

The 21 Qualifications Of Elders

1. **ABOVE REPROACH.** (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6) Above reproach literally means, “not able to be taken hold of.” This qualification relates to having a good reputation. In a way, this is a summary statement of the rest of the qualifications. When a Christian applies the principles of God’s Word, and desires to deepen his relationship with Christ, the result will be a lifestyle that could be described as being above reproach. Character flows from values and faith. When we establish a sincere faith in Christ, godly values blossom and character deepens. Obviously, a shepherd leader must have an excellent reputation, if he is to have credibility with the flock of God.

2. **HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE.** (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6) The Greek words, which we translate as “the husband of one wife,” speak to the subject of fidelity in marriage, not marital status. Directly rendered, the Greek phrase says “a one woman man.” If married, the elder must be absolutely committed to his wife.

Famed Southern Baptist Seminary professor and linguist A. T. Robertson, John MacArthur, J. Vernon McGee and Charles Swindoll, agree this phrase addresses the issues of polygamy or fidelity in marriage, not divorce. Among the other biblical experts agreeing with view are, Drs. Ed Glasscock, Fritz Rienecker, Albert Barnes and Eric Titus. However, we should not assume from this that divorce is inconsequential or insignificant. Jesus sternly warned His followers to avoid divorce. When selecting an elder or deacon, a divorce should be seen as a “red flag” in the candidate’s past. Since an elder must be a good steward of his family, a recent divorce disqualifies a man from serving as an elder. However, divorce is not the unpardonable sin. For example, a man may have divorced many years ago. Since then, he may have remarried and lived an exemplary and mature Christian life. This man may now enjoy a godly marriage, raising children who love the Lord. When we take this man’s total life experience into consideration, the divorce should not disqualify him from consideration as an elder or deacon. However, if the divorce was recent, or if there is any question about his relationship with his wife or leadership of his family, the man must not be considered for appointment.

3. **TEMPERATE.** (1 Tim. 3:2) **SELF-CONTROLLED.** (Titus 1:8) “Temperate” refers to a person’s orientation toward life. It speaks of a man who lives a balanced life, not prone to extremism. The elder must have a rich devotional life, which allows Jesus to become Lord in his life. The Lordship of Christ will then bring his pride under control, clarify his motives, and strengthen the Christian’s weaknesses.

4. **PRUDENT.** (1 Tim. 3:2) **SENSIBLE.** (Titus 1:8) An elder must use sound judgment. This soundness of judgment grows out of a humble view of himself and the recognition of Christ’s all sufficiency. The tendency to make poor judgments, or unwise decisions, is the opposite of prudence and sensibility.

5. **RESPECTABLE.** (1 Tim. 3:2) An elder must be well-behaved, well-organized, a man whose life is in order. This often affects such areas of life as responsibility and honorable use of language. If the elder is not respectable, he would never have the credibility needed to feed, lead, protect, and love the flock.

6. **HOSPITABLE.** (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8) The elder should not have neither a cynical disposition, nor a closed attitude toward people. When a person is hospitable, he will keep his

life, home, and heart open to others. A loner has no place in spiritual leadership, nor does a person who prefers projects over people. Whether introvert or extrovert, the elder must be people-oriented.

7. ABLE TO TEACH. (1 Tim. 3:2) **ABLE TO EXHORT IN SOUND DOCTRINE AND REFUTE THOSE WHO CONTRADICT.** (Titus 1:9) These closely aligned characteristics refer to a person's ability and desire to learn, in order that they may teach others the truths of God's Word. Two of the major assignments of eldership are feeding and protecting the flock. To accomplish these tasks, the elders must have a great respect for God's Word, a proficient comprehension of its truths, and a genuine commitment to the disciplined study of the Scriptures. This enables the elders to instruct God's people in biblical truths and encourage them to apply these principles to daily life. There is an alarming number of teachers and preachers today whose message is anything but biblical. Unfortunately, the use of media has made these heresies readily available to undiscerning Christians. The elders must also have a strong comprehension of doctrine so they can protect the flock from these ravenous wolves, who would destroy them if they were not protected.

8. NOT ADDICTED TO WINE. (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7) This characteristic sets down the absolute prohibition of drunkenness in an elder's life. We must also remember what the Scripture teaches in Romans 14:21 and 1 Corinthians 10:31. There are many reasons why an elder would do well to totally abstain from alcohol.

9. NOT PUGNACIOUS. (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7) An elder must not be quick-tempered. The tendency to strike out in bursts of anger would destroy the elder's ability to maintain credibility with the flock. Furthermore, an elder is to protect the church from people who are pugnacious.

10. GENTLE. (1 Tim. 3:3) A gentle person is non-combative, kind, and patient. Elders, as well as all believers in Christ, are told to be gentle with a number of different kinds of people. For example, we must be gentle to those without Christ, according to Titus 3:2,3. We must be kind and patient towards the carnal Christian. Gentleness is to be expressed to all other Christians as well. This characteristic will not always demand the strict letter of the law. The elder must know when to offer mercy, because strict justice may be inappropriate due to its generality.

11. UNCONTENTIOUS. (1 Tim. 3:3) This word means, "not quarrelsome, not debating, selfish, or sinfully jealous." Contentiousness reveals insecurity and bitterness, which should not exist in the elder's life. Such a person may do significant harm to the flock.

12. FREE FROM THE LOVE OF MONEY. (1 Tim. 3:3) **NOT FOND OF SORDID GAIN.** (Titus 1:7) The Bible teaches us a great deal about the appropriate and inappropriate use of, and desire for, money. An excellent example of this is found in Deuteronomy 8:17. Here, Moses explains that we tend to equate material possessions with our significance. In Revelation 3:17, we are told of a human tendency to link money with security. Both of these inclinations ignore Matthew 5:33 and Hebrews 13:5, which say our security and significance come from the depth of our own intimacy with the Lord. A man meets this qualification for eldership if he has an obvious understanding of the evil money can cause and then rejects the temptations money brings. Read 1 Timothy 6 for more information on this subject.

13. **RULING HIS HOUSEHOLD WELL.** (1 Tim. 3:4) **ABOVE REPROACH AS A STEWARD.** (Titus 1:7) "Ruling" refers to the way a man provides leadership for his family. It is possible for a man to be morally qualified for eldership, but disqualified by his lack of leadership in his home. We must remember that there are two issues at work in each home. First, there is the quality of leadership that is offered. Secondly, there is the willingness to follow the leadership that is given. The elder must be committed to the task of being a good steward of his household. Household leadership is an important qualification for elders because the church is more of a family than a business.

14. **HAVING CHILDREN UNDER CONTROL WITH DIGNITY.** (1 Tim. 3:4) **HAVING CHILDREN WHO ARE NOT ACCUSED OF DISSIPATION OR REBELLION.** (Titus 1:6) The elder's children must bring honor to their parents. This demonstrates that the elder, and his wife, have encouraged order and loving discipline in their home. However, these principles do not suggest that the elder must raise "perfect" children. To require such a standard would render no father qualified for eldership. A man who has raised, or is raising, children who love the Lord, will also have the ability to encourage holiness among the rest of God's children.

15. **NOT A NEW CONVERT.** (1 Tim. 3:6) The elder cannot be a new convert. Spiritual maturity is of greatest importance, due to the spiritual responsibilities elders face.

16. **OF GOOD REPUTATION OUTSIDE THE CHURCH.** (1 Tim. 3:7) The term "outside the church" refers to unbelievers. People who do business, play sports or take part in other activities with a potential elder must think highly of him.

17. **NOT SELF-WILLED.** (Titus 1:7) When a person is self-willed, he stubbornly follows his opinions, arrogantly refusing to listen to others. An elder must be willing to change his opinions, and receptive to the convictions, feelings, and interests of others. In other words, it is essential for an elder to have good teamwork skills. Many men may fill the other qualifications of eldership and fail here. However, the church must not overlook this qualification. If we do, we will make it difficult, if not impossible, for the elders to work together. On the other hand, an elder must be able to stand for biblical principles, no matter what the cost may be. So, in appointing elders, we must search for men who have the ability to compromise in the areas of personal opinion, while remaining strongly committed to matters of biblical principle.

18. **NOT QUICK-TEMPERED.** (Titus 1:7) This is a very important qualification for a spiritual leader. Spiritual leaders must be slow to anger. The reason for this qualification is obvious. We destroy our testimony when we allow ourselves to become angry quickly. Furthermore, James 1:20 says that our anger cannot accomplish the will of God.

19. **LOVING WHAT IS GOOD.** (Titus 1:8) An elder must be a man who is devoted to what is good and right. The opposite of this trait would be the person who makes decisions based upon what is popular and expedient.

20. **JUST.** (Titus 1:8) This qualification deals with two concepts, positional righteousness and experiential righteousness. The elder must know Christ, and live a life that reflects an intimate relationship with the Lord. It is not enough to believe right, the elder must also act right.

21. **DEVOUT.** (Titus 1:8) This trait refers to a holy life. When selecting elders, a prime consideration must deal with the potential candidate's attitude, character, and activities. The elder is a man who loves the Lord and reveals that love by the way he lives. This is not to suggest that the only qualified candidates are those who are absolutely sinless. What Paul is saying here is that the elder must exemplify a deep surrender to Christ in everyday life.

Conclusion

When the church appoints spiritual leaders, we must insure that the selection process is completely biblical. Jesus has the right to build the Church the way He desires. That is why God has given us specific instructions, in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, as to the character and attributes of the men He has chosen to feed, lead, protect and love His Church. By selecting men who fulfill these qualifications, we join the Lord in building His Church, His way.

If leaders are appointed wisely, in obedience to the Scripture, the Church will prosper and the members will thrive. However, if these scriptural principles are ignored, or rejected, the results will limit and damage the flock of God.

The following are statements by noted professors and biblical commentators on the subject of "husband of one wife".

Dr. A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament*, volume IV. page 572. "'of one wife' (mias gunaikos). One at a time, clearly."

John MacArthur, *Church Leadership, John MacArthur's Bible Studies*, page 51. "Paul was not referring to an elder's marital status, because that is not a moral qualification for spiritual leadership. However, if the elder is married, he is to be a one- woman man.

Unfortunately, it's possible to be married to one woman yet not to be a one-woman man. Jesus said, 'Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.' (Matt 5:28) A married-or unmarried-man who lusts after a women is unfit for the ministry. An elder must love, desire, and think only of the wife God has given him."

Dr. J. Vernon McGee makes the following interpretation of "husband of one wife", in his *Thru The Bible Commentary*, volume 5, "'The husband of one wife.'...I think that the primary meaning here is that the bishop or elder should not have two wives. Polygamy was common in Paul's day, and bigamy was certainly prevalent. The officer in the church should be the husband of one wife."

Dr. Charles Swindoll, in *Excellence in Ministry*, page 41, writes, "So what does 'husband of one wife' mean? Taken in its most basic sense, it means that an overseer, if married, must be married to only one woman (which excludes bigamy, polygamy, and homosexuality) and must be devoted to his wife (which excludes promiscuity and an unhealthy marriage.)

Dr. Ed Glasscock, writing in the Dallas Theological Seminary Theological Journal, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July-September 1983, says, "One may *assume* Paul meant to prohibit divorce and remarried men from serving as elders, but one should honestly admit that Paul did not say 'he cannot have been previously married' or 'he cannot have been divorced.' What he did say is that he *must be* a one-wife husband or a one-woman man. Paul was clearly concerned with one's character when a man is being considered for this high office; Paul was not calling into review such a person's preconversion life."

Dr. Fritz Rienecker, the renowned German expert on the Greek New Testament writes, in his work *A Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament*, "...a husband of one wife,' 'one woman man.' The difficult phrase probably means that he is to have only one wife at a time."

Dr. Albert Barnes, in his widely accepted commentaries, *Barnes On The New Testament, Thessalonians-Philippians*, writes, "It is the most obvious meaning of the language, and it would doubtless be thus understood by those to whom it was addressed. At a time when polygamy was not uncommon, to say that a man should 'have but one wife' would be naturally understood as prohibiting polygamy."

Dr. Eric Titus, in *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary On The Bible* says, "The import is plain: the bishop must be free of any suspicion of loose sexual relationships; he must be above reproach as the exemplar of family integrity."