



Portrait of a Godly Elder

I Timothy 3, Titus 1

In Acts 20:17-38, Paul addresses a group of Christian leaders from the church at Ephesus. In the passage they are called elders (v. 17), overseers (v. 28), and shepherds = pastors (v. 28). Therefore, we believe that "elder, overseer, and pastor" are related terms used to describe one office of leadership in the local church. The New Testament indicates that the early church was led by a plurality of elders/pastors/overseers and by a plurality of deacons (see Phil. 1:1). This portrait of a Godly elder is to delineate the qualifications of an elder/overseer/pastor.

Our constitution states: *Pastors: Pastors are members serving the body and overseeing the spiritual life of the church. They shall be elected by the congregation. Only those qualified according to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 shall be considered for election. Pastors will serve indefinite terms until they resign or are dismissed. (Pastors may be paid or unpaid by the church.)*

We begin with the words of Robert Cook: "There is no substitute for character. You can buy brains, but you can't buy character." When it comes to selecting leaders, nothing is more important than godly character. You can buy talent...or brains...or knowledge...but you can't buy character. Either a person has it or he doesn't.

What Does a Godly Elder Look Like?

We must ask a simple question: What does a godly leader look like? Answer: He looks like the man described in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. If we want elders who would be elders in more than just the name, then we need to take I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 very seriously.

View these character qualities in three ways: *First*, they apply specifically to the elders of the local church. *Second*, they fit in a general way all Christians who are called to leadership in any area. *Third*, they also apply to all Christians everywhere in that these qualities ultimately describe what a godly or mature Christian should look like. No qualification on this list is unique to those called to leadership. That is, *when these qualifications are considered in a broad sense, they fit each one of us*. Indeed, elders **must** be above reproach, free from the love of money, not quarrelsome, gentle, lovers of the good, and so on. But those are qualities that all Christians should display. They describe the kind of people all of us should want to be. While the list is for elders, and then for church leaders generally, we can all benefit from studying this list carefully and asking ourselves, "How well do I measure up?"

These standards are extremely challenging and convicting. It's easier to preach this list than it is to put in into practice.

It is impossible to overstate the important of these characteristics!

--Untold trouble when ignored!

--Great blessing when followed!

Remember that this is an *aspirational* list. No one lives like this 100% of the time. Paul sets before us a worthy goal--which most of us will work on for a lifetime and still not completely reach. We ought to take this list *seriously* but also *graciously* and *realistically*.

I. The Overlooked Ingredient: I Timothy 3:1

"Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task." Many of us might completely overlook that verse in our haste to get to the list of qualifications. That would be a great mistake because this verse reveals the overlooked ingredient of leadership: *Godly elders must want the job.*

Paul uses two verbs to bring this out. *First*, he says that a person must "set his heart" on leadership. The verb means to "stretch out in order to grasp," like a football player straining to reach the goal line. *Second*, he says that a elder must "desire" leadership. That verb means to "eagerly desire" or to "be ambitious for" or even to "covet" (in the good sense).

Notice also that he calls leadership a "noble task." *Leadership is a noble calling in and of itself.* Consider the following statements:

1. Leadership is a noble thing in the eyes of God and it, too, is a form of servanthood.
2. The desire to be an elder is noble if it is accompanied by a desire to grow in grace.
3. Being an elder is a noble work--but it is work! If a person desires leadership, what does he seek? A title? A name? A big office? A platform for greatness? A big salary? No, he desires a "noble task."

Here, then is the first requirement for leadership. A person must want the job! There should be a God-given desire that moves the heart to action. The application is clear: If you have to talk a person into serving, you've probably got the wrong person! That goes as much for Sunday School teachers and choir members as it does for elders and deacons. *If God is truly calling, that person should eventually feel a deep inner desire for the job.*

(Note: Reluctance and hesitation are not always a bad sign. Perhaps the person feels unworthy or perhaps they don't understand what the job entails. Sometimes reluctance is good because the job of leadership is an awesome task. We don't want elders who take their jobs lightly. On the other hand, settled unwillingness and opposition is a sign that you don't have the right person for the job.)

Two implications to think about:

1. **If leadership is a noble task, then churches should uphold their leaders before the congregation.** Being an elder is a great work, being a deacon or a deaconess is a great work, serving the Lord as a small group leader is a great work. Being a ministry leader is a heavy responsibility. The same is true for all volunteer positions in the church. Let's uphold leadership and encourage our people to show respect and appreciation for the leaders God has given.
2. **Young men and women should be taught that leadership is a worthy calling in the local church.** Too often church members make disparaging comments about the pastor, the staff, the elders or the deacons or the ministry leaders or the small group leaders...and then we wonder why our teenagers drop out of church as soon as they can. How much better to uphold godly leaders and challenge our children and youth to aspire to the same kind of leadership someday.

II. Character Qualities of a Godly Elder

With that as background, we turn now to discuss 25 qualities of spiritual leadership in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Don't be discouraged as you work through this list. No one meets these qualifications 100%! We're not looking for perfection, but rather solid evidence of growth in each area.

A. The Elder's Temperament

1. Temperate: I Timothy 3:2

The Greek word for temperate originally meant "wineless." The word seems to be used metaphorically referring to mental behavioral and spiritual sobriety. When Paul uses the word, he means something like "even-tempered," "clear-headed," or "balanced." *It refers to a man who has nothing that muddies or muddles his senses.* In that sense it certainly touches the use of alcohol, but also goes far beyond it. A temperate person is "cool, calm and collected," especially in a moment of crisis. He's not credulous, not easily deceived, not carried away by every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). He's old enough and experienced enough not to be rattled under pressure. *You discover this quality in a person's life as you watch him in a crisis situation.* A temperate man doesn't fall apart when his world falls apart. He doesn't lose his emotional equilibrium when the rug is suddenly pulled out from under him.

This is a much-needed quality if the leader is to stand firm against the devil's subtle attacks (I Peter 5:8), false teaching (2 Tim. 4:3-5), and moral and spiritual darkness (I Thessalonians 5:6-8).

2. Sensible: I Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8

The Greek word describes a person who has a "safe mind." The NIV translated the Greek with two different English words--"self-controlled" and "sensible." *Both describe a certain pattern of thinking, a way of approaching the problems of life.* The sensible person is balanced, discreet, reasonable, and discerning--not given to extremes. He is experienced enough to keep his balance when life throws him a curve ball. The word also implies a sober and serious attitude. He's a great man to have around when a tough decision needs to be made because he doesn't jump to conclusions or act solely on the basis of his emotions. *Again, this quality comes from long experience with life.* Few young men or women will have this quality in abundance, but it is often seen in older people. Sober-mindedness greatly tempers pride, authoritarianism, and indiscretion.

3. Disciplined: Titus 1:8

The word describes a person who has "his strength under control." He eats, but he is not a glutton. He sleeps, but he does not sleep forever. He loves a bargain, but he knows how to say no. He may have a credit card, but he knows when *not* to use it. He gets angry for the right reasons, but he never "loses his cool." He is strong, but he doesn't intimidate others.

Proverbs 25:28 warns of what happens when this quality is *not* present: **"Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control."** Such a man is easy prey to sexual temptation, financial temptation, uncontrolled anger, arrogance, envy, sloth, and a critical spirit.

Seneca said, "Most powerful is he who has himself in his own control." Many gifted men and women fail at precisely this point. Great promise is squandered by a failure of self-discipline.

B. The Elder's Interpersonal Relationships

It's interesting that Paul uses four negative expressions to specify how the godly leader must live. Some things simply must *not* be present in his life. Those four are counter-balanced by one positive characteristic.

1. Not violent: I Timothy 3:3

The NAS uses "not...pugnacious." The King James rendering is "not a striker." That says it all. A "striker" is a violent person who is easily angered and quarrelsome. Such people tend to be assertive, manipulative, demanding, coercive, and highly critical of others. They are quick to pick fights and slow to make up afterwards. Wives and children especially feel the blows of a pugnacious man, and anyone who seriously frustrates a pugnacious man is a potential target for physical abuse.

The term warns again those who use physical abuse, verbal abuse, mental abuse or emotional abuse in order to get their way. Paul's command is simple: *Don't choose a person like that as a leader!* God only allows those He knows will be gentle to lead His sheep through the stresses of congregational life.

2. Not quarrelsome: I Timothy 3:3

The NAS translates this word as "uncontentious." The King James uses a picturesque phrase--"not a brawler." Some people just love to pick fights. They love to argue, love to "mix it up," love to trade insults, and put other people down. Such a man is the master of the cutting remark, the king of the cute comeback. Proverbs 20:3 says, **"It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel."** Do you know how to spot this person? *In any group, this man dominates the discussion by arguing every point into the ground.* He can always find a thousand reasons why a new idea won't work. When challenged, he sends out the clear message: "My way or the highway."

By contrast, the godly leader is uncontentious, willing to listen, not prejudiced in any form, not argumentative, not given to a fighting spirit. He is a peace-maker, but not a peace-breaker. God hates division and fighting among his people. And though leaders must confront false teachers and sinful behaviour, they must do it in a Christian manner, not with a sinful disposition that is inclined toward fighting.

3. Not quick-tempered: Titus 1:7

The word means "not passionate." Moffatt translates it as "not hot-tempered," while the New Testament in Basic English says "not quickly moved to wrath." It describes a person who doesn't blow his top whenever he gets angry. Proverbs 29:22 warns us about this tendency: **"An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins."** Let's be clear on this point. There is such a thing as righteous anger (Ephesians 4:26), and there are times when leaders need to be angry. No one wants a leader who always smiles and never frowns. No one wants a leader who lives in Fantasyland and thinks everyday is Christmas. *We need leaders who know how to get angry at the right time for the right reasons in the right way.*

But Paul is warning us against putting a "hot-head" on the Elder Ministry Team. Don't do it. One hot-head can destroy the work of a dozen godly men. Leaders deal with people and their problems. And sometimes people can be frustrating and the problems can be annoying. *Godly leaders know how to remain calm under pressure and provocation.* Since Christian leaders deal with people and problems, a "hot-head" will find much fuel to provide his anger. With his ugly, angry words, a quick-tempered man will destroy the peace and unity the Lord desires to His people.

4. Not overbearing: Titus 1:7

The word literally means "not self-pleasing or not self-willed." A self-willed man is headstrong, independent, self-assertive, and ungracious toward those with a different opinion. He refuses to listen to others because his only concern is promoting his own agenda. He seems to enjoy working with whoever he can easily control or persuade. He is not a team player.

A person who is free from arrogant self-will does not always have to have his own way. He is known as someone who shows respect for all those he interacts with whether old or young, male or female, simple or educated.

The unyielding, overbearing person who is blind to other's feelings and opinions must not be permitted to lead the church.

5. Gentle: I Timothy 3:3

The scholars tell us that this word is difficult to translate because it contains so many delicate nuances. It has the idea of patience, equity, peaceableness, graciousness, forbearance, consideration, and personal kindness. It describes a person who considers the whole picture before acting. A gentle leader protects and does not humiliate. *He "guards each man's dignity and saves each man's pride."* In making a decision he judges both the letter *and* the spirit of the law. He is willing to make allowances for the weakness and ignorance of the fallen human condition. He is willing to yield, willing to forgive, willing to overlook. Matthew Arnold calls this quality "sweet reasonableness." You know it when you see it because the person who has it always makes you feel better when you are around them.

God will not let His people be driven, beaten, condemned, or divided. The godly leaders must be patient, gracious, and understanding with the erring--and, at times, exasperating--sheep.

C. The Elder's Reputation

1. Above reproach: I Timothy 3:2

This phrase serves as a general summary of all the character qualities a leader should have. The Greek word describes a garment without any "folds." When applied to personal character, it means that leader must be unassailable, uncensured, and free from any secret or hidden pockets of sins. Said another way, it means that a godly leader is one whose life is such that there is nothing a detractor can "grab hold of." The Living Bible uses the phrase "a good man whose life cannot be spoken against." Knox says "one with whom no fault can be found." It means that no charge could be brought against such a person that would withstand impartial examination. Leaders are often attacked, their motive questioned, their actions criticized. *While such things do happen, a leader who is truly above reproach will weather the storm because there is nothing about him which a person could say, "aha! I gotcha."* This means no questionable conduct, no secret sins, no deliberately unresolved conflicts. He is free from any offensive or disgraceful blight of character or conduct.

To be "above reproach" describes not perfection, but a model Christian life. We should expect nothing less from our leaders. If an elder brings disgrace upon himself and the church because of sinful behavior, that man is disqualified from church oversight. He is no longer "above reproach". Since Christian leaders lead primarily by example (1 Peter 5:3), an irreproachable life is indispensable.

2. Blameless: Titus 1:6, 7

This word comes from the legal realm and carries a slightly different connotation. It means "without indictment" or "unaccusable." The difference is this: **"Above reproach" means "one who could not be accused," while "Blameless" means "one who is not accused, whose character and conduct are not called into question."** Taken together they establish a very high standard of personal conduct.

3. Respectable: I Timothy 3:2

The Greek word is *kosmion*--from which we get the English word "cosmos." It describes a person whose life is well-ordered and well-arranged. Another word might be "dignified." It describes one who is orderly in his whole person and lifestyle. This quality is seen in a leader's outward behavior--his dress, his manners, his speech, the way he relates to the opposite sex. It touches the way he keep his home and how he handles the various affairs of life. It basically describes a person who can keep a dozen balls in the air at one time--without dropping any and without saying, "Hey, look at me!" Such a person can work through difficult problems with clear thinking. *To us an old phrase that sounds sadly out-of-date, a man with this quality is a "Christian gentlemen."*

Titus 2:9-10 uses another form of this word to encourage slaves to **"make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive."** Godly leaders should live in such a way that their life *beautifies* the gospel. A "respectable" person makes Jesus beautiful and the gospel attractive to outsiders.

In I Thessalonians 4:11, 12, Paul implores the Thessalonians to live orderly lives in order to "behave properly toward outsiders.": An elder who lives a disorderly life is unable to care for God's flock properly and successfully. Under such a man's leadership, the sheep will soon show the pathetic signs of neglect and mismanagement.

4. Hospitable: Titus 1:8

The word literally means a "lover of strangers." We might tend to overlook this quality, but in the early church hospitality was non-negotiable. In those days there were no Holiday Inns or Marriott Hotels where traveling Christians could safely spend the night. Therefore, if you came to my town, you automatically planned to stay with me and I automatically opened my home to you. The fact that I didn't know you beforehand wouldn't matter. If you were a brother in Christ, then my home was your home. In addition, since the early church had no buildings, the believers met in homes. Every church was a house church and hospitality was essential.

Hospitality practically displays the Christian family's generosity, closeness, and love. Lack of hospitality among the Lord's people is a sure sign of selfish, lifeless, loveless Christianity. A man who closes his door to God's family cannot be an elder.

To be hospitable touches your attitude toward others. A godly leader must be open, approachable, vulnerable, transparent, one who genuinely cares for others. Here are some questions to ask about potential leaders: Does he open his home to others? Does he share easily with others? Is his life transparent? Would I feel free sharing my problems with him?

5. Upright: Titus 1:8

The word means "fair, honest, just." An upright man conducts himself in accordance with the principles of divine truth. This touches a man's business dealings, his financial affairs, how he handles his employees, what kind of deals he makes, whether he pays his bills on time, whether he keeps his promises, how he speaks about others, and whether you would trust this man with your wife and children overnight. *It is a combination of "goodness" and "honesty."* Such a man can be counted on to make wise, fair, and righteous judgements for the community. This qualifies a man to arbitrate the affairs of God's people in a fair and honest way, without partiality.

6. Good reputation with outsiders: I Timothy 3:7

Here is another quality that is often overlooked. The phrase for "good reputation" is literally "good witness." What kind of "witness" do you have with the people outside the church? All too often we neglect to consider a man's reputation in the community. *But the "voice of the people" may be the "voice of God."* This touches a man's reputation with his neighbors, his friends, his co-workers and his non-Christian buddies. The godly leader ought to be admired by those outside the church. Although they will not always understand why, unbelievers are quick to spot a difference. "You're different somehow. I just can't put my finger on it."

Here's a penetrating question: **Would your unsaved friends be surprised to discover that you had been elected to a position of leadership in your church?** Would they be surprised...or pleased?

We have too many "Sunday Christians" who turn out to be "Monday Scoundrels." If unbelievers do not respect us, that may say something negative about us. It's not always the offense of the Gospel. Sometimes we are just offensive in the way we live.

Why is this important? Because the unsaved watch us all the time. Your life may be the only "Bible" some people ever read. They watch us, examine us, listen to our jokes, study the way we do our work, take note of how we treat others...and then they draw their own conclusions. And their judgment is often extremely accurate!

People judge the community by its leaders. The real test of a man's character, then, is from Monday through Saturday, not on Sunday morning. The unsaved watched and are very astute. They observe what a Christian is like at work and in the community, and will be the first to see if there is a dichotomy between profession and practice. Their opinion of a Christian leader's character cannot be dismissed, for it affects the entire Church's witness.

But notice the warning Paul adds to this qualification: **"So that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."** Church leaders are especially susceptible to Satan's attacks. We hear about it all the time--so often now that it hardly seems like news when we read that another minister has fallen into sin. **When Satan wants to destroy a church, he goes after the pastors first! He loves to disgrace God's work by trapping leaders in open sin before a watching world.**

When that happens the church is hurt, the gospel is mocked, and Christ's name is defamed.

Cynically, people will say, "He acts that way, and he's a Christian leader." They will ridicule and mock him. He will be discredited and suffer disgrace and insults. But that isn't all. Using public criticism and the leader's own inconsistencies, the devil will trap the man into greater and more serious sin. A small offense can become more destructive and evil.

There are many lessons here, not the least being that you need to pray for your elders. Their feet are made of clay--just like yours. Don't assume your leaders are always strong. They sometimes face overwhelming temptation--generally when it is least expected. So pray for them. Pray for your church staff. And pray for your small group leaders and ministry leaders. *Pray for God to strengthen all the leaders of your church so that they might have a good testimony for the name of Jesus Christ.*

D. The Elder's Spiritual Life

1. Not a new convert: I Timothy 3:6

The word for "new convert" is *neofuton*--from which we get the English word "neophyte." It literally means "new plant." *Don't put a "new plant" in a position of leadership.* "New plants" need nurturing, they need fertilizer, they need someone to pull the weeds and make sure they get enough water and light. "New plants" need lots of tender loving care. What they *don't* need is the pressure of leadership. Remember, even a mighty oak tree was a "new plant" once. Given time and careful attention, that "new plant" will someday become strong enough to stand on its own. Until then, keep it in the hothouse.

A "new convert" is a beginner in the faith, a baby Christian, a recent convert. No matter how spiritual, zealous, knowledgeable, or talented a new convert may be, he is not spiritually mature.

Note the warning: **"He may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil."** The Greek is very picturesque: "He may be *wrapped up in smoke*." That is, by elevating a man too soon to leadership, he may begin to "blow smoke" and eventually be blinded by his own arrogance. The Bible is right: **"Pride goes before destruction"** (Prov. 16:18). Even the most mature and godly believer must continually battle pride's subtleties. Pride destroys. It's a serious matter for ruinous consequences await the inexperienced, prideful elder.

The danger here is that new believers simply haven't been properly trained or tested yet. They lack the maturity, wisdom and experience that only comes from knowing the Lord for many years. Martin Luther said that three things were necessary for the making of a minister: Prayer, Meditation, and Temptation. Only when a man has been "around the block" a few times is he ready for leadership. This applies to every level of leadership in the local church. Don't put a new believer in a key position! Don't be quick to elevate someone new to your congregation. Give them time to get acclimated. *If they are worthy, they will demonstrate that fact over time.* Don't rush. Take your time. It takes a lifetime to grow a good leader. Don't spoil the process by elevating someone too soon.

2. Holy: Titus 1:8

This word refers to personal piety. A man with a firm disposition who is committed to observing faithfully his religious obligations and practices is considered "devout." It is that quality of life which causes a leader to conform to that which pleases God. Not very helpful? How about his? *A holy person is someone who brings you into the presence of God simply by walking into the room.* It doesn't refer to fake piety or to a holier-than-thou mentality. In fact, that's the opposite of what this word means. A holy person makes it easy to believe in Jesus. They simply exude the presence of God by the sheer force of their goodness and godliness.

When you are choosing leaders, choose those men and women who make it easy for you to believe in God.

3. Holding fast to sound doctrine: Titus 1:9

This verse is worth quoting in full: **"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it."** Every word is important. "Hold firmly" means "constantly holding onto and not letting go." The "trustworthy message" refers to the essential truths of the Christian faith--the fundamentals which must not be compromised. "Sound doctrine" is literally "healthy doctrine" or "wholesome teaching," referring to the well-balanced teaching of God's Word that produces healthy Christian living. To "refute" is to "correct" or "convince" those who "contradict" the truth.

An elder must cling firmly to, be devoted to, and adhere wholeheartedly to God's Word.

This presupposes:

- 1. A settled body of Christian truth.**
- 2. A knowledge of that truth.**
- 3. A willingness to proclaim that truth.**
- 4. A willingness to defend that truth.**

The Christian message has never been universally popular; some have always opposed it. We need leaders who are so well grounded in the truth of the Bible that they can accurately teach it to others and courageously defend the truth when it is attacked. Unqualified elders who were (and are) uncertain and uncommitted to the Word have done incalculable damage to the church of Jesus Christ. Because they did not guard themselves or the flock, many churches that once stood for sound orthodox doctrine now reject nearly every major tenet of the faith. Refuting opponents of God's truth demands courage, much effort, spiritual maturity, and knowledge of the truth. The church must be protected from those who speak against the Word, and the elders are called to do that job. (Acts 20:28-31).

4. Able to teach: I Timothy 3:2

This is a more general statement of the same principle. *Interestingly, the ability to teach is the only character requirement related to the actual work of an elder--indicating that teaching and leading belong together.*

Teachers *are* leaders and leaders *are* teachers. Elders must be able to open their Bibles and instruct others.

The phrase "able to teach" translates one Greek word which means both "having a teachable spirit" and "able to teach others." This presupposes:

1. **A teachable spirit--eager to learn.**
2. **A good working knowledge of the Bible.**
3. **A willingness to share spiritual truth with others.**
4. **A capability to communicate.**
5. **A willingness to confront false teaching when necessary.**

Leaders must love the Word, must cling to the Word, must know the Word with no wavering, no doubting, no compromising. The failure of church leaders to know and teach the Bible is one of the chief reasons why the biblical error floods our churches and drowns the life and power of the church. Therefore, the elders must be able to teach God's Word.

Since teaching is also a spiritual gift that not all believers possess, how can this requirements be met by those without the spiritual gift? The answer is not hard to find. *Not all elders will be equally gifted in teaching.* Some will flourish in front of a class, others will do better leading a small group or in one-on-one discipleship. Not all will teach in the same way. But all must be able to do it in some way.

The church of Jesus Christ is built on the Word of God. Elders lead the church. *Therefore elders must be men of the Word.* This is non-negotiable. P.T. Forsyth said, "One man who truly knows his Bible is worth more to the church's real strength than a crowd of workers who do not." It doesn't matter how successful a man may be at his business, or how eloquently he may speak, or how much education he may have. If a man cannot instruct people in the Word, he does not qualify to be an elder.

E. The Elder's Family Life

Churches suffer when this category is ignored or downplayed. Paul listed three very specific requirements concerning an elder's family life. We ignore them at our own peril.

1. Husband of one wife: I Timothy 3:2

Unfortunately this qualification has been so wrapped up in controversy that we have missed its essential teaching. In Greek the phrase literally reads "a one-woman man."

Paul has in mind marital faithfulness as a character quality of a godly leader. Why is that important? Because if a man is not faithful to his wife, how can he be trusted to be faithful to his obligations elsewhere? If a man cheats on his wife, where else will he cheat?

Here are some questions we ought to ask about potential leaders:

1. Is he a flirt? Does he have roving eyes?
2. Are his affections centered on his wife?
3. Does he demonstrate that affection and loyalty in ways others can see?
4. Is his marriage a model for others to follow?
5. Is he above reproach in his dealing with the opposite sex?
6. Is his life free from pornography in every form?

Many Christian men who have never been divorced would have trouble answering those questions. This is a higher standard than simply asking, "Has he ever been divorced?" The real question is, "What kind of marriage does this man have?"

For that matter, many divorced men couldn't meet this standard either. *If a man has been married more than once, and if he has children from his previous marriage, it will be quite difficult for him to truly be a "one-woman man" as regards his present wife.* He may have alimony to think about, child support payments to make, relational difficulties to solve, old wounds that need to heal, and so on. In every divorce there is sin on every side, and that sin leaves lasting scars that remain for many years.

To say that is not to say that a divorced man should never be an elder. Each case needs to be considered individually. *But divorced men will have a harder time meeting this standard.* That's the inevitable fallout from a world where divorce has become all too common.

The phrase "husband of one wife" is a teaching that an elder must have "an exclusive relationship with one woman and one woman only." *It's a positive statement about loyalty and faithfulness.* Seen in this light, to be the "husband of one wife" is a *moral* qualification, not simply a *marital* qualification. The issue is the *quality* of the marriage, not simply the *legal state* of the marriage. The phrase therefore implies loyalty and faithfulness. Stated as it is in a positive form it means that the overseer must have an exclusive relationship with one woman. It is a beautiful, striking, and positive way of expressing exemplary, irreproachable conduct in marriage.

Does this mean that an elder must be married? No, the phrase is not "husband of a wife" but "husband of one wife." The contrast is not between having a wife or not having a wife, but between having *one* wife and having *many* wives. I think it is fair to say that Paul *assumes* that most elders will be married, but he does not *require* marriage. The meaning is, "If he is married, he must be a one-woman man."

Does this mean that an elder must be a man? Yes, the question is also addressed in I Timothy 2:8-15. The list of qualifications in I Timothy 3 merely assumes what is made explicit in chapter 2.

2. Manages own household well: I Timothy 3:4-5

The word "manage" means "to stand before and lead." The word "well" means "in an orderly fashion." *Paul says that when we need elders we should begin by looking for those men who handle their families in an orderly fashion.*

But why does he bring up the family? Because the home is the best training ground for local church leadership. *Spiritual leadership begins at home!* The family is like a church in miniature where the father is the pastor of his own family. And the church is like a large family where the elders are the spiritual fathers who care for God's children.

Notice that the elder is to keep **"his children under control with all dignity."** Donald Guthrie states, "Any man unable to govern his children graciously and gravely by maintaining good discipline, is no man for government in the church." A biblical elder is best tested by how he handles his children, not by how rich, successful, or well-known he may be. A Christian elder must have obedient and submissive children, but not be a spirit-crushing tyrant who gains submission by harsh punishment or unjust opposition.

Notice the penetrating question Paul asks: **"If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?"** The word translated "take care of" is the same verb used of the Good Samaritan who "took care of" the poor man he found on the road. It means to "assume personal responsibility for the care of another person." That's what a father is to do for his family. God holds him responsible for his wife and children. He's got to answer to God someday for what happens to them. *If a man fails at that great task, how can we dare to give him a leadership position in the local church?*

So the home is the church in miniature and the birthplace of budding spiritual leaders. Habits formed there last forever. Principles imparted there are never forgotten. Eternal truth is hammered out on the anvil of daily life.

Remember, elders don't run a business. They lead a family! A man who learns to lead his family well will someday make an excellent elder.

Managing involves many things, including the following:

- A. Setting priorities
- B. Planning for the future
- C. Providing what is needed
- D. Handling crisis situations

By the way, when is management best seen? In a crisis. *Anyone can lead a business when things are going well. Good managers shine when the business is in trouble. The same is true at home. Family problems should not disqualify a man from spiritual leadership. **It's not what happens but how he responds that makes all the difference.*** Some men rise to the occasion; others cut and run. The men who rise in a crisis are the leaders you want.

3. Children who obey him: Titus 1:6

This particular qualification is stated in two different ways. 1 Timothy 3:4 says the elder must "**see that his children obey him with proper respect.**" Titus 1:6 is more specific: "**a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.**" These verses are frighteningly specific. *The challenge today is to raise godly children in a world that constantly pulls in the opposite direction.* We aren't told how the father is to do this, but we are told what the results will look like:

1. Children who are faithful.
2. Children who obey.
3. Children who show proper respect.
4. Children who are not wild.
5. Children who are not disobedient.

If an elder has a contentious spirit, the people will inevitably become contentious. If an elder is not hospitable, the people will be unfriendly and cold. If an elder loves money, he will subtly use the people and work for his own ends (1 Timothy 3:3). Following his example, the people, too, will become lovers of money. If an elder is not just and devout, he will be unable to rightly discern critical issues and problems. If an elder is not sensible, balanced, and self-controlled, his judgments will be characterized by disorganization, aimlessness, and ugly extremes. If an elder is not a faithful, one-woman husband, he will ultimately encourage others to be unfaithful. If an elder does not faithfully hold to the Word, the people will not.

The translation "**having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion,**" is better rendered as having *faithful children*. Even the best Christian fathers cannot guarantee that all their children will really believe. To say this passage means believing Christian children places an impossible standard upon a father. Salvation is a supernatural act of God. God, not good parents (although they are used of God), ultimately brings salvation (John 1:12, 13). Elders must have children who are loyal and dutiful, good citizens, or--as we might say today-- responsible children.

"Dissipation" means debauchery, profligacy, or wild, immoral living (cf. 1 Peter 4:3, 4; Luke 15:13). Nigel Turner describes dissipation this way: "It is more than wastefulness, worse than prodigality, and nothing short of immoral debauchery and excessive lewdness." "Rebellion" means to not be subject to control, to be disobedient, unruly, or insubordinate. Such children not only bring disgrace and shame upon their father, as Eli's children did (1 Samuel 2-3), but bring disqualification from leadership upon him.

A "steward" (Greek, *oikonomos*, literally means house-manager) is a manger, an administrator, and a trustee of someone else's household, property, or business.

One or two points deserve special mention. *He's probably not speaking of young children, and possibly not even of teenagers.* He may be envisioning grown children who have already left the home and gone out on their own. Certainly that is the only way to get a long-range view of how the children have turned out.

The word "wild" is literally "unsaved." It means to live an "unsaved" lifestyle. It refers to a wild, indulgent, immoral and debauched way of life--one that is typical of the surrounding pagan community. More than that, the word speaks of excessive lewdness as a *pattern of life*. Children make many mistake in the course of life, but those raised in a godly home will be inclined toward righteousness. Some will try drugs, some will rebel, others will be trapped by immorality, some will seek abortions, others will break the law, but the seeds of a godly heritage will eventually bear fruit along the way.

To summarize:

1. **An elder should be a model father.**
2. **No one can raise "perfect" children who never make mistakes.**
3. **The godly man never gives up on his children.**
4. **Wild and disobedient children reflect badly on a father's ability to guide others.**

5. How a father responds to a crisis in his family reveals much about his ability to handle crisis in the church.

A godly leader takes great care with his children knowing that they are his single greatest contribution to the world. One writer describes the ideal father this way:

"His *firmness* makes it *advisable* for the child to obey."

"His *wisdom* makes it *natural* for the child to obey."

"His *love* makes it a *pleasure* for the child to obey."

Do your children respect you enough to submit to your leadership? If so, then you are an excellent candidate for leadership in the local church.

Summary? *The ideal elder has a family that is committed to Jesus Christ, where the husband loves his wife and the wife is dedicated to her husband's spiritual leadership, where the grown children love Jesus Christ and love and respect their father.* That's the picture! It takes time to build a family like this and it takes a father with the discipline and desire to see it happen. But it's worth it in the end.

F. The Elder's Personal Habits

This final category touches the elder in his relationship to alcohol and money--two areas of perennial temptation. Don't overlook God's Word on these crucial points! If you do, you will regret it later.

1. Not given to drunkenness: I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7

Literally this phrase means "not lingering over wine." Paul uses a strong word here that literally means not beside wine, or not addicted, preoccupied, or overindulgent with wine. It is variously translated as "not a lover of wine," "not addicted to strong drink," "Not a drunkard," "Not a hard drinker," "Not excessive in his use of wine." We might add that the word also includes the thought of not frequenting places where wine is misused. *It means not using wine as a way of life.*

While this does not demand total abstinence, it also makes clear that a lover of wine cannot be a leader of God's people. *Godly leaders must be above reproach in the use of wine.*

Unfortunately, too many people read this caution as a permission to drink wine. Since the warning is repeated twice, we learn that alcohol abuse was a serious problem in the first century. One wonders what Paul would think if he suddenly arrived in modern America and saw how pervasive alcohol abuse has become. *Please do not turn this warning into a permission!* Godly leaders must be very careful about alcohol, either using it in great moderation or not at all.

2. Not a lover of money: I Timothy 3:3

This touches how a man views his whole life. *The godly leader must not make money the goal of his life. He must not be absorbed with the goal of increasing his net worth.* In I Timothy 6:6-11, 17-19 Paul has some strong words for the rich. They are tempted to be arrogant and to put their trust in their wealth. Instead they should learn to trust God and then focus on becoming rich in good deeds. This, he says, will lay up a firm foundation for the future.

Being a "lover of money" doesn't imply anything dishonest or wrong. It simply means that you have wrongly made money (and the things money can buy) the measure of your life. How foolish, how sad.

Like a powerful drug, the "love of money" can delude the judgment of even the best men. Both Paul and Peter warned the elders against greed (Acts 20:33ff.; I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7, I Peter 5:2). Money-loving, materialistic elders set the wrong example and will inevitably fall into unethical financial dealings that disgrace the Lord's name.

3. Not pursuing dishonest gain: Titus 1:7

This characteristic is different. *It implies a kind of deliberate dishonesty.* The godly leader must not be an embezzler, a thief, a crook, a pilferer. His financial dealings must be above reproach. There cannot be the

slightest question about the way he handles his money. If there is, if he has a reputation as a "sharpie" who cuts a hard deal, if he is known as a man who plays fast and loose in his business affairs, if he laughs and says, "Everyone does it," forget it. Don't make that man a leader!

The temptation to use one's position or prestige to gain an unfair financial advantage lurks at every prominent leader's door. This does not mean that overseers cannot receive financial provision, however. What the Bible condemns is the base motive that desires what rightfully belongs to someone else. Hence, it is sordid, base gain, or disgraceful profit.

Note the difference: The "lover of money" is honest but wrong. "Pursuing dishonest gain" is dishonest and wrong. *Both are condemned as inappropriate for a leader of God's people.*

4. Loving what is good: Titus 1:8

We come to the final characteristic and find that it serves as a fitting conclusion to this list. "*Loving what is good*" means to support good people, good causes and good ideas. This requirement defines a man who willingly and with self-denial does good, or is kind and ready to do what is beneficial to others. It reaches to the motivation of a leader's life. What excites him? What hobbies does he cultivate? What brings a smile to his face?

Some people are excited by trifles and trivia, others by outright evil. Few there are who truly love what is good in life. When we find such people, we ought to follow them for they understand the difference between the good, the near-good, and the not-so-good. One commentator calls this quality "the unwavering activity of love." An elder who loves goodness will always seek to do helpful things for people. He will be loving, generous, and kind towards all and will never sink to evil, retaliatory behavior.

Conclusion

As we survey this list, we need to keep several things in mind. **First, it takes time to develop a life like this.** That's the best argument for not elevating young men and new believers to eldership. Most 30-year-olds won't have developed these qualities yet. That same principle applies to leadership generally. **Second, a life like this doesn't happen by accident.** You have to work at it. If you want to be this kind of person, it will take real effort expended toward a definite goal over a long period of time. You can't read this list, pray about it, and expect to wake up tomorrow morning a brand-new person. *Change is possible, but for most of us real change is a slow, agonizing process.* In five years you could substantially change your life; in two years you could be a very different person; in one year you could see real change; in one month you could begin to grow in several areas; in a week you could focus on one key area; and by tomorrow you could write down each quality on a chart and rate yourself in each area.

A. Concerning All of Us

This daunting list is not meant to depress us, but to inspire us to be better men and women!!!! *A noble work demands a noble person.* If after reading this paper, you feel depressed, that's okay...as long as you don't stay depressed. A veteran 75-year-old missionary--assessed his own life in light of this. His evaluation: "I'm above reproach, I'm the husband of one wife, I'm free from the love of the money, I don't linger over wine..." Then he paused for a long moment and said, "But I could use some work in the rest of the areas." Ask yourself, "If he would say that, what about me?" As you survey this list, you may see 5 or 6 areas of strength, 7 or 8 areas of growth, and 4 or 5 areas that need real work.

- It's okay to say, "I can't meet those qualifications now."
- It's better to say, "By the grace of God, that's the kind of person I want to be."

What God wants is not perfection, but growth toward a goal!

B. Concerning Our Elders

What should we conclude when we read a list like this? How about this? Being an elder is a tough job! How would you like to be an elder and have this list applied to your life? Perhaps that's one reason why so few men are willing to volunteer to serve.

Therefore, we ought to highly respect those godly leaders who serve in our midst. In closing, here are three specific suggestions.

- 1. Elders are held to higher standards. They deserve our respect.**
- 2. Elders face greater temptations. They need our prayers.**
- 3. Elders bear heavier burdens. They depend upon our support.**

A good elder is a great gift from God. Let us therefore give 100% support to the godly leaders around us. And let us each take these principles to heart, asking God to make us better people than we've ever been so that we can do more for Him than we've ever done before.

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