

Qualifications of Elders

Titus 1:5-9

July 7th, 2019

Intro:

The past five years have seen the collapse of several prominent large churches in America.

In 2014 a church in Seattle with 14,000 members spread across 15 locations dissolved after the lead pastor was removed due to perceived abusive behavior, lack of accountability, and financial mismanagement.

In 2018 a prominent pastor of a church of 24,000 in the Chicago area resigned after allegations of a series of affairs and sexual misconduct spanning decades. He denied them but an independent investigation found the claims credible.

Another pastor in another megachurch in the Chicago area was fired in 2019 due to bullying, abusive behavior, financial mismanagement, and what other leaders described as a culture of fear and intimidation.

These are the stories that make the headlines because the churches are large. And they are tragic because behind every headline are 1,000 of believers who are crushed and disillusioned. Of course, we don't have the inside story on any of the situations, but the reports that have come out of each situation are troubling if accurate. However, countless small churches around the world experience leadership problems that go under the radar because they only affect those small churches.

The Bible does give great insight into how good leaders operate. We see examples of good leadership in men like Nehemiah and Paul. We see failed leadership in Solomon and Saul. Mostly we see mixed bags in men like Moses, David, and Peter. Really, everyone except Jesus is a mixed bag in the Bible.

But the clearest teaching in the Bible on leaders is not on what they *do*, it is on who they *are*; not on skills and tasks, but on character.

We see this in Titus 1 as Paul outlines the qualifications of elders who lead the church.

This matters for you because it tells you what type of leadership to look for, pray for, and support.

It matters for you because the qualities listed here are simply qualities of spiritual maturity. So every believer can benefit by thinking through this list.

1. The **role** of an elder (1:5)

a. Elders are to **oversee**, **teach**, **protect**, and **shepherd** (1 Peter 5:1-3; Acts 20:17, 28-32; Hebrews 13:17)

i. **Acts 20:17, 28-30** From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church...²⁸ "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

1. Elder/overseer (bishop) are used interchangeably but with different emphasis.

2. Elder implies his maturity, overseer implies the work of overseeing God's flock.

3. From "shepherd" we get our word "pastor" – used here as a verb

ii. **1 Peter 5:1-3** Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the*

will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

1. Most abuses and scandals in the church would be avoided if people followed these instructions.
2. Don't serve out of compulsion but voluntarily
3. Don't serve for sordid gain but with eagerness
 - a. He is also not to serve in order to benefit his own ego, bank account, personal power, or prestige.
4. Don't lord your power over people but be an example
 - a. There is a danger of a pastor who doesn't take his responsibility to oversee things seriously because the people would be in danger. However, there is also the danger of an over manipulative pastor who wants to lord his authority over people and have his fingers in every area of their lives.
5. He has a sense of responsibility and leadership, but it is for the good of the people he shepherds, not his own good.
 - a. His leadership is to be more than example because he also needs to teach, exhort, help people through struggles with sin, etc. But it should also include being an example. That can't be left out.

iii. **Hebrews 13:17** Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

1. Sobering passage for someone in spiritual leadership: we will one day give an account to God for how we served you.
2. One of the best supporting passages for the concept of church membership – who are we to keep watch over? For whom will we give an account?
 - a. Spectrum of people from those who walk in the door for the first time to those who are here once a month to those who attend regularly but only Sunday mornings to those who are in the directory to those who have committed to membership.
 - b. We are to love everyone along that spectrum. The teaching ministry is heard by everyone on that spectrum, just more often by some than others. But its that last group that has clearly said, we want to be part of this. We are opting in.

b. The biblical pattern is to have ***multiple*** elders shepherding each church.

i. Titus is to appoint elders in every city (1:5)

1. Could this be one elder in every city but multiple cities so that is why it is plural?
2. Possibly, although that could have been made more clear if he said appoint an elder in every city/church.
3. But other passages are clear that the pattern is plural elders in each church.

ii. Acts 20:17 – elders (plural) of the church (singular) in Ephesus

iii. **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13** But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13

and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

1. I hope you appreciate the awkwardness of teaching a passage like this. Seems self-serving!
2. Point here is that “those who diligently labor” are plural

iv. Pics of our elder board

1. At UBC our policy is to have a minimum of 3 lay elders and the senior pastor serving on the elder board. Not chapter and verse on that, just something we think is wise practice.

c. **Wisdom** supports the benefits of a plural elder model.

i. It provides accountability for the leadership.

1. They are not to lord their position over people, which is easier to slip into if there is a single person in that role rather than a plurality.

ii. It allows the wisdom of different perspectives.

1. **Proverbs 24:6** For by wise guidance you will wage war, And in abundance of counselors there is victory.
2. Vocationally, our elders come from different backgrounds – Norris was in the military reserves and was a teacher before retiring, Martin was a hospital administrator in Cameroon, Landon works for a medical device company, Steven is in management with Idaho Power, I was a teacher and worked for the Bureau of Land management in the summers before joining staff here.
3. Our life experiences are different. Our areas of giftedness are different.

iii. It shares the shepherding responsibilities among many men.

1. Examples from past few weeks...

d. **Deacons** serve the practical needs of the church body. (Acts 6:1-5; 1 Timothy 3:8-13)

- i. In Acts 6 there was a concern that some of the widows were being overlooked in the food distribution so men were selected to help with the distribution.
- ii. 1 Timothy 3 describes the qualifications of elders much like Titus 1, but then it goes on to describe the qualifications of deacons, with the only real difference that there is not a requirement that they be able to teach, indicating their role is not a teaching role.

2. The **qualifications** of an elder (1:6-9)

a. Overall description: **above reproach** (v. 6a)

i. This phrase applies to all the other qualifications that follow.

ii. But what does it mean?

1. Cannot mean “sinless” or else only Jesus would qualify.
2. But it surely means something, and surely the bar is high.

iii. The word has the idea of not being chargeable with some offense, no obvious reason to accuse him of living inconsistently with Biblical values and teaching.

b. **Family** qualifications (v. 6b)

i. It starts with the home – Donald Guthrie describes the home as the training ground for Christian leaders.

1. Much of the elders tasks apply first to his responsibilities at home. Does he put his family's needs before his own or is he self-willed and lording his strength or authority over them? Is he teaching and discipling his own children? Does his wife feel cared for and nurtured?
2. I don't think it means that he must be married or must have children.
 - a. Paul wasn't married and didn't have children.
 - b. But the norm is that he will be married and the home will be his first training ground.

ii. Husband of one wife

1. What is being ruled out here?
2. Polygamy?
 - a. That can seem strange in our culture that doesn't have a history of polygamy.
 - b. One man described it like seeing a prohibition against having a leader that is a cannibal. We know what cannibalism is and we don't want our leaders to be one, but it seems unnecessary to list.
 - c. However, in many places where the gospel extends in the world, polygamy is a present reality.
 - i. Thailand example of a man who had two wives and children with both and then came to Christ
 - d. Zach Eswine compares passages like this that look beyond our experience to ocean explorers exploring the 85% of the ocean that we haven't mapped.
3. Married after first wife dies?
 - a. Wouldn't prohibit that since its clear the Bible doesn't forbid marriage after the death of a spouse (Romans 7:1-3)
4. Remarried after divorce?
 - a. Here's where it can get tricky.
 - b. Relevant questions: Were there biblical grounds for the divorce? Was it before or after he was saved?
5. Literally: "one woman man" – is he a man who is known as being devoted to one woman? Is he above reproach? Will his past or present behavior hinder him from ministering to the body?

iii. Having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion

1. Believers or "faithful"?
 - a. The Greek word *pistous* can be used either way

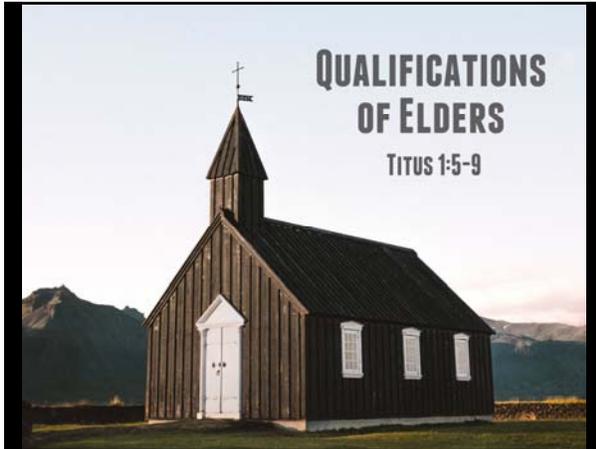
- i. As in Matthew 24:45 of the “faithful servant” or in 1 Cor. 1:9 where God is described as “faithful”
 - b. “Believe” is a straightforward interpretation and makes sense in some ways.
 - i. If the role of an elder is to teach the word and share the gospel, surely that should show itself in his own home first.
 - c. But, can a faithful parent assure that their kids will come to saving faith? What if a child appears to be a believer when they are in the home but in their 30’s walk away from the faith? Is the father therefore disqualified?
 - 2. Different versions have emphasized “faithful” (CSB, ESV, KJV)
 - 3. 1 Timothy 3:4-5 emphasizes the father’s responsibilities not the children’s saving faith, something he cannot directly control
 - a. **1 Timothy 3:4-5** *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity ⁵ (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),
 - 4. Like with the “one woman man,” the key question is how will this affect his ability to shepherd? Is he above reproach?
 - a. If his kids are going through a difficult period, they may need more of his attention at home and it may not be wise for him to serve as an elder.
 - b. If his teenage kids are running wild, even if he is taking every right step to discipline, address their hearts, and instruct them, it may hinder his ability to minister to other families.
- c. **Conduct** and character qualifications (vv. 7-8)
- i. “above reproach” is repeated, with an added emphasis that he is a steward of God, meaning he doesn’t own “the church.” The church is Christ’s, but he is a steward charged with caring for it and must do so in a way that pleases the owner.
 - ii. 5 negatives and 6 positives.
 - 1. The negatives all point to strong areas of temptation for one in leadership that can have a devastating effect.
 - iii. He must not be...
 - 1. Self-willed
 - a. Stubborn, arrogant, only concerned with his own desires
 - b. The cooperative nature of plural eldership requires an ability to work together.
 - c. Additionally a self-willed man will not lead for the good of the body but for his own glory, pleasure, ease, etc.
 - 2. Quick-tempered
 - a. Prone to anger rather than patient and self-controlled
 - 3. Addicted to wine
 - a. As an expression of a lack of self-control
 - b. His negative example could have a ripple effect.

- c. Just in the past year I've encountered half a dozen stories of ways alcoholism has harmed individuals and families.
 - 4. Pugnacious
 - a. Violent, bullying with words or physical force
 - b. One of the churches that I mentioned in the intro - He was abusive in his language toward staff, used vulgar humor, a video surfaced of him grabbing one teenage boy during a youth message scolding him for slouching and not paying attention, and physically pulling him up in the chair, he misused church finances, three of the lay elders described a culture of fear and intimidation at the church. That's pugnacious.
 - 5. Fond of sordid gain
 - a. Using the church or ministry as a way to build personal wealth, motivated by a love of money or greed.
- iv. But he must be...
1. Hospitable
 - a. Perhaps think in terms of small, medium, and large
 - i. Small ways – inviting someone to stay for a meal when you know you'll have enough, intentionally making extra
 - ii. Medium – planning monthly meals with someone you know and someone you don't know well
 - iii. Large – adding a single person to your family routines – hiking, holidays, birthday parties; buy a home that's a little bigger than you need and look for ways to host missionaries, college students, parents of young couples, etc.
 - b. Rosario Butterfield wrote a challenging book on hospitality called, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*
 - i. Overwhelming, but just as the example of someone who does Crossfit 7 days a week and runs marathons might feel overwhelming by comparison, it could also motivate you to start walking 3 days a week and watching your Mountain Dew intake.
 - ii. We need to know our frame, our stage of life, the limitations of our home/wife/kids/budget
 - iii. But most of us could engage in more hospitality than we are.
 2. Loving what is good
 - a. Good deeds, virtue
 3. Sensible
 - a. Doing what makes sense and is reasonable, a facet of maturity
 4. Just

- a. Carrying about what is righteous or just or fair
- 5. Devout
 - a. Not just administratively competent or a 'strong leader' or a "people person" but with a heart for the Lord and personal piety
- 6. Self-controlled
 - a. Just, devout, self-controlled – looking man-ward, god-ward, and self-ward
 - b. His example demonstrates that the gospel and its power are real
- d. **Teaching** qualifications (v. 9)
 - i. Holding fast – He must have a firm grip on God's Word himself
 - ii. "in accordance with the teaching" – not trying to reinvent something or come up with something "new"
 - iii. Two aspects to his teaching:
 - 1. Exhorting in sound doctrine – teaching what is true
 - 2. Refuting those who contract – correcting the false teachings that Paul will start warning about in the next verse.
 - 3. Calvin: a pastor needs two voices, one for gathering the sheep and the other for driving away wolves and thieves.

3. Applications

- a. Pray for leaders like this, seek to appoint and confirm leaders like this
- b. These descriptions are simply descriptions of spiritual maturity, with the exception of the teaching qualifications.
 - i. Use them as a standard to consider areas you need to grow.
 - ii. How is your hospitality? How is your temper? Do you tend to dominate those under your authority at work or in the home?



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