

Elder Qualifications

The Biblical Basis of Eldership

1. Introduction: Paul emphasizes *spiritual maturity and character over gifting*. It is possible to be very gifted and knowledgeable, yet immature or even carnal. Immature people often get into leadership, where they do the church much harm (see Diotrophes 3 Jn. 9). There is nothing wrong with the desire to be a Christian leader (1 Tim. 3:1), but it must be for the right reason.
2. Since these qualities describe spiritual maturity, they are helpful in that they describe the character that the Holy Spirit is seeking to produce in everyone's lives. Not surprisingly, most of these qualities are prescribed elsewhere in the New Testament for all Christians. If we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us into a man or woman of God, we can be sure that God will put us into the roles of leadership that he has prepared for us.
3. As the Holy Spirit uses this passage to convict us, how should we as leaders respond?
 - a. Acknowledge to him your lack, along with how you see this lack concretely manifesting itself in your life currently.
 - b. Agree that you want him to change you in this area.
 - c. Agree that you cannot change yourself, but that you believe that he can change you in this area, no matter how deeply entrenched it is.
 - d. Ask him to give you practical steps of faith to take.
4. Look for those who are strong in these areas, observe how they exhibit these qualities, and talk with them about how they developed it (Phil 4:9; 1 Cor. 11:1; Heb 13:7).
5. The qualifications for elders generally fall into two categories:
 - a. He must be functionally effective in spiritual leadership.
 - i. *Already Leading*. Just as Jesus said sheep would know the voice of their shepherd, (see John 10:4), it seems likely that those considered for eldership in the early church had already demonstrated the ability to lead. This is probably why Paul waited for a while after starting the churches in Ephesus and Crete before he had Timothy (ch.3) and Titus (ch. 1) appoint elders.
 - ii. *Incubated, not "overnight wonders."* It took time for the true leaders to naturally emerge. This suggests a serious commitment to front-loading preparation (training)
 - iii. *Able to accommodate learning on part of young believers (and perhaps even unbelievers)*. The ability to lead others in spiritual matters is also implied by the fact that the elder must be "skilled at teaching" (1 Tim. 3:2), or, "able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). A teacher is not skillful unless his students learn. Learning includes how to do God's will, not just how to know it. (James 1:22-25)
 - iv. *Must have a good reputation both inside and outside the church community, and have a self-awareness that includes how they impact*

others and that there are no skeletons in the closet that are unmentioned. Elders and deacons had to "hold fast the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience" (1 Tim. 3:9) which would not be possible if they were guilty of sins of omission (see also "above reproach" 1 Tim. 3:2).

- v. *Behavior is consistent with revealed truth.* All of these references imply that elders had to be practitioners of the Word, not just theoreticians.
- b. He must be morally upright and consistent.
 - i. *Character counts.* The emphasis in the Bible is on character even over and above function.
 - ii. *See biblical qualifications below.* Following are the character qualities of an elder.

Above reproach

(1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6,7)--*anepilempton*: unaccusable; *anegkleton*: unreprouvable

- This is the summation of all other characteristics.
- Not only the absence of disqualifying factors is in view, but positive things are evident
- A good reputation spiritually (Acts 6:3; 16:2).

Husband of one wife

(1 Tim. 3:2)--*mais gunaikos andros*: "one-woman man"

- This probably does not refer to polygamy (which was not common in the Roman empire), but rather that sexual morality is an established life-style.
- This qualification does not exclude divorcees; present life-style only is in view (as with all of the qualifications).
- Exclusion on this basis must take into account flirting, porno habits, inappropriate "counseling" of the opposite sex, etc.

Temperate

(1 Tim. 3:2)--*nephalion*: sober

- This is the opposite of being mentally and spiritually dense. It is linked with alertness in 1 Thess. 5:6 and 1 Pet. 5:8.
- The person has a clear perspective on life, and a correct spiritual orientation.

Prudent

(1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8)--*sophrone*: thoughtful, self-controlled, sane

- The person is mentally healthy (Mk. 5:15; 2 Cor 5:13).
- He has an honest evaluation of himself which involves neither arrogance nor self-hate (Rom. 12:3).
- The person evidences the ability to be reasonable, sensible, able to keep one's head (Titus 2:6; 1 Pet. 4:7).

Respectable

(1 Tim. 3:2)--*kosmion*: well-ordered

- A habit of orderliness and stability has been established (see 1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:4).

Hospitable

(1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8)--*philoxenon*: "lover of strangers"

- The person takes a genuine interest in new people. This would include both an outreach orientation and the willingness to open his home to others (Heb. 13:2).

Able to Teach

(1 Tim. 3:2)--*didaktikon*: skilled at teaching

- The elder must understand Scripture well enough to be able to effectively exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict (Titus 1:9).
- This does not necessitate being a gifted large-group teacher.
- "Grounded in the Word" means that the elder can explain and apply biblical concepts in his words, and discern error when he hears it.

Not Addicted to Wine

(1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7)--*me paroinon*: "not lingering over wine"

- The person has a demonstrated freedom from drunkenness, or substance abuse. There is no dependence on alcohol or other drugs.
- Able to give up freedom to avoid stumbling a weaker brother (1 Cor. 8)

Not self-willed

(Titus 1:7)--*me authade*: not a usurper

- This is linked with rebelliousness in 2 Pet. 2:10, and with usurpation of rightful authority in 1 Tim. 2:12.
- There should be a proven ability to defer to others.
- Avoids a "my way or the highway;" attitude.
- To "defer" means that you actively get behind the others' way and help it to succeed.
- Implies he is able to apologize

Not quick-tempered

(Titus 1:7)--*me orgilon*: not inclined to anger

- The person is not vengeful or violent, brooding or bitter (see Eph. 4:29,31), especially when he doesn't get his own way.
- When Moses struck the rock (Num. 20) he was refused entry into Canaan. When leaders misrepresent God by making him seem more angry than he really is, it's a serious thing (Jas. 1:19,20)
- Leaders may get angry, but they should be slow to anger rather than having a short fuse.
- The leader must be under control, avoiding violent outbursts
- Elders must be able to drop offenses, not hold onto them

Not pugnacious

(Titus 1:7; 1 Tim. 3:3)--*me plekten*: not a striker

- The person is not prone to physical or verbal abuse (i.e. slander, put-downs, etc.)

- Not a fighter

Gentle

(1 Tim. 3:3)--*epieike*: gracious, forbearing

- The person is not unduly rigorous or legalistic in his treatment of people.
- He is kind, empathetic and patient with all people.
- The opposite of quick-tempered, or pugnacious.
- People are fragile. We need to consider how our words and actions will affect them. See 2 Tim. 2:24,25; 1 Thess. 2:7; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 4:3; Col. 3:12,13; 1 Tim. 6:11; Gal. 5:22,23; Jas. 3:17.

Uncontentious

(1 Tim. 3:3)--*amachon*: peaceable

- This means not looking for ways to disagree or oppose; not loving to fight or quarrel.
- The person possesses a positive and constructive point of view.
- This is the opposite of being self-willed.

Free From the Love of Money

(1 Tim. 3:3)--*philagruron*: not greedy

- This means the ability to be content with what one has materially (1 Tim. 6:8).
- The person is not motivated by financial considerations in ministry goals (see Acts 20:33)
- True love for Christ and his work will become eclipsed by greed (see Mat. 6:24). Our day is replete with newsy examples of the error of money-love in the church.
- See 1 Tim. 6:6-11,17-19. Mature elders should give away much to others, and should live a simple life-style in order to curb temptation.

Manages own household well

(1 Tim. 3:4,5; Titus 1:6)--*prohistemenon*: to stand before; manage; to lead, used of an army commander standing before his men

- This is a demonstrated ability to lead spiritually and effectively in marriage, if one is married, and family
- The elder's family should respect him and voluntarily follow his leadership
- Examining one's family life tends to ensure that the person is spiritually authentic and not two-faced.
- Christian leader's first responsibility is to his own family. Prioritizing and practicing biblical principles with family and home is crucial in cooperating with God (see 1 Cor. 7).

Not a new convert

(1 Tim. 3:6)--*me neophuton*: "newly planted"

- The person has been a walking Christian long enough to be tested by God (see 1 Tim. 3:10)
- The person should have experienced success without becoming conceited

Having a good reputation with those outside

(1 Tim. 3:7)--*exothern*: used by Paul for non-Christians (Col. 4:5)

- Non-Christians are unable to discredit the person.
- They speak well of him generally, and accusations are easily exposed as false (1 Pet. 3:16).
- The person is spiritually authentic and not two-faced. This has important, obvious implications for evangelism.
- The elder resists a Christian ghetto mentality, and fosters a constant awareness of the watching world

Loving what is good

(Titus 1:8)--*philagathon*: = loving good

- The person's lifestyle demonstrates that God's way is enjoyed (see Rom. 12:2)
- There is no questionable dichotomy between the person's recreational life and ministry

Just

(Titus 1:8)--*dikiaon*:

- The person is fair and impartial in his dealings with people (1 Tim. 5:21).
- When favoritism and particular biases are adopted, the biblical concepts of righteousness and goodness fade, and with that, God's agenda and priorities.
- To gain victory in this area, one must be well aware of what his own bias tendencies are, and must resist those in favor of biblical truth

Devout

(Titus 1:8)--*hosion*: Practical seriousness and zeal for God's will

- A single-mindedness for God and His work.
- Have we thought through the cultural accretions that have nothing to do with being a believer, but often receive so much of our energy?
- This person relates all their activities to a concern for the gospel.