

Qualifications for Elders

In General

As a summary statement for all that follows in the qualifications, Paul says an elder is to be a man who is *above reproach* (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7). His lifestyle is such that no one can legitimately accuse him of conduct which is unbefitting a mature believer. However, this does not mean he is perfect or without room for improvement. Why? Because none of us are perfect (Phil. 3:10-14; Ps. 143:2). Generally speaking, an elder is to be a model of Christian maturity and the qualities of these passages are marks of maturity which normally characterize the qualified man. Note that these qualities may also be seen from the standpoint of a man's fundamental relationships—to God, His Word, self, family, others including the outside world, and things.

As to God and His Word

(1) *Not a new convert* (1 Tim. 3:6). Not a neophyte, novice, one newly converted. Does he truly know the Lord and has he shown definite progress in spiritual maturity?

(2) *Devout* (Tit. 1:8). Does he demonstrate a definite commitment to know, love, and walk with God?

(3) *Holding fast to the faithful word . . . able to exhort . . . and refute . . .* (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9). Is he a student of the Bible? Is he stable in the faith, sound in doctrine and practice? Does he know the Word well enough to teach it to others? Is he able to use the Word of God to exhort people with sound doctrine and to refute those who are antagonistic to the faith or the truth of Scripture?

As to Himself

(1) *If a man aspires to the office of overseer* (1 Tim. 3:1). Based on biblical criteria and motives, does he have a strong desire to serve the Lord and the body of Christ as an overseer of the flock, or does he feel constrained by necessity (cf. 1 Pet. 5:2, “shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily according to the will of God”)?

(2) *Temperate* (1 Tim. 3:2). In the everyday situations of life does he tend to react according to biblical principles so that he remains under God's control? Is he Spirit-controlled and disciplined rather than self-indulgent?

(3) *Prudent* (1 Tim. 3:2). Is he prudent or biblically minded to the extent that he walks wisely according to the wisdom of Scripture?

(4) *Not quick tempered* (Tit. 1:7). Does he have a short fuse? Is he emotionally stable and in control of his feelings?

As to His Family

(1) *Husband of one wife* (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6). Literally, a one-woman man. He is a man totally devoted and faithful to his own wife so that he is not distracted by other women?

(2) *One who manages his own household well* (1 Tim. 3:4-5; Tit. 1:6). Does his wife love, respect, and follow his leadership, and are his children under control, respectful of authority, and responding positively to God?

As to Others

(1) *Hospitable* (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). Literally, “a lover of strangers.” As he is able, does he share his home with others in order to minister to their needs?

(2) *Able to teach* (1 Tim. 3:2). Is he able to communicate the Word of God to others? Is he able to handle those who disagree with him in a patient and gentle manner? Have others recognized in him the ability to teach and communicate the Word at least in small group settings?

(3) *Not self-willed* (Tit. 1:7). A self-willed man is a self-centered man who demands his own way because he cares only for himself. As a servant, an elder must seek to please God and care for others. Is he able to set aside his own preferences in order to promote unity and care for the needs of others?

(4) Loving what is good (Tit. 1:8). Literally, “a lover of goodness.” He is a man who is devoted to that which is good or beneficial either in things, deeds, or people (Ps. 15). Does he take advantage of opportunities to do good to all men (both Christians and non-Christians) in order to build them up rather than tear them down?

(5) Not pugnacious or a striker, i.e., anger out of control (1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7). Does he show a tendency to be either physically or verbally abusive? Has he shown a disposition to use a position of leadership to bully or push people around?

(6) Uncontentious (1 Tim. 3:3). He is not a quarrelsome person who struggles against others for self-seeking reasons such as jealousy or selfish ambition. He may strongly disagree, but he will state his case without being contentious.

(7) Gentle (1 Tim. 3:3). This word in the original Greek text refers to strength under control, like a powerful, but gentle horse. Does he handle others in a gentle, patient, and gracious way? Is he yielding, showing a mellow gentleness, or is he heavy-handed, insisting on the letter of the law?

(8) Just (Tit. 1:8). In his relationships with others, is he able to make just decisions, those that are wise, fair, impartial, objective, and honest according to the principles of Scripture?

(9) Respectable, orderly, balanced (1 Tim. 3:2). Is he respected by others because his life adorns the Word of God? The basic idea of this word is orderly. It describes a man whose behavior is good and blended harmoniously in a balanced manner.

(10) Having a good reputation with those on the outside (1 Tim. 1:7). Does he have a good reputation among unbelievers because he has a life-style of unquestioned integrity.

As to Things

(1) Free from the love of money (1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7). Does he have his priorities straight? Is he seeking his significance, security, and primary satisfaction from material wealth? Is he involved in dishonest business practices? Is the amount of salary he receives the most important thing about his occupation? Is he seeking the office of elder for personal gain?

(2) Not addicted to wine (1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7). Is he free from any form of substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, etc.) or any kind of addiction which might take control of his life, cause belligerent and irresponsible behavior, and cause weaker Christians to stumble (Rom. 14:13-21)?

Taken from Qualifications for the Evaluation of Elders and Deacons by J. Hampton Keathley.