

## Qualifications Of Elders – 1

### INTRODUCTION:

1. The eldership has been an important part of God's plan in relationship to the local church since its beginning.
  - A. In Acts 11:30 we learn that the churches of Judea already had their own elderships.
  - B. In Acts 14:23 we learn that Paul and Barnabas returned to the churches that resulted from their preaching of the gospel and appointed elders in every one of them.
  - C. So, it is fitting for us to be aware of our need for elders and to work to prepare ourselves for filling this office with qualified men.
2. Today we begin, in a sense, to consider the qualifications for elders, although the terms and work of elders we previously considered tell us much about what kind of men elders must be.
3. Understanding these qualifications is important because we must put the right men in the position, and we have many men here who have an opportunity to prepare to become elders.
4. Today we will begin by looking at how an elder must **desire** the position, as well as how he must be **above reproach** and the **husband of one wife**.

### BODY:

#### **I. One who *aspires to* and *desires* the position (1 Tim. 3:1).**

- A. Though presented as an unquestionable truth rather than qualifications, there is more to be seen.
  1. The words translated *aspire* and *desire* (NASB, ESV, NET, NIV) have subtle differences that enlighten us concerning those who would hold this position.
    - a. **Aspire** – *Oregetai* – to reach or stretch out with desire to grasp something (*Thayer; NASEC*)
    - b. **Desire** – *Epithymeō* – (*Thayer*) desire, craving, longing; (*NASEC*) to covet, crave, long for; (*Vine*) to desire earnestly
  2. **Aspire** presents the idea of *effort to achieve the goal*, while **desire** focuses upon *the longing of heart to achieve the goal*.
    - a. One must *want* the position strongly enough to put forth effort, or *prepare*, to achieve it!
    - b. So, this is not a position one would simply “fall into,” but one of intent and effort.
- B. One must have a **godly desire** for the position because it is “fine work” (1 Tim. 3:1).
  1. Godly motives are required because to be an overseer is to do a **fine work**, or work that is ethically good, right, noble, honorable, virtuous (*Thayer; Vine*)
    - a. There is labor, toil, effort involved in being a godly elder.
    - b. It is good, noble, virtuous labor because of its *purpose*—to **watch over souls** (Heb. 13:17).
  2. Peter confirms the need for a godly desire (1 Pet. 5:2 – “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**.”).
    - a. One must not to be *forced* or *coerced* into the position.
    - b. One must *desire* the position with God's will in mind, and without thought of personal gain.

#### **II. Above Reproach (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6-7):**

##### A. Scriptures and definitions:

1. 1 Tim. 3:2 – “An overseer, then, must be **above reproach**, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach”
2. Titus 1:5-7 – “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint **elders** in every city as I directed you, <sup>6</sup> namely, **if any man is above reproach**, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. <sup>7</sup> **For the overseer must be above reproach** as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain”
3. Defined: **Above reproach** is translated from two different Greek words.

- a. **1 Tim. 3:2** – (*anepilēptos*) lit., that cannot be laid hold of, irreproachable; (2) blameless, unrebukable (*Vine; Thayer; Strong; BDAG*).
  - b. **Titus 1:6, 7** – (*anegklētos*) **Thayer** – cannot be called into account, unproveable, blameless; nothing laid to one’s charge (as the result of investigation); **Vine** – not just acquittal, but the *absence of even a charge or accusation against a person*
- B. Though *Vine’s* says it means “absence of even a charge/accusation,” it does not mean that any charge leveled against a man disqualifies him.
1. Despite our current “cancel culture” thinking, accusations do not equal guilt, seeing someone can accuse anyone of most anything.
    - a. **Thayer** contradicts that definition by stating that nothing can be laid to one’s charge “as a result of public investigation.”
    - b. Adam Clarke’s Commentary: “a person against whom no evil can be **proved**”
  2. Perfection is not a qualification for the eldership, although a noble aspiration, seeing Peter was an elder but was not perfect (Gal. 2:11 – “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.”).
- C. Instead, it means a man must be able to rightly defend himself against accusations.
1. For, elders themselves can have accusations brought against them without being disqualified, and conviction would require testimony by 2 or 3 credible witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19 – “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.”).
  2. If there are accusations, they are best dealt with privately at first, seeing...
    - a. The accuser may be misinformed or unaware that the issue may have been resolved.
    - b. Unnecessary public accusation may cause undue harm to the man’s reputation.
  3. Application: One who seeks the eldership [and all Christians] must grasp the seriousness of their actions, knowing that brethren and the world are watching!

### III. Husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6).

- A. The Greek literally says that he must be a “one-woman man,” or “one-wife husband.”
- B. Possible positions:
1. **Position 1**: He must be **married** to a **woman**. This is correct but lacking.
    - a. It is **correct** in that one who desires to be an elder must be...
      - i. **Married** – he must be a **husband** (no legitimate translation disagrees).
        - 1) One cannot be an *unmarried husband*.
        - 2) Some argue that taking this position would exclude good men like Paul and Timothy from holding this office. And to that I would agree.
        - 3) For, an elder must have marriage/family experience, such as *ruling his house well* and having *submissive and faithful children* (1 Tim. 3:4; Titus 1:6).
      - ii. **Married to a woman**, which is seen in having a **wife**. A biblical elder **could not**, despite current PC thought, **be married to a man** (1 Cor. 6:9-11).
    - b. It is **lacking** because it does not address the problem of an *adulterous marriage* or being a *polygamist*, which are not to be tolerated in the Lord’s church (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9-11).
  2. **Position 2**: He must be **married** to a **woman** and **not a polygamist**
    - a. This is correct in the same areas as Position 1, and in *rejecting polygamy* (i.e., one wife).
    - b. It is **lacking** in not addressing the *legitimacy* of the candidate’s marriage, seeing some marriages are unlawful (Matt. 19:9 – “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”).
  3. **Position 3**: He must be **married** to a **woman**, but **not in a second marriage**.
    - a. This position states that if a man is in a second marriage, whether widowed or *especially if he has divorced his mate*, he is disqualified. (Many “**feel**” this way.)
    - b. It is **correct** in the same areas as Position 1.
    - c. This position is **lacking** being based on a faulty view of MDR:
      - i. When a *widower* marries, he is the husband of **one** wife (cite Rom. 7:2-3).

- ii. When a man divorces his wife scripturally, or for sexual immorality, and marries another, he is the husband of only **one** wife (Matt. 19:9).
  - 1) Death and scriptural divorce end a marriage and the bond related to it, allowing the innocent party to be married and bound to another.
  - 2) Otherwise, every widower and scripturally divorced/remarried man would be a polygamist!
- d. Some wrongly claim that a *divorce* means a man is no longer **above reproach**.
  - i. To hold this position is to say that to follow the Lord's instructions will result in legitimate damage to one's godly reputation!
  - ii. If this is how we must view those scripturally divorced who would be elders, how are we to view preachers, teachers, and all Christians who are scripturally divorced?
    - 1) Are we to automatically assume they are not above reproach, are not blameless?
    - 2) Are we to assume there is no innocent party in a divorce?
  - iii. I do acknowledge that one might for expediency's sake choose not to ultimately seek this position to avoid disturbing the unity of a congregation (if there are questions).
    - 1) Yet, the candidate and the congregation must weigh *this incorrect objection* against the requirement for elders being appointed in a congregation.
    - 2) And, giving in to the *weakest of the members*, which is often the issue in these cases, is not always best for the congregation.
    - 3) Again, just because some have objections does not disqualify the man.
- 4. **Position 4:** He must be **married** to a **woman** and **neither a polygamist nor an adulterer**.
  - a. This is the **correct** meaning because it addresses the sanctify of marriage (Heb. 13:4 – "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.>").
  - b. Question: If an elder's wife dies, is he still qualified?
    - i. Some say "yes" (i.e., H.E. Phillips – *Scriptural Elders and Deacons*), because the experience gained at his appointing would not be lost by the death of his spouse.
      - 1) This could be compared to a man serving and then his grown, believing children dying.
      - 2) He would not have lost the character that qualified him.
    - ii. One could rightfully argue that such a man no longer has believing children and that a widower is **no longer a husband**. So, seeing this as disqualifying is not a *crazy* or completely *unreasonable* position to take.
    - iii. Much thought and prayer would be needed in such a case among all parties involved.
- C. What does being a husband require? I address this because elders are to be **examples** to the flock, and being examples in their marriage is not excluded.
  - 1. Being the husband of one wife means he must love his wife with godly, sacrificial love (Eph. 5:25, 28-29 – "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,..."<sup>28</sup> So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; <sup>29</sup> for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church").
  - 2. Being the husband of one wife means he must be the head of the wife, leading her in godly fashion (Eph. 5:22-23 – "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is **the head of the wife**, as **Christ also is the head of the church**, He Himself being the Savior of the body.>").
    - a. This is not a dictatorship over the lowly servant wife, seeing it is patterned after Christ who does all as "Savior of the body/church."
    - b. This position is **not to be abdicated** due to laziness or indecisiveness, seeing it is much easier to be a follower than a leader.
  - 3. He must dwell with his wife with understanding (1 Pet. 3:7 – "You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a

woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.”).

- a. Though there are many jokes about husbands being clueless concerning their wives’ thoughts and needs, that should not be.
- b. A proper husband knows his wife, her nature and disposition, which says husbands should likely study our wives more to be better mates.

CONCLUSION:

1. Today we have addressed how one who would be an elder must...
  - A. Put forth effort to meet the requirements motivated by an strong desire for the office and work.
  - B. Above reproach, or blameless, in his life, realizing that his actions must be governed by the Lord.
  - C. Be scripturally married to a woman, while also being a proper husband to his wife in matters of love, leadership, and understanding.
2. My hope and prayer are that the men here seriously desire this office and are willing to do the work necessary to obtain it, seeing to do so is to truly desire a fine, virtuous work.
3. Do you desire to please the Lord, and do as He wills that you might be saved? Will you B-R-C-B-LF?