

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

“...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE...” ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

VOLUME 3

FEBRUARY 4, 2018

ISSUE 32



A TRUSTWORTHY STATEMENT (1 TIM 3:1)

By Andrew Dow

In my last article we observed that on five occasions Paul uses the phrase, “**it is a trustworthy statement**” (1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11; Titus 3:8). When Paul identifies something as “trustworthy,” it indicates the importance of what is about to be said. In the second of these “trustworthy statements,” Paul writes, “**It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do**” (1 Tim 3:1, NASB). This trustworthy statement precedes the pastors’ qualifications. Let’s consider this saying.

Aspiring to the Office of Overseer

Paul’s second trustworthy statement begins with a condition: “**if any man aspires**” (1 Tim 3:1). If you find yourself with this aspiration, know that it is a good thing. It is interesting to note here the kind of “desire” of which Paul speaks. There are two similar Greek words in this verse: *oregomai* and *epithumeo*. The NKJV translates this verse, “**if a man desires (*oregetai*) the position of a bishop, he desires (*epithumei*) a good work.**” While this translation is accurate, it doesn’t demonstrate the subtle difference in these two words. The first word, *oregomai*, carries the sense of desiring something to the point of reaching out to attain it. The second word, *epithumeo*, is a desire of the heart. Thus, a translation might read, “**if a man reaches**

out for (*oregetai*) the office of overseer, it is a fine work his heart longs (*epithumei*) to do.”

What do these nuances add to our understanding? First, the desire of the overseer should be an active desire. It is NOT that you have an inclination to one day, maybe, possibly become an overseer if anyone ever asks. Rather, it is acknowledging, through your actions, that you long for this position in your heart. You demonstrate this heart-felt longing by preparing your life for this role.

How much better off would the church be if we had men desiring to serve as overseers and living lives that demonstrate that desire? Paul expected men to desire this position to the point of action.

A Fine Work to Desire

This statement was deemed to be trustworthy, but we might ask the question, “*why is it good that a man should reach for this goal?*” After all, God doesn’t require men to attain this position. What is it about this position that makes it a worthwhile pursuit?

While a passage commanding Christian men to become elders cannot be found, all Christians are constantly reminded of their need to grow. This is the reason Paul told Timothy he needed to exercise himself spiritually (1 Tim 4:7–8). It is our responsibility to “**grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**” (2 Pet 3:18). For this reason we find lists throughout the Bible that set goals for our growth. Peter tells us we are to grow in faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and love (2 Pet 1:5–8). Paul wrote that we are to bear “**love, joy, peace,**

patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” in our lives as the **“fruit of the Spirit”** (Gal 5:22–23). Aspiring to be a bishop is aspiring to grow in all respects as a Christian should. This is a good thing to desire.

In reality, the list of qualities in 1 Timothy 3 should be the aspiration of all Christians. These attributes are, in fact, found throughout the Bible for all Christians. For example, consider that overseers are to be **“above reproach ... able to teach ... gentle, [and] peaceable...”** (1 Tim 3:2–7). Peter tells us to strive for moral excellence (2 Pet 1:5; cf. above reproach) and knowledge (2 Pet 1:5; 3:18; cf. able to teach). Paul writes that we are to bear gentleness and peace (Gal 5:22–23). The overseers Paul described were not super-Christians. To the contrary, they are the Christians we all must strive to be. Why is desiring the work of overseer a good desire? Because it should already be our desire. We should all be trying to get to this point in our lives.

One of the overarching themes of the Bible is love. It is a trait that Christians are called to implement in their lives (1 Cor 13). Although love is not directly mentioned in these qualifications, it is something without which an elder would be ill-equipped. An examination of 1 Timothy 3:2–7 shows that love for God and neighbor is the root of each of these traits (Matt 22:36–40). Christians are expected to imitate the love of Christ (Eph 5:1–2). Overseers of God’s people exhibit this love through their desire to serve the flock. Certainly all Christians should love the brethren to the point that they are willing to strive for the position of overseer. This is a good desire because it shows love for God and His people.

