intoxicated.

He should be self-controlled and orderly.

He should be willing to put himself out for those he doesn’t know.

He should be a good teacher who is able to correct false teaching.

He should not like to sit around drinking.

He should not be someone who likes to fight, but someone who is gentle.

He should not be quarrelsome (contentious, argumentative).

He should not love money or use shameful ways to obtain it.