

Lesson 3: Elder Qualifications – No. 2

(1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8, 9)

INTRODUCTION:

1. One of the problems I have observed with the eldership, especially among liberal churches of Christ, is that the choosing of elders is often influenced more by worldly standards than by God's standard.
 - A. Men of earthly success, wealth, position in the community, etc., were the ones appointed.
 - B. And, I have seen a lot of issues arise from this, with churches being led astray, due to their lack of the qualities, both inner and outer, required by God for this position.
2. Of course, some can so define these qualifications that no man could ever meet them, which is also contrary to the Lord's will.
 - A. For example, a commentary defined being **of good behavior**: "neat and decent in his apparel; modest in his whole deportment and conduct, and affable and courteous to all; *beautiful in his life and conversation, being adorned with everything that is graceful and comely*" (Gill)
 - B. Who could truly say that about anyone except the Lord Himself? Yet, God does demand a definite excellence of character and life of those who would rule in one of His local churches.
3. The qualifications we will consider today address inner qualities regarding one thoughts and reign over self, as well as certain outwardly positive life skills required by the Lord, all of which are attainable by those who devote themselves to the will of God.
 - A. These qualities are: being temperate, prudent, self-controlled, as well as being respectable and hospitable.
 - B. For clarity's sake, these are the NASB translation of these qualifications and I will basically stick with them and also display the verses so you can see where the words under consideration are found in the text and follow along in whatever version you are using.
 - C. My goals in considering these qualifications is not only to define them, but also to explain them in such fashion that one can meditate on them and apply them to his life in order to prepare to become an elder, or overseer, in the Lord's church.

BODY:

I. Temperate (1 Tim. 3:2):

- A. Text: 1 Tim. 3:2 – "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, **temperate**, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach"
 1. Temperate (*nēphalios*)
 - a. *Strong's* – sober, vigilant
 - b. *Vine's* – to be free from the influence of intoxicants
 - c. *Thayer's* – abstaining from wine; but of the root *nēhpō* says, "to be sober, to be calm and collected in spirit; to be temperate, dispassionate, circumspect (or careful, cautious – rp)
 - d. *BDAG* – temperate in use of alcoholic beverages, clear-headed, self-controlled
 2. Here we can rightly reject the meaning of *abstaining, or being free, from alcohol and its influence*, seeing that is covered in 1 Tim. 3:3's "not addicted to wine."
 - a. The preferred interpretations are circumspect, vigilant, or carefully watchful.
 - b. This interpretation fits the work of elders which is to *watch out for the souls of the sheep* (Heb. 13:7).
- B. From this we see that like any good shepherd, an elder must be keenly alert and watchful for the dangers that threaten God's sheep.
 1. Shepherds must watch for sickness within the fold that can spread and do much harm, as well as for wolves, etc., from without that attack and destroy the sheep as well.
 - a. In the same way elders watch for threats of spiritual sickness like lethargy, strife, discouragement, resentment, weakness, immorality, false teaching, etc., as well as outer threat of false teachers and their doctrine that can uproot the faith of the sheep.
 - b. Paul warned elders of these threats (Acts 20:28-31 – "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. ³¹ Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.”).

2. On the *positive* side, one who would be an elder needs to be on constantly alert for opportunities *to do good*, to lead both family and brethren in the way of good works.

II. Prudent/sensible (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:8) and self-controlled (Titus 1:8):

A. These qualifications address the inner strength and control needed for the office.

B. Prudent/sensible:

1. Scriptures:
 - a. 1 Tim. 3:2 – “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, **prudent** [*sōphrōn*], respectable, hospitable, able to teach”
 - b. Titus 1:8 – “...hospitable, loving what is good, **sensible** [*sōphrōn*], just, devout, self-controlled”
 - c. I am unsure why the translators were not consistent, seeing this causes confusion.
2. Defined: (*sōphrōn*)
 - a. **Vine’s** – being “of sound mind”; hence, “self-controlled, sober-minded”
 - b. **Strong’s** – moderate as to opinion or passion
 - c. **Thayer’s** – curbing one’s desires and impulses, self-controlled, temperate
 - d. **BDAG** – prudent, thoughtful

C. Application:

1. This says one must have shown himself prudent, wise, or of sound mind, in dealing with life, not making poor, thoughtless, decisions.
2. This is vitally important because...
 - a. Elders are to be examples to the flock.
 - b. Elders must deal with the life issues of the sheep, guiding them towards godliness.
3. A man should not seek the office who often finds himself the victim of his lack of forethought or is prone to silliness and frivolity and lacking a certain serious of life needed to grasp the gravity of the work, which does not mean he cannot have no sense of humor. Instead he is to be one who shows himself to have a well-balanced character.

III. Self-controlled (Titus 1:8 – “...hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, **self-controlled**”)

A. Defined: (*egkratēs*) **Thayer; Strong; Wuest; BDAG** – “strong, robust; mastering, controlling one’s self, restraining [of self], temperate, having power over [self], being disciplined.

1. While *sōphrōn* (prudent/sensible) emphasizes the soundness of mind and the wisdom behind his words and actions, *egkratēs* emphasizes his need for *deliberate self-control*.
2. He is not to be like many who are controlled by circumstances, their own or other’s emotions, or their own desires.

B. Application:

1. An elder must be aware of his weaknesses and the situations he faces, being of the mind to hold control his temper, emotions, and desires, not controlled by them (1 Cor. 6:12 – “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, **but I will not be mastered by anything.**”).
2. This is extremely important because:
 - a. A shepherd must deal with emotionally charged situations concerning the personalities and weaknesses of the sheep, which requires a calm and clear head to avoid polarizing the congregation, causing resentment, and leading it toward division
 - b. Elders will face criticisms and challenges to their authority that must be handled with calmness and understanding so as to maintain godliness and unity.

- c. As an example to the flock, he must be free from addictions, exemplifying the freedom from the slavery of sin and worldliness that is found in Christ.
- C. Of course, any such qualities as these can only be added to one's life through prayer and study of the word.
 1. It is only when one **reads** with purpose to **examine the Lord's life as an example for his own** that he can learn to endure difficult situation with godly control (1 Pet. 2:21-24 – "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,²² who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth;²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.").
 2. Added to this must be a life of **prayer** for wisdom from God offered with confidence in God's ability to provide (Jas. 1:5-6 – "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.").

IV. Respectable

- A. 1 Tim. 3:2 – "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, **respectable**, hospitable, able to teach"
- B. Defined: (*kosmios*)
 1. *Vine's* – orderly, modest
 2. *Thayer's* – well-arranged, seemly, modest, of a man living with decorum [in keeping with good taste, polite, restrained], a well-ordered life
 3. *Mounce's* – decorous, respectable, well-ordered
 4. *BDAG* – respectable, honorable
 5. It is the same word translated *respectable/modest* concerning a godly woman's apparel (1 Tim. 2:9).
 6. Truth Commentary says it "speaks of order against disorder," being dignified.
 - a. Whereas *sophron* speaks of qualities of the *mind*, this addresses *external qualities*.
- C. Application: We should understand that these *internal* and *external qualities* are connected.
 1. One who lives with **vigilance** and **prudence** will obviously seek to live his life in a respectable, honorable, orderly fashion.
 2. One who is **sober-minded** will not make quick, thoughtless decisions concerning his personal life, family, or financial matters.
 3. One who practices **self-control**, who chooses to rule his passions, will show honor and respectability in dealing with family, work, or church issues, no matter how desperate or frustrating they may seem.

V. Hospitable

- A. Scriptures:
 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 1:8 – "...**hospitable**, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled"
- B. Defined: (*philoxenos*) hospitable; (2) fond of guests, given to (lover of) hospitality; (3) generous to guests (*Vine; Strong; Thayer; BDAG*)
 1. The term literally means "love of strangers," referring to not only a willingness, but one who finds joy in entertaining, or lodging others, especially strangers travelling through.
 2. Because the word *strangers* is inherently prominent in the meaning, this is not about reciprocal action, or only opening his home to those he expects to return the favor!
 - a. This was sorely needed in NT times due to the lack of inns and places for lodging.

- b. And, evangelists were wholly dependent upon such hospitality in their work, as we see in the work of Paul.
- C. Like so many other elder qualifications, this is also to be a foundational quality for Christians (Rom. 12:12-13 – “Be **devoted to one another** in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ **not lagging behind in diligence**, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, **practicing hospitality.**”).
 - 1. The Spirit in 1 Tim. 5:10 says that having “shown hospitality to strangers” is a necessary qualification for a widow to become the continual responsibility of the local church.
 - 2. This is why we have talked so much in the past, and need to talk again, about getting out of our comfort zones, about breaking out of the box we build around our lives, and become far more hospitable to one another than we are! (Heb. 13:1-2 – “Let love of the brethren continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.”).
 - 3. For this congregation to thrive and be pleasing to God, we must create an atmosphere of hospitality, of opening our homes for the growth of godly relationships, that must be shown by its leaders, its overseers, its elders.
 - a. This qualification cannot be magically met. It requires thoughtful intent, commitment, and work to make it happen.
 - b. And parents, including you fathers who would be elders one day, one of the greatest gifts you will ever give your children is to show the importance of spiritual relationships by opening your home regularly to your brethren and striving to be a part of such situations offered by them!

CONCLUSION:

- 1. God wisely, of course, demands those who would oversee and rule His local churches to have...
 - A. Inner godly wisdom and outer control of their lives
 - B. This godly wisdom and control are to be seen in the respectable lives they live and the hospitality they show toward others.
- 2. So, let us be aware of these needed qualities and meditate on them, considering what is needed to achieve them and dedicating ourselves to doing so.
- 3. For, there is no higher office in this life! And, doing this is the only way to assure the proper future of this congregation and the souls of those who make it up!