

# THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

*A Commentary on the  
Greek Text*

*by*

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*To all those who made this work possible  
and especially  
to my beloved wife, Virginia*

## QUALIFICATIONS FOR BISHOPS AND DEACONS: 3:1-16

This chapter gives the qualifications for two groups of officers, bishops and deacons, and then gives the pastoral reason for the instructions of this letter (Paul's delay and the need for such instruction now, vv. 14, 15) and the theological perspective that necessitates such instructions and permeates them (the church is the household and dwelling place of the living God, committed to uphold and practice God's truth, vv. 15, 16).

A number of questions arise concerning the identity of these two groups of officers: Who held these offices? What were their functions? How were the two offices related to each other? Are they mentioned elsewhere in the NT, and, if so, how are the various references to them related and what picture of the NT situation do they give? Although these questions must be addressed further in the detailed examination below of this section of the letter, it will be helpful to have a general perspective on these two offices as a working hypothesis. Three factors present some means of identification and differentiation: (1) the names, (2) the further delineation of the bishop's task in Titus 1, and (3) the differences in the qualifications between the ἐπίσκοπος and διάκονοι.

The name of the office of ἐπίσκοπος, "bishop," "overseer," indicates that oversight is a major aspect of the position. This is further delineated in the parallel passage, Tit. 1:5ff. Therefore, the πρεσβύτεροι spoken of in 1 Tim. 5:17 as ruling (ἡγουσῶρες) and teaching are ἐπίσκοποι. These same two functions of ruling and teaching distinguish the ἐπίσκοπος in v. 2) in the descriptions of the functions of the two offices here in 1 Timothy 3. It is said of the ἐπίσκοπος, but not of the διάκονοι, that he must be "able to teach" (δοκιμάζων, v. 2), and it is specified (in a rhetorical question) that the ἐπίσκοπος will "take care of the church of God" (v. 5). In Titus 1 also it is said that the ἐπίσκοπος/πρεσβύτερος must "be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (v. 9), i.e., give spiritual instruction and exercise spiritual authority or oversight. It is also said that the ἐπίσκοπος as well as Titus must silence false teachers who are "upsetting whole families" (v. 11) and "reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith"

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QUALIFICATIONS FOR BISHOPS AND DEACONS

(v. 13). This picture of the ἐπίσκοπος as one who exercises oversight in the church particularly in ruling and teaching is reflected in Acts 20:28 ("to shepherd the church of God", cf. also the mention of ἐπίσκοποι in Phil. 1:1 and the description of Christ as ἐπίσκοπος in 1 Pet. 2:25).

διάκονοι seems to be used here in a more technical sense than elsewhere, since it goes beyond the more general sense of one who serves the church as a minister. That latter role is expressed here by ἐπίσκοπος, and here the διάκονοι are distinguished from the ἐπίσκοπος. The position of the διάκονοι is so characterized by service, as its main function, that the word has become a technical term for those carrying out such service (cf. H. W. Beyer, *TDNT* 1, 88-93; see Acts 6:1-7).

So the working hypothesis, provided primarily by the self-defining terms, is that the ἐπίσκοπος is an "overseer," one carrying out a ministry of oversight, while διάκονοι are "servants," those carrying out a ministry of service (cf. also the mutually exclusive description in Acts 6:2-4). See the **Excursus: Bishops/Presbyters and Deacons** below for an analysis of the NT as a whole on this subject.

Dibelius-Conzelmann and others, particularly those of the history of religions school, have asked whether the lists of qualifications of bishops and deacons in this chapter might represent a common stylized list that was used in the non-Christian world to describe all sorts of leaders and that was not drafted by Paul with the particular offices in mind. Dibelius-Conzelmann give examples of such lists of qualifications, especially the description of the military general in Onasander (= Onosander), *De Imperatoris Officio* (pp. 374ff. in the LCL edition translated by Members of the Illinois Greek Club), quoted at length by Dibelius-Conzelmann, 158-60. Of the eleven qualifications in Onasander's list, two words are also found in 1 Timothy 3 (σώφρων in v. 2, ἀφιλάργυρος in v. 3, both of the bishop) and three are similar to terms used in 1 Timothy 3 (self-restrained [ἐγκρατῆς], being a father [though entirely different considerations are adduced], and "a man of good reputation").

On the other hand, several items in Paul's list of qualifications for the bishop are directly related to that ministry ("able to teach," v. 3; ability to govern the church proven by governing of one's family, vv. 4, 5; and "not a new convert," v. 6) and other elements that are distinctly Christian (references to the δάβδαλος, vv. 6, 7; the distinctly Christian element of gentleness expressed by a cluster of terms, three negative and one positive, v. 3, in the list for deacons, faith and conscience, v. 9, standing and confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus, v. 13). Furthermore, the lists for the bishop and the deacons share certain distinctive concepts that are appropriate for the particular ministry of that group and do not appear to be a mere echoing of some existing list.

As one analyzes these lists, one gains the distinct impression that they