

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS

Definition: A qualification is a quality of virtue and ability that is unavoidably required to serve as an elder of God's church.

Why are qualifications required?

❖ **Ezekiel 34:2-5**, “Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered.”

In modern times, we generally look for:

- a person's profession of receiving a divine call,
- a seminary degree or some training,
- and leaving a job in the marketplace for full-time church ministry.
 - Sometimes, son of a pastor in nepotistic leadership

What are the qualifications required to serve God's church?

- ❖ **I Timothy 3:1**, “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone **aspires** to the office of overseer, he [MALE LEADERSHIP] desires a noble task.”
 - **I Timothy 2:12-14**, I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain

quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

- ❖ **I Peter 5:2**, “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but **willingly**, as God would have you;”

Having a passion is not enough; a man must have godly qualities too.

- ❖ **I Timothy 3:1-7**, The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

1. “Above reproach”. (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6)

John MacArthur: “Above reproach” cannot refer to sinless perfection, because no human being could ever qualify for the office in that case, but it is a high and mature standard that speaks of being a consistent example for the congregation to follow.

In what areas the man should be above reproach? Paul provides the list further.

2. “Husband of one wife”. (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6)

Alexander Strauch: This phrase means that an elder must be above reproach in his marital and sexual life. He must be a one-woman kind of

man. He must be above reproach in his relationship with other women. He must be an example of faithful monogamous marriage.

- He has a healthy relationship with his wife.
- His marriage is a model to young people in the church.
- He has a good testimony at home (wife, children, siblings, parents).
- He is not flirtatious or inappropriate with other women.
- He is not divorced.

3. “Sober-minded” and “Self-controlled” (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8) “disciplined” (Titus 1:8; see I Tim. 4:7)

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Self-control is the ability or power to rule or regulate one’s personal life so that we are neither driven nor dominated by the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, or the pride of life (I John 2:16; see also Gal. 5:19-21).

- He is not a glutton.
- He is not lazy.
- He isn’t sexually immoral (doesn’t watch porn).
- He is not impulsive.

4. “Respectable”. (I Tim. 3:2)

- ❖ **I Timothy 4:12,** Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

Alexander Strauch: ‘orderly’...‘well-behaved,’ or ‘virtuous’...that which causes a person to be regarded as ‘respectable’ by others.” An elder cannot expect people to follow him if he is not respectable.

- He is respected by others in the church because of his lifestyle.

5. “Hospitable”. (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8)

Thabiti M. Anyabwile: Does the man open his home to others? This is perhaps the most obvious form of hospitality. Identify those men who make their home a place of ministry. Perhaps they host a small-group Bible study. Perhaps they volunteer first to host a missionary or to prepare meals for visiting preachers. Maybe they often invite people over for dinner. Men with an active hospitality ministry are gems, and by their hospitality they give themselves the opportunity to intimately know and oversee the sheep.

- His home is hospitable, open to the saints in need of fellowship and sustenance.

6. “Able to teach”. (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9) “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” (Titus 1:8)

Mark Dever and Paul Alexander: What then does it mean to be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2)? Many have thought that such teaching must necessarily mean formal, public, expositional preaching. While this may be included, it is not the necessary or exclusive definition of “able to teach.” Ability to teach the Word simply means that a man is able to explain the Scriptures accurately to other people in ways that profit them spiritually. He should be known by others in the congregation as a man to whom people can go in order to have the Scriptures explained to them...It may also mean that a man has an effective and broad-based discipling ministry within the church, in which he is explaining and applying the Scriptures to individuals in ways that help them grow in Christian knowledge, love, and fruitfulness.

- He rightly interprets the Holy Scripture, avoiding allegorical, emotional, experiential interpretations.
- He is competent to clearly expound the gospel of Christ.
- He is competent to explain the fundamental doctrines of Christian faith.

- He has a good understanding of ecclesiology.
- He is competent to refute false teachings. (like the prosperity gospel, cults)
- He is competent to explain the Scriptures accurately and explicitly to individuals in ways they would be spiritually benefited.
- He is competent to counsel believers suffering from emotional, spiritual, and intellectual problems.
- He is good at making disciples.

7. “Not a drunkard”. (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7)

Overindulgent with alcohol. But can he drink moderately? Romans 14:21, It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

8. “Not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome”. (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7) “quick-tempered.” (Titus 1:7)

John Stott: Unlike the false teachers, who were characterized by conceit, quarrelsomeness and strife (6:3ff.), true Christian teachers are above all to be gentle. This was an outstanding quality of our Lord Jesus, so that Paul could appeal to the Corinthians ‘by the meekness and gentleness of Christ’ (2 Cor. 10:1). Since gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit, it should characterize all the disciples of Jesus, but specially Christian leaders who are the servants of the Lord (2 Tim. 2:24-25). Once this positive virtue has been cultivated, the two negative correlatives should take care of themselves. A gentle pastor will be neither violent nor quarrelsome. His patience may be sorely tried by demanding and aggravating people, but like his Master he will seek to be gentle.

- He is firm and decisive in his attitudes about essentials of faith and living without being opinionated or contentious about details.
- He is not argumentative and quick to quarrel.

- He is able to disagree, without being disagreeable, and willing to see another's point of view. He is not self-willed and inconsiderate of others' opinions.
- He takes correction gracefully when he is wrong without being self-defensive.
- He is not demanding and dominating in interpersonal relationships.
- He is slow to judge others and quick to commend.
- He is gracious and not nitpicking and demeaning towards the weaknesses and failures of people,

9. “Not a lover of money” or “greedy for gain”. (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:2)

Steven Cole: Paul states that he “must be free from the love of money.” Money itself is not evil, but it is dangerous. It is like a loaded gun—it can be very useful if you use it properly, but it can hurt others or yourself if you use it carelessly. A greedy man is not qualified to be an elder, because greedy men are not godly. They will be tempted to take advantage of people financially or to embezzle (misuse) church funds.

- He is not greedy for money.
- He sincerely pays his debts promptly.
- He doesn't easily ask people for money.
- He returns the leftover money after purchases.
- He is not known for being idle and burden to others.
- He does not seek to live a lavish and luxurious life.
- He is generous and regular in giving offerings to the church and helping others.
- He is a good steward in the use of his worldly wealth and earthly possessions.

- He uses his credit card wisely.
- He does not give excessive preference to rich people while ignoring the poor (Jas. 2:1-13).
- He does not overemphasize on giving money/offerings.

10. “He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?” (1 Tim. 3:4-5) “His children are believers (faithful) and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.” (Titus 1:6)

Donald Guthrie: Any man unable to govern his children graciously and gravely by maintaining good discipline, is no man for government in the Church.

- He rules his children with firmness and love, or are they inclined to be wild and "bratty".
- He is a good spiritual leader at home, able to train his children in the way they should go.

13. Not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.” (1 Tim. 3:6) Not be arrogant.” (Titus 1:7) “not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:3)

Brian Croft: As the spiritual leaders and doctrinal gatekeepers of the church, pastors “must not be a recent convert” (1 Timothy 3:6). This means a spiritually immature person should not enter this work, which makes sense for obvious reasons. In the text, though, Paul gives a specific one — lest “he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.” **An immature believer could easily get caught up in the power of the position instead of seeing the office as a sacrifice and service to God and his people.**

- He is willing to take on jobs in the church, without seeking acclaim and without grumbling.
- He is open to learn from others.
- He is not boastful about what he does for the church.
- He doesn't do works in the church to show off.
- He is not manipulative to accomplish his personal agendas.
- He sacrifices himself to serve others rather than using others to serve himself.

12. “he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.” (1 Tim. 3:7)

Alexander Strauch: What the outside community thinks is important. If people at work or in the neighborhood say, “That man's an elder in your church? He's a Christian? He doesn't live like it!” that man should not qualify to lead God's family. The Bible says that the world's judgment of your life counts! An elder should be a man with a good public reputation (Acts 6:3).¹¹ If all believers are required to have a good testimony before nonChristians, then it is imperative that the leaders have a good reputation with unbelievers. An outsider's opinion of a Christian leader's character cannot be dismissed, for it affects the evangelistic witness of the entire church. That is why Paul emphatically states “he must have a good reputation.” The reason for emphatically insisting on this qualification is that an elder with a sinful reputation among nonChristians will “fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil” in a far more destructive way than those he leads.

- He has a good testimony in his neighborhood and workplace

13. “A lover of good.” (Titus 1:8)

¹¹ Alexander Strauch, *The Biblical Qualifications For Pastoral Eldership* (Titus 1:5-9, 1 Tim. 3:1-7, 1 Peter 5:1-4), <https://bible.org/seriespage/2-biblical-qualifications-pastoral-eldership-titus-15-9-1-tim-31-7-1-peter-51-4>

William Hendriksen explains the word as "ready to do what is beneficial to others."

- He is friendly and cordial toward members and visitors.
- He loves to know believers and build relationship with them.
- He makes himself available to those with burdens, listening to their cries, comforting them in sorrows, praying with and for them in their needs.

14. "Upright" and "Holy" (Titus 1:8)

Daniel L. Akin: Flowing from the right priorities and a right perspective is a pattern of life characterized as "righteous" and "holy." An elder must be someone a church can follow in the way he treats others and in the way he lives before others. To be "righteous" means being just, fair, equitable, and honest in how you deal with others. Credibility in ministry can stand or fall right here because the just man will reflect the character of God Himself! The word "holy" is not the usual word for holiness, though it has the same basic meaning. It carries the idea of pure and unpolluted. This is the man committed to godliness and Christlikeness. He pursues a life untainted by moral pollution or stain. His life is a reflection of the Christ who has redeemed him and lives within him.

- He is confidential.
- He doesn't lie to others but speaks the truth.
- He is transparent (where necessary) about his weaknesses and not a hypocrite.
- He is not double-tongued (saying one thing in the front and something else behind the back)
- He is a man who pursues holiness.
- He is a man broken over his sins and lives a repentant life.

Finally:

- **John Stott:** So what we call the ‘selection’ of candidates for the pastorate entails according to Paul three essentials: the call of God [GIFT], the inner aspiration and conviction of the individuals concerned [PASSION], and their conscientious screening by the church as to whether they meet the requirements which the apostle now goes on to list [GODLY QUALITIES CONFIRMED BY CHURCH].

A Note For All Christians:

- **D. A. Carson**, *Emeritus Professor of New Testament*, points out: Indeed, with only a couple of exceptions, all of the qualifications listed here are elsewhere in the New Testament demanded of all Christians. For instance, this elder is supposed to be given to hospitality. But that is demanded of all Christians in Hebrews 13. What this means, then, is that *the Christian pastor must exemplify in his own life the virtues and graces that are demanded of all the people of God*. There are only a couple of entries here that cannot be demanded of all Christians, viz. "not a novice."

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. All members (not prospective members) must fill the form.
2. It is mandatory to listen to these two messages before filling the form.
 - Have you listened to the two sermons on biblical eldership? (If you haven't listened to them yet, it is mandatory that you first listen to these two sermons before going ahead to fill the form. This is to help you fill the form with proper biblical understanding)
3. You must write your name when you fill the form. The names will be kept confidential. Elders must evaluate the evidences if there are any charges against prospective elders.
 - ❖ **I Timothy 5:19**, Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

4. The qualifications checklist must be seen in the context of advertent and habitual sins, not in light of inadvertent and unusual choices marked by repentance.
5. This checklist must be viewed in light of a man's current life. He might have been terrible in some of the areas in his past life, but his present life might have been transformed by the redemptive power of Christ. So consider only his present status.
6. Consider a man's character holistically. He may be good at serving others, but if he is ungracious in his relationship with others or unfaithful in financial issues, then he is disqualified for pastorate. \
7. See that you won't disqualify a man because of a church member's personal bias and grudge. Examine the charges with discernment and biblical evidence.
8. This checklist is to avoid hastiness and use discernment, but do not use this evaluation to find a perfect pastor. There is no perfect pastor. Consider whether he pursues godliness, broken in his heart for his failures, and humble in receiving help to grow in godliness.