

Titus 1:7–8

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate.

The Steward of God

The elder of verse 5 is here called a bishop — an overseer. These are not two offices but one person seen from two angles: elder speaks of the person and his maturity, bishop or overseer speaks of the character of the work. And he must be blameless — not as a vague aspiration, but as a steward of God. A steward has responsibility to one who is over him; his work is done in consciousness of that. Scripture requires of stewards that they be found faithful. The steward is not managing his own house but his master's, and the house of God has an order that is God's order, not man's contrivance.

Abraham's steward in Genesis 24 — sent on the great errand of finding a wife for Isaac — is a fine picture of what stewardship looks like in practice. When he arrived at the city he prayed to his master's God. When the answer came he praised his master's God. Throughout the whole mission his speech was full of his master's name. He referred everything back to the one he served. That is the character of one who is truly a steward of God — constant reference to the one in whose house and on whose behalf the work is being done. The Lord Jesus in Mark's Gospel is the supreme example: the perfect Servant, immediately going from one task to the next, in unbroken occupation with the will of His Father.

And the Holy Spirit, who came down at Pentecost and abides within us, is presented throughout Scripture in the same character — not seeking His own, but the things of His Master.

The Six Nots — What Must Not Be There

Verse 7 lists six negative qualities, six things that must not characterise the overseer. The number six in Scripture is the number of man, always falling short of the perfect seven. And here, before the positive qualities of verse 8 are given, the Scripture presses the negative — what must be absent. This is the pattern: cease to do evil, learn to do well. The negative must first be cleared away before the positive can stand.

Not self-willed: self-will is described elsewhere in Scripture as the sin of idolatry — it sets the self on the throne that belongs to God. An overseer whose governing principle is his own will is not fit to manage the house of God, which runs on God's will.

Not soon angry — or as Darby renders it, not passionate. Explosive temperament, outbursts of anger, uncontrolled emotion — these disqualify a man from the steady, patient work of oversight. The word passionate points to the kind of temperament that flares up suddenly and intensely.

Not disorderly through wine — Darby's rendering is instructive in the context of this epistle, whose whole concern is order and disorder. It is not teetotalism that is required, but that there be no disorderliness arising from being under any influence. An overseer who is in any sense under the control of something other than the Spirit of God is not fit for his charge.

No striker — violence. Not given to filthy lucre — corruption. These are the two great sins that characterised the world before the flood: the earth was filled with violence and corruption. Both are excluded from the overseer. He must be honest

in the conduct of his life and his occupation, and without any trace of violence in his dealings with others.

The Seven Positives — A Wholeness

Verse 8 gives the positive side, and if the items are counted — lover of hospitality, lover of goodness, sober, just, holy, temperate, and then holding fast the faithful word in verse 9 — there are seven. Seven is the number of completeness in Scripture. These form a whole, a complete picture of what the overseer should be. A man extremely devoted to one of these, while lacking others, would be lopsided. These seven form a bouquet — each is weighty, and together they constitute the kind of person fitted for the work.

A lover of hospitality — the word is a compound meaning love of the stranger. Hebrews 13 places it alongside love of the brother and contrasts both with love of money — three compound words each beginning with the root for love. A person who loves money does not want to be hospitable, because hospitality costs money. The overseer who is hospitable shows that his affections are rightly ordered.

A lover of goodness — not of sentimentality, which can imitate goodness while being rooted in mere feeling. Goodness has the character of God; the Lord said, *there is none good but one, that is God*. To love goodness is to love what has the character of God stamped upon it.

Sober — Darby renders this discreet: with self-restraint and consideration. In the work of oversight one can find oneself in situations where lack of discretion causes serious problems. Discretion is wisdom applied to the circumstances of life — the instinct to avoid unseemliness, to guard against situations that could compromise either oneself or others.

Just — righteous in one's dealings with others. Favoritism is the opposite of this, and it is extremely unjust. The overseer must have a right estimate of things, avoiding rash conclusions, showing no partiality. *God is not a respecter of persons* (Colossians 3:25) — and His steward must reflect that.

Holy — or as Darby renders it, pious. Piety is a larger word than mere ritual observance: it encompasses reverence for God, appreciation for His acts and mercy, giving God His proper place in all things. The mystery of godliness in 1 Timothy 3:16 shows that piety is the characteristic fruit of the whole revelation of Christ — the full knowledge of the truth working out in the life.

Temperate — which is the antidote to *passionate* in verse 7. Passion is an extreme; temperance is the quality of not being extreme, of having genuine self-control. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit — that is how high a value God places upon it.

These three — sober, just, holy — appear also in Titus 2:12, where the grace of God teaches all believers to live soberly, righteously, and piously. They appear in the same order. What is required of the overseer is not a different standard from what is required of every Christian — it is the Christian standard, and what distinguishes the overseer is that he must be manifestly displaying these things, so as to have them as a known and acknowledged pattern of life. They also cover three directions: sober looks inward to oneself; just looks outward toward others; pious looks upward toward God. Together they cover everything.

— Study ends —