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## Season 3. Episode 7. 1 Timothy 3:1 Getting Back to Ministry, by Bruce C. E. Fleming

### Intro:

Welcome to **The Eden Podcast** where we think again about the Bible on women and men and we start with a correct understanding of what happened in the Garden of Eden back in the beginning.

I'm Bruce C. E. Fleming, founder of the Tru316 Project and a former Academic Dean and Professor of Practical Theology.

### The focus of this episode is:

#### 1 Timothy 3:1 Getting Back to Ministry

Jump with me to the heart of the matter. 1 Timothy 3:1 does not teach that only men are to be overseers in the church. Verse 2 does not teach that only married men can be pastors. And verses 4-5 do not teach that men only are to manage the household.

1 Timothy 3:1 is actually the turning point of all of Section Two of the letter of 1 Timothy. Verse 1 of chapter 3 presents Jesus as the *key* to the restoration of the disruptive wayward overseers Timothy was correcting at Ephesus. 1 Timothy 3:1 offers encouragement to these overseers undergoing retraining by saying, "Anyone aspiring to oversight desires a good work." In other words be encouraged! You are learning in order to again use your spiritual gifts and training as overseers building up the believers of the church.

However, many people cover over the meaning of the verse. They lard it over with teaching full of imported meaning that is foreign to the text. It sounds something like this: Here's an 11<sup>th</sup> Commandment from God. Only *men* should be overseers. Surprising departure from the previous meaning I described? It certainly is! What do you think of it?

In the verses that follow verse 1 there are other departures from the meaning of the inspired Greek text. People repeat their error from verse 1 when they teach that verse 2 says that only married *men* should be overseers in church.

Then, with regard to life in the Christian family they get wrong verses 4-5 saying that *men* are the ones who must manage the family unit. The Greek words of 1 Timothy chapter 3 don't say any of these things. Many translations, sadly, go astray. Let's correct them as we think again about 1 Timothy chapter 3.

**The change.** We were driving through France on a break from language learning school in the Alps. This was our first time to go south. Somewhere ahead was the great basin of the Mediterranean Sea, and beyond that North Africa. As we *crested* a ridge and started down a long and gentle slope we *observed* that the landscape had changed. The warmer air smelled of the sea. The trees were all different than the ones behind us. Olive trees, we realized. And in the far distance, the blue of the great Mediterranean.

The change in 1 Timothy from chapter 2 to chapter 3 strikes us the same way. There is suddenly a breath of fresh air as we leave behind the details of “how to correct” the wayward men and women overseers in chapter 2 and we turn to their qualifications and future ministry, now that they have been retrained and restored.

What brings about this change in climate, temperature and liveliness? It is the Logos, Jesus the Word!

1 Timothy 3:1 is the high point of section two of First Timothy that runs from 1 Timothy 1:18 to 3:16. Paul has referred to his own three sins and here gives Timothy advice on three groups who had similar sins.

According to 1 Timothy 1:13 Paul had been (1) a blasphemer, (2) a persecutor and (3) an injurious disrupter of the church. In 1 Timothy 1:18-20, Paul refers to the *blasphemers* in Ephesus, naming Hymenaeus and Alexander. In 1 Timothy 2:1-7, Paul takes up the subject of those who were actual or potential *persecutors* of the church like he had been. In 1 Timothy 2:8-3:16 he changes to his *third* sin and gives commands how to retrain and restore to ministry the men and women preachers and teachers who had gone astray like he had *disrupting* the church.

What, or rather who, made *all* the difference in Paul’s life? He testified in 1 Timothy 1:12-17 that it was Jesus, the logos, the faithful word. This *same* Jesus was *the One* who could make all the difference in the lives of the overseers at Ephesus.

**Who were these overseers?** What did Paul think of them? These were among the ones God had gifted to feed and care for the flock. They shared the call and burdens Paul himself carried. Together with him they had labored to feed and care for the *newborn* believers. Together they had given them the milk of the word. From house church to house church and in public spaces they had proclaimed the word of God. They had challenged and corrected the false doctrines of pagan religions and together had built up believers into maturity and fruitfulness in Christ.

And then, they had broken Paul’s heart. They had wandered off into false doctrines and wrong practices. They had disrupted the church where they had fruitfully labored.

Did Paul want to throw them all away, condemned to exile and unending shame? No. He did not.

According to his testimony in 1 Timothy 1 verses 12 to 17, God had not treated *him* that way. God had recognized that he, Paul, had sinned ignorantly and in unbelief. To *him* the *grace* of the Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love that are found in Christ Jesus.

Paul was *foremost* among sinners, yet *he* had found *mercy*. In Paul, Jesus Christ had demonstrated His perfect patience. And Paul praised Jesus for this. Jesus, the Word, had

called him. Jesus *strengthened* him and made him *faithful*. And Jesus the Word could do so for those who had *once* served faithfully. *They* could aspire to serve *again*.

In 1 Timothy 2:8 Paul focused on correcting the *men* who had taught false doctrine resulting in *anger* and *disputing* in church. In 1 Timothy 2:9-15 Paul focused on the women who had taught false doctrine. He didn't describe the *results* of their doing so but focused rather on why he wanted them retrained. They were like Eve, and like himself, in that they were *second-degree* offenders.

Adam, Hymenaeus and Alexander had sinned on purpose. They were first degree offenders and were judged severely.

But not so Eve, Paul and the wayward women learners at Ephesus. The women had not willfully gone astray and were teachable. This is why Paul says in verse 2:11, "Let them learn!" Let them be retrained with a view to preaching and leading again in church.

This is why Paul writes what he does in 1 Timothy 3:1.

<sup>3:1</sup>"Faithful is Jesus the Logos, the Word," so Timothy if any one of those you are correcting aspires to oversight, that one, that woman or that man, desires a good work!

But that is very likely not what you will read in the version of the Bible you are using today. This is problematic. What translations are putting out in 1 Timothy 3 misses the mark of what *Paul* is saying in 3:1 and the verses that follow it. They also miss the mark in what Paul said for the previous verse in 2:15.

I trace this to their mistranslation and misinterpretation of what Paul says at the end of 1 Timothy chapter 2 about Adam and Eve and the teachers he was retraining at Ephesus. They get it wrong because they have been getting wrong what God said to Eve and to Adam in the Garden of Eden, back in the beginning.

This is why we need a true Genesis 3:16. And with Genesis 3:16 rightly understood we can think again about the problematic passages in the New Testament of which 1 Timothy 2-3 is perhaps the most important one.

**Getting it wrong.** Let's look at what results in translations that miss the three-point outline Paul anticipates that is coming up 1:18-3:16 based on his own three sins. Let's look at what happens when translations miss the main idea in verses 8-15 in chapter 2, in Paul's only imperative verb to Timothy in verse 11, which is "Let learn!" Let's look at what results in translations that miss the importance of Jesus' work as the faithful word in 1 Timothy 3:1.

Only in one of the following versions do we clearly see Paul's reference to the faithful logos. That version is from back in the mid 1800's. Let's start with that one. Focus on how the first words are rendered by each version. We'll come back and focus on the rest of the verse after that.

### Smith's Literal Translation

*Faithful the word*, If any strive for superintendence, he eagerly desires a good work.

### New King James Version

*This is a faithful saying*: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.

### New American Standard Bible

*It is a trustworthy statement*: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, *it is* a fine work he desires *to do*.

### New Living Translation

*This is a trustworthy saying*: QUOTE“If someone aspires to be a church leader, he desires an honorable position.”CLOSE QUOTE

### English Standard Version

*The saying is trustworthy* COLON: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

### My own literal translation

*Faithful is the word*, If anyone aspires to oversight, that one desires a good work.

People mistakenly look for Paul to be quoting “a saying” somewhere around verse 1 of chapter 3. The idea of “a saying” was the *secondary* idea used by Paul back in chapter 1 verse 15. There Paul referred to Jesus as *pistos ho logos*, the faithful *logos*, the faithful Word.

There Paul used a secondary sense to the word *logos* by adding a *statement* which he quoted. The two other occasions where he refers to the *logos* in 3:1, and in 4:9, he gives no secondary statement or saying in the immediate context. He points to faithful Jesus. Jesus changes everything in the ones he touches.

As for the saying Paul added in 1:15, it was applicable in the lives touched by Jesus the other two times Paul refers to faithful Jesus. In 1:15 he wrote, “that Christ Jesus came into the world to *save* sinners....”

In 1:15, Jesus the faithful Word changed Paul’s life. In 3:1, Jesus the faithful Word changes the lives of the overseers being corrected and restored by Timothy. In 4:9, Jesus the faithful Word saved Timothy too and made him faithful. If anyone wanted to have a saying in mind, and clearly there was one in mind, it was the one spelled out in 1:15, “Christ Jesus came into the world to *save* sinners....”

Dr. John R. W. Stott in a course I took from him on the Pastoral Epistles pointed out that *changes* were being made at this point in the newest Greek editions of the New Testament. As he observed them they first were suggesting by their page layout of these verses that a statement of some kind was located in the second part of verse 3:1. Then a newer edition suggested that a

saying was located somewhere back in verse 2:15. Then, editions swung back again to suggesting a *saying* of some kind was in verse 3:1.

Their efforts were confusing because, as Stott pointed out, there was no *clear* saying present at *all*. The same problem was encountered in 4:9. No one could identify a clear statement being quoted by Paul in the immediate context.

There doesn't need to be. Something else is going on in the passage of 1 Timothy the three times Paul uses the words *pistos ho logos*. In 3:1, Jesus, the faithful Word, serves as the high point, the turning point of the second section of the letter to Timothy that runs from 1:18 to 3:16. As Jesus is faithful, Jesus in turn makes others faithful, in this case the overseers Paul has been correcting in 2:8-15.

As we arrive at 3:1 we are at a major turning point. Paul turns from "How to correct disruptive wayward overseers" to "How to restore them to ministry." Keeping this focus on *overseers*, both female and male, keeps us from going astray in our interpretation and in our practice in church today.

The Greek words in the rest of 1 Timothy 3:1 are inclusive of both women and men. They are gender neutral. Paul is talking about *tis* or "anyone," female or male who aspires to oversight.

Overseers were among the ones gifted to serve the rest of the body of Christ. Those who received this gift were described in Ephesians 4:11-12.

In the letter to the Ephesians, only some believers in the body of Christ are called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers. Because Paul is speaking about those who had gone astray from within this group, when he talks about anyone aspiring to oversight in 3:1 the antecedent to the pronoun "anyone" looks back to those people who already had been gifted and called to be overseers.

The "anyone" in 3:1 refers to those who have *already been* in public ministry and have been stopped from doing so because they had gone astray and disrupted the church. But these were not without hope. To the contrary they could aspire to such a good work once *more* thanks to Jesus, the faithful Word.

Have you looked on wayward church leaders this way? Have you seen defrocked pastors, and elders and preachers and teachers treated this way? I have. But not much in the churches in my own country in America. But in other countries where we have served I *have* seen a fruitful practice of discipline, retraining and restoration carried out.

In 1 Timothy 3:2-7, Paul gives a careful list of characteristics of faithful overseers. Then he continues with a second list for deacons after that.

We next will look more deeply into the verses that follow 1 Timothy 3:1. In preparation, here is my paraphrase of 1 Timothy 3 verses 1-7.

<sup>1</sup>“Faithful is the Word,” so if anyone aspires to oversight, that person desires a good work.

<sup>2</sup>An overseer must be without reproach –

a faithful spouse, temperate, serious, modest, hospitable, a good teacher, <sup>3</sup>not an excessive drinker or pugnacious, but patient, uncontentious, and not avaricious,

<sup>4</sup>ruling his or her own household well, having one’s children in subjection, <sup>5</sup>(for if someone doesn’t know how to manage his or her own household, how can that one take care of the church of God?)

<sup>6</sup>not a recent convert, so as to avoid the danger of being puffed up with pride, and falling into the same condemnation as the devil received. <sup>7</sup>It is important to have a good testimony from outsiders, so as not to fall into disgrace and the devil’s snare.

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The foundation for it all is found in The Book of Eden. You can start reading it [HERE](#) or order in bulk [HERE](#).

There is also a Study Guide on this episode for use in personal study or in small groups and more. You can find it in the blog posts on [Tru316.com/blog](http://Tru316.com/blog) or write me at [Bruce@Tru316.com](mailto:Bruce@Tru316.com). And thanks for listening to **The Eden Podcast!** ([www.TheEdenPodcast.com](http://www.TheEdenPodcast.com))

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