

Qualifications of Elders, Pt. 2
The Elders Moral Character
Titus 1:6,7

This morning we come to the second message taken from Paul's letter to Titus on the qualifications of Elders. The responsibilities that Elders have been given by the Lord to shepherd the flock of God are serious ones both for the elder and for the people. Those who would desire to do the work of an overseer must take those responsibilities seriously for they will be held to a stricter judgment as teachers (James 3:1) and they will give an account to God for those souls they are to watch over (Heb. 13:17). The church should give serious consideration of the qualifications of the men that would serve in this capacity for these men will be setting the example after which the people will be patterning their lives (1 Peter 5:3; Luke 6:40).

Follow along as I read Titus 1:5-9 which sets the context for this morning's message: *For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 [namely,] if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 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, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.*

In our previous message we learned that the overall characteristic of an elder (vs. 6) is that he is "above reproach" or "blameless" in the KJV. This does not mean that he is perfect, but combining the meaning of the particular word used here in Titus 1:6 & 7 and the one in 1 Timothy 3 we understand that this means the man is to be of such character that he will not be accused of that which would bring dishonor upon the Lord and that if he was accused such charges would not hold up in a fair court. Most of the character qualities listed here and in 1 Timothy 3 for an elder are also character qualities that all Christians are to have. The elder is not some sort of super pious oddball, but rather a man that exhibits the Christian maturity that every saint should be.

As we have already discussed, a key area that will display the true character of the man is his relationship with his family. How does he interact with his wife and children. Does he provide for them? If he does not he is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8). But providing his family's physical needs is not enough. He must also be leading them spiritually and teaching them what life is truly about. If he is a man in pursuit of material gain he is trying to serve two gods which is sin (Matt. 6:24). He is to be a man who is devoted to his wife alone. I explained in detail in my previous message that the phrase translated here as "husband of one wife" is better translated as a "one woman man" for that is both what the Greek literally means and it more clearly brings out the character of the man. This is so much more than a man who manages to stay married to his wife. This is a man that is sexually pure. If he even has an eye that wanders to look at other women he has a flaw in character and he is not qualified to shepherd God's flock.

The character of his children is also a reflection of his character and ability to lead in the church. As Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:5, *"but if he does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?"* If his children are characterized by rebellion - as so many children are now - then he is not qualified to lead in the church. If his older children are accused of dissipation - drunken revelry, being prodigals, then he is not qualified. The great tragedy is that there are so many elders - pastors that have children like this and they continue on in that position and the church is

managed in the same manner. It is no wonder then that the churches of America continue to falter and fail. How a man interacts with and leads his family is the first area to examine to see if a man is qualified.

As we continue on in our text, we find additional character traits that the elder must possess in verse 7 & 8. Note here that Paul interchanges the word overseer (ἐπίσκοπον - also translated as "bishop") for elder (πρεσβύτεροι) used in verse 5. There are not separate offices of bishop/overseer and elder/presbyter in the church. They are the same.

Note here as well that Paul repeats the overall characteristic again. The "*overseer must be above reproach.*" The other characteristics are specific areas summed up in the general, but note as well that Paul adds a statement of responsibility. The overseer is to be above reproach "*as God's steward.*" The church does not belong to the elders, it belongs to God. It is his flock. The overseer is simply a steward with responsibilities of oversight. In ancient Roman society the steward was either a slave or a freeman that was given responsibility and authority to manage the owner's household. This could involve the care of the family members, accounting of the families finances, running of some aspect of the family business, and supervision of the other slaves or employees including discipline. The steward did all this work for the benefit of his master, not himself, and he would have to give an account of his work to his master.

The elder /overseer /pastor is the steward of God's flock. He has been given many responsibilities in managing the flock, but the flock is not his, it belongs to God. His work is for the benefit of the Lord, not himself and he will give an account of his management. As I mentioned earlier the elders are to "keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account" (Heb. 13:17). They are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God and it is required that they be found faithful (1 Cor. 4:1,2).

The rest of verses 7 & 8 list out 11 areas in which elders are to be found faithful. Each area is a moral attribute which should characterize them. The first five are stated as negatives, what a pastor must not be. The remaining positively - what he should be

NOT SELF WILLED μὴ αὐθάδη

This word occurs in the New Testament only here and in 2 Peter 2:10 where it is used to describe the character of a false prophet - *...those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties.* This is an arrogant person who asserts his own desires without regard for others. Such a person is not a team player and will cause contention and division.

While the world may seek after an aggressive, self-assertive man for leadership, such a man is not qualified to lead in the church. Jesus taught in Matt. 20:25-28 that "*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and [their] great men exercise authority over them. 26 "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" Elders are to emulate Him and follow His commands.

NOT QUICK-TEMPERED μὴ ὀργίλον [KJV - not soon angry]

Elders have to deal with a lot of situations that can easily try a person's patience, for that reason an elder must be someone that is not quick tempered. They must be someone who is not prone to anger and can control their passions. This is not a reference to an occasional outburst, though that is not good, it is a person who is characterized by outbursts, an irascible fellow, someone with a "short-fuse." The kind of person you are afraid to talk to for fear of setting them off.

James 1:20 tells us that the *anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.* A man given to anger is not going to be able to promote the righteousness of God in himself or others. "...the

Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged" (2 Tim. 2:24). The pastor must work in this manner to promote the righteousness of God.

NOT ADDICTED TO WINE (3:3; 1:7) μὴ πάροινον

The word here is a compound of *παρά* (at or alongside) & *οἶνος* (wine) which literally means "to be continually alongside, or in the presence of wine." The elder is not to have wine as his companion. The reasons for this are found in other texts.

First, the elder is to be the example to the flock of someone who is "not drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but filled with the spirit" (Eph. 5:18). If he lingered long where the wine flowed he would risk being drunk with wine and lose self control. So even at such joyous occasions as a wedding feast he would be careful of the wine table.

Second, God has always called leaders to a higher standard than the rest of the people. In Lev. 10:9 God told Aaron and the other high priests, "*Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you may not die-- it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations-- 10 and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean.*" Nadab and Abihu had not done this and so had come properly prepared into the Tent of Meeting and profaned the worship of the Lord and so they died there (Lev. 10:1-3). Elders also are to lead the people in the worship of the Lord and so they must come properly prepared and not influenced by anything that might cause them to profane that worship. The Lord is to be treated as Holy and He is to be honored before the people (Lev. 10:3). An Elder that had wine for a companion could find himself in the same type of sin as Nadab and Abihu.

Third, Elders are often called to settle all sorts of problems and they must have clear minds to do so. The Lord warned political leaders of this in Proverbs 31:4,5, *4 It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, Or for rulers to desire strong drink, 5 Lest they drink and forget what is decreed, And pervert the rights of all the afflicted.* Lingering long by the wine glass will result in a clouded mind and perverted decisions.

Fourth, all Christians need to be careful about causing the weaker brother to stumble, but elders must be especially careful for they set the example. The elder must be ready to willingly forgo his liberties in order to keep a brother from stumbling into doing something for which he does not have faith to do and thus sin (Rom. 14:23). Paul cautioned in Romans 14:20,21, "*Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. 21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or [to do anything] by which your brother stumbles.*" An elder's willingness to relinquish his liberty demonstrates his ability to assess the situation and show practical concern for his fellow Christians.

Let me add a couple of notes here about wine before we go on to the next attribute of an elder. First, wine (*οἶνος*) throughout the New Testament is a fermented drink. Even the "new wine" (*ἡλευκος*) of Acts 2:13 had to have been at least partially fermented because it was thought by the observers that those present had been intoxicated by it. Second, there is much evidence that in the Roman culture wine was usually mixed with water so that it had a much lower alcohol content the wine normally served today. Though there is some question as to this practice in the Jewish culture since drink being diluted with water was viewed as a sign of corruption and God's judgment to them (Isa. 1:22). Either way there were no "fortified wines" or distilled liquors then so maximum alcohol content would have been 6-8%. Third, Paul is not commanding the elders to abstain, but to not "be alongside it - a companion of wine." Paul could have very easily commanded abstaining by using the verb, *ἀπεχω*, as he does in 1 Thess. 4:3 that we all are to "abstain from sexual immorality." The character of the elder is seen in his attitude and how carefully he conducts himself. Timothy apparently was so considerate of others that he did abstain and his stomach suffered the consequences of the bad water. Paul finally told him to not drink just water

but use a little wine for his stomach's sake (1 Tim. 5:23). His willingness to set aside his freedom and even suffer for it demonstrates his character.

NOT PUGNACIOUS (3:3; 1:7) μὴ πλήκτην [KJV - no striker]

This might seem obvious, yet it is a qualification that must be mentioned. The KJV gives a good literal translation - no striker. This is man who strikes out physically, a fighter ready to strike. I still vividly remember driving through Dallas when Diane and I were moving here and hearing the news report that the police were searching for a certain man that was a deacon at a Baptist church who allegedly shot another deacon at a deacon's meeting. What a travesty - a church where the leaders need to check their guns at the door before having a meeting. Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:24,25, *4 And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses [and escape] from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*"

NOT FOND OF SORDID GAIN (1:7) μὴ αἰσχροκερδῆ [KJV - not given to filthy lucre]

This is another compound word - αἰσχρος "base" + κερδος "gain." κερδος is used for both monetary profit (James 4:13) or for winning people to your side (Matt. 18:15). The same word is used in 1 Tim. 3 for the elders and deacons. The elder must be someone that does not do anything in a sordid or shameful manner and especially for his own gain whether it is monetary or in people to follow him. Elders who rule well and especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching have the right to double honor - that is, earn their material living by their spiritual work (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Cor. 9:11-14). However, the elder's attitude toward money reveals much about him and he should never be one of seeking after or demanding it. He seeks first God's kingdom and His righteousness and lets Him take care of the material things. Peter points out that those who are greedy and exploit the flock for their own gain are those who are false teachers (2 Peter 2:1-3). A person who will compromise their honesty and integrity for wealth or financial gain is not qualified to be an elder. The elder must not be a person who is concerned with amassing material things.

Those are the things an elder should not be. Next what he should be. First, he should be:

HOSPITABLE (3:2; 1:8) φιλόξενον

The word that describes this characteristic is a compound of the words φιλος (loving) & ξενος (strangers). To be hospitable is to be someone who loves strangers as friends. Too often we think of hospitality as entertaining friends, but this is not what is being spoken of here. Anyone can entertain their friends, but the mark of a mature Christian is being helpful and friendly to people you do not know. Jesus described this true hospitality in Luke 14:12-14.

And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you. 13 "But when you give a reception, invite [the] poor, [the] crippled, [the] lame, [the] blind, 14 and you will be blessed, since they do not have [the means] to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Jesus is not saying that you can never invite your friends or relatives over for dinner, but he is saying that the nature of true hospitality is one of giving, not one of seeking to get something back. Don't keep count on who you invite over and who invites you back. All Christians should practice this kind of hospitality (Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:3), but especially the elders because they set the example for the rest of the flock. And who knows, Hebrews 13:2 says that you could end up with some very special guests - *"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."*

LOVING WHAT IS GOOD (1:8) φιλάγαθον

The KJV for some reason translates this as “loving good men,” but the word here is the compound φιλα (love as in strong affection for) & αγαθον (good or goodness). This would be a man who mind dwells on that which is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, of good repute, things that are excellent and worthy of praise (Phil. 4:8) and whose actions would follow suit. That which is good is that which reflects God and this man desires those things in his own life. He is a person who willingly and with self-denial does good and is kind to others for their benefit.

PRUDENT/SENSIBLE (3:2; 1:8) σωφρονα [KJV - sober]

This word is a difficult one to translate since no English word fully conveys its meaning. Literally the word means “soundness of mind.” Aristotle described a man who was σωφρονα as “level headed” one who “desires the right thing in the right way at the right time.” It is someone who has common sense, or more properly, disciplined sense - since common sense is not very common anymore. “Prudent” (as in 1 Tim. 3:2) and “sensible” are decent translations for they bring out some of this idea of being balanced, discreet and self-controlled because of sound judgment and sensible thinking.

The elder must be prudent, sensible because he must handle many problems and guide people in the Lord’s ways. He must be in command of his mind and be disciplined in what he thinks about. Unless you have this quality, it is easy to be distracted by circumstances, or the immorality or foolishness of others. An elder must be able to avoid the trivial and keep his priorities in order. In 1:14 Paul directs Titus to teach the people not to pay attention to “Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.” Only a prudent and sensible man will be able to teach others to be the same.

JUST (1:8) δίκαιον

A person who is just is someone who is upright in all his dealing with God and man. Paul said that he strove to *maintain a blameless conscience before God and before men* (Acts 24:16). The elder is to fulfill all his responsibilities in accordance with what is right and thus reflect the nature of God. Job was such a man who was “*blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil*” (Job. 1:1). A person characterized by being just demonstrates their maturity in the process of sanctification, for that is what sanctification is to achieve in our life - practical, righteous living.

DEVOUT (1:8) ὅσιον [KJV - holy]

This is related to the word more commonly used for “holy” and is often translated that way which is why the KJV does so. It is similar in meaning to being just but places more emphasis on the performing of one’s duty to God. The word “pious” brings out some of the meaning. It is someone who has a high moral code because of an inner desire to be pure before God. Joseph was a man of this character. He was tempted to sin by his Egyptian mistress but being a devout man he fled saying, “How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?” A just man would flee because he would not to break God’s moral law and offend his neighbor. A devout man would flee because he would not want to offend His God.

This does not mean Elders are perfect for as 1 John 1:8 says, *If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* Elders will stumble in sin, but they are to be those that would cry out as Paul does in Romans 7 against their failings and they would quickly confess their sins knowing that Christ is faithful and just to forgive their sins and cleanse them from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Elders are to be the models of godly character and conduct.

The final character quality demanded of elders is that they be SELF-CONTROLLED (1:8) εγκρατῆ [KJV - temperate]

While many of the characteristics that are demanded of elders are also to be developed in the life of all believers, this one should be developed fairly quickly for it is one of the fruit of the spirit. The root of the word means power, strength or control and signifies someone who is controlling the physical and mental areas of his life. Yet, for the elder this is not something worked up by himself, but rather, as MacArthur put it so well, *“He lives an exemplary life on the outside because he submits to the Holy Spirit’s control on the inside.”* The Christian who is self-controlled is someone who has yielded himself to the control of the Holy Spirit.

Elders must be men who walk rightly from an inward motivation, not an outward conformity. A person who behaves correctly only when others are watching is only acting a part, not living the reality. Elders are to walk in the integrity of their own hearts. They are as concerned about the inward hidden sins as much as the outward displayed sins. They master their passions and their minds and submit them to the Spirit’s control that they might live for the glory of God. Elders should be able to say along with Paul in 2 Cor. 1:12, *2 For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.*

God’s basic standards are the same for all Christians, but those who would desire to be used by God in leading His people must demonstrate their maturity and attain higher standards in order to fulfill the awesome responsibilities of the office.

Let me close by reading an excerpt from Charles Spurgeon's *Lectures to My Students* that expresses this well.

[If a pastor] were called to an ordinary position, and to common work, common grace might perhaps satisfy him, though even then it would be an indolent satisfaction; but being elect to extraordinary labours, and called to a place of unusual peril, he should be anxious to possess that superior strength which alone is adequate to his station. his pulse of vital godliness must beat strongly and regularly; his eye of faith must be bright; his foot of resolution must be firm; his hand of activity must be quick; his whole inner man must be in the highest degree of sanity. It is said of the Egyptians that they chose their priests from the most learned of their philosophers, and then they esteemed their priests so highly, that they chose their kings from them. We require to have for God's ministers the pick of all the Christian host; such men indeed, that if the nation wanted kings they could not do better than elevate them to the throne.

For some work we choose none but the strong; and when God calls us to ministerial labour we should endeavor to get grace that we may be strengthened into fitness for our position, and not be mere novices carried away by the temptations of Satan, to the injury of the church and our own ruin. We are to stand equipped with the whole armour of God, ready for feats of valour not expected of others; to us self-denial, self-forgetfulness, patience, perseverance, longsuffering, must be everyday virtues, and who is sufficient for these things? We had need live very near to God, if we would approve ourselves in our vocation.