

Selecting Leadership for the Local Church

I. How Do Most Churches Select Their Leaders?

(i.e., What criteria are often used to determine who will be the church deacons, elders, etc.?)¹

- A. Popularity (attractiveness, charisma, and likableness)
- B. Past (tradition, "He's always had that office" mentality)
- C. Politics (shrewdness, clout, manipulation)
- D. Pocketbook (wealth, large church contributions, even bribery)
- E. Profession (occupational standing—why do so few middle- and lower-class elders exist?)

II. How *Should* Churches Select Leaders? What Process of Selection and What Qualifications Must Potential Church Leaders Meet?

A. Scriptural Examples:

1. APOSTLES: The Replacement of Judas (Acts 1:12-26)

- a. Process of Selection: Congregational selection of candidates, prayer, drawing of lots, apostolic appointment. Since we no longer have apostles, this is not a pattern for us!
- b. Qualifications: To be in "the twelve," one had to participate in Christ's ministry and be an eyewitness of His resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). For other apostles, only the latter was required (cf. 1 Cor 9:1). This is why no one today qualifies as an apostle.

2. DEACONS: The Church at Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6)

- a. Process of Selection: Congregational selection, apostolic appointment (Gr: "ordain")
- b. Qualifications: Good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom (v. 3; but see especially 1 Tim 3:8-13 that is explained later in this study)

3. ELDERS: Titus' Responsibility (Titus 1:5-9)

- a. Process of Selection: undefined, but Paul told Titus as his apostolic representative to appoint (Gr: "ordain") men once they had been selected. Elders were likely selected by church vote just as were the leaders in the Jerusalem church (cf. Acts 6:1-6). With no apostolic delegates today to ordain elders, ordination must be by the church leadership.
- b. Qualifications: Titus 1:6-9; 1 Tim 3:2-7 (explained on the following pages)

B. Scriptural Principles:

- 1) Qualifications *apply only to men* (women are excluded).
- 2) Qualifications are not optional but *essential* (all qualities must be true of one being considered; failure in one area should be the reason for withholding an appointment).
- 3) Qualifications primarily refer to one's *present lifestyle* and character, not his past (unless Scripture designates past actions as applicable to the present).
- 4) Qualifications refer to the *office of elder* (e.g., bishop, overseer, pastor) *or deacon* but not to other church leadership positions (e.g., Sunday School teacher, care group leader).
- 5) Qualifications *must be maintained* to remain an elder. Those who initially qualify but later neglect to maintain the standards must resign or be removed from the board.
- 6) Qualifications emphasize a man's *character far more than his abilities* (which may disqualify some of the most successful and shrewd businessmen in the church).
- 7) Qualifications emphasize a man's ability to manage his *home* more than his work.

¹Chuck Swindoll, *Excellence in Ministry* (Fullerton, CA; Insight for Living, 1985), 39.

Elder Qualifications

(Titus 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-7)

I. Outline of the Qualifications

A. General Reputation	(Titus 1:6a;	1 Tim 3:2a)
B. Family Life	(Titus 1:6b;	1 Tim 3:2b, 4-5)
C. Negative Characteristics	(Titus 1:7;	1 Tim 3:3a, 6)
D. Positive Characteristics	(Titus 1:8;	1 Tim 3:2b, 3b, 7)
E. Teaching Requirement	(Titus 1:9;	1 Tim 3:2)

Note: A man's *desire* to be an elder must precede any official evaluation (1 Tim 3:1a). If a man does not want to become an elder, it matters little whether he qualifies, so even if "desire" is not considered a qualification, it certainly is relevant. Also, "BDAG" in the qualities below abbreviates the Greek lexicon by Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker. This work is considered the standard dictionary for defining Greek words.

II. Examination of the Qualities Individually (NIV translations are underlined)

A. General Reputation (Titus 1:6a; 1 Tim 3:2a)

1. Above Reproach is a general qualification of general reputation that can be seen as an "umbrella principle" under which all the other traits fall.
 - a. (ἀνέγκλητος Tit 1:6, 10 [deacons]) means "blameless" (cf. KJV) or "irreproachable" (BDAG 64b) in the sense that no one can point the finger at his character or behavior with an accurate accusation—not perfect but having a good reputation. This means not "merely unaccusable, but unaccused; not free from any just charge... but free from any charge at all...if any present [at the elder's ordination] had such a charge to bring, the ordination should not go forward until such a charge had been sifted" (Trench, 381). This requirement to be blameless excludes one guilty of sin in his past, which the church would need to discipline (e.g., divorce, immorality, criminal offenses) or that affects his present reputation.
 - b. (ἀνεπίληπτον 1 Tim 3:2) is translated as "above reproach," which is a synonym for "irreproachable" (BDAG) with the same sense as ἀνέγκλητος above (Tit. 1:6).
2. Respectable (κόσμιον 1 Tim 3:2b) also has the idea "honorable" (BDAG) and is used for women who wear modest apparel (1 Tim 2:9). The word refers to one who is living an orderly or well-arranged life. Christ used the verb form (κοσμέω) to designate a "well-ordered house" (Matt. 12:44), "well-trimmed lamps" (Matt. 25:7), and "decorated" tombstones (Matt. 23:29). A respectable man shows maturity that avoids personal excesses that may offend others, significantly weaker brothers and sisters. A church whose leaders do not earn respect will have a challenging experience.
3. [Having] a Good Reputation with Those Outside the Church (μαρτυρίαν καλήν ἔχειν ἀπὸ τῶν ἕξωθεν 1 Tim 3:7) also is mandatory for one being considered for office. An elder should be respected both inside and outside the church. The Greek reads, "to have a good witness from those outside." This requirement disqualifies anyone known by unbelievers as a crooked businessman, a lazy worker, a tyrant, a hardheaded and insensitive man, etc. A "good reputation" can be extensive.

Note: The following qualities relate to a man's *genuine* character, but the qualities above ("above reproach," "respectable," and "good reputation") denote his *perceived* character. A godly man who is not *known* as godly cannot qualify as an elder.

B. Family Life (Titus 1:6b; 1 Tim 3:2b, 4-5)

4. The Husband of One Wife (μῖς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα in 1 Tim 3:2; μῖς γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ in Tit 1:6) emphasizes a man's control in sexual restraint and a faithful relationship to his wife if he is married. (If he is not faithful in this second most important relationship in life should he be trusted in the affairs of the church?) This qualification excludes any husband unfaithful to his wife or one guilty of homosexuality, incest, habitual pornography and other sins of the flesh. (See the detailed evaluation on pages 228-230).
5. Having Responsible Children is generally translated like the NIV's "whose children believe" (τέκνα ἔχων πιστά Tit 1:6) but may also be translated as "having faithful children." This alternate translation is preferable since (1) parents are not ultimately responsible for the salvation of their children, and (2) the parallel meaning is supported in 1 Timothy 3:4, where an elder is required to "manage his household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity" (cf. 1 Tim 3:12 for deacons). The Greek word for "manage" is also used for elders who "rule" (1 Tim 5:17). The meaning of "having faithful children" is explained in the following clause (below).
6. (Whose Children Are) Not Accused of Dissipation or Rebellion (μὴ ἐν κατηγορίᾳ ἀσωτίας ἀνυπότακτα Tit 1:6) refers to the elder's children not being able to be slandered for riotous living or insubordination ("being wild or disobedient," NIV), but rather being disciplined and restrained (able to accept authority). The man whose children are rebellious or excessive (drugs, sex, drunkenness, etc.) would best get his family under control before taking on responsibility as a church leader (cf. 1 Tim 3:5).

C. Negative Characteristics (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3a, 6)

7. Not Self-Willed (μὴ αὐθάδη Tit 1:7) means that the man under consideration must not be "stubborn or arrogant" (BDAG) or not self-indulgent to the point of showing arrogance to others. He must protect God's concerns (holiness, purity, faithfulness, etc.) rather than selfish pursuits (desire for control in the church, overbearingness, etc.). Humility is indispensable.
8. Not Quick-Tempered (μὴ ὀργίλον Tit 1:7) means not "inclined to anger" (BDAG), not given to outbursts of wrath, not contentious or belligerent. Gentle (ἐπιεικῆ 1 Tim 3:3) or "yielding" and "kind" (BDAG) describes this characteristic positively.
9. Not Addicted to Wine (μὴ πάροινον Tit 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3) describes one who is "not drunken" (BDAG). The literal translation is "not (one who lingers) beside (his) wine." Temperate (νηφάλιον 1 Tim 3:2) refers to the same idea, "literally temperate in the use of alcoholic beverages, sober, clear-headed, self-controlled" (BDAG). An alcoholic or heavy drinker should never be considered for the office of elder. Ideally, an elder should be a non-drinker and, at the most, one who drinks with extraordinary moderation.
10. Not pugnacious (μὴ πλήκτην 1 Tim 3:3) refers to a "pugnacious man, bully" (BDAG). This man is "not violent" (NIV), not given to blows, not eager to use his fists, and not argumentative. Any man with a reputation for physical and emotional retaliation at others would not meet this elder qualification.
11. Uncontentious (ἄμαχον 1 Tim 3:3b) properly understood refers to the quality of being "peaceable" (BDAG). The elder should avoid fighting ("not pugnacious" above) and actively pursue unity and harmony within the body of Christ. One who tends to "witch hunt" makes the work of the elders difficult in the many potentially explosive situations that face every church. Since this characteristic is expected of all believers (Tit 3:2), how much more for the leaders!
12. Not Pursuing Dishonest Gain (μὴ αἰσχροκερδῆ Tit 1:7) refers to one "not fond for dishonest gain, greedy for money" (BDAG 25a). He makes an honest living and is upright in all his business dealings since he is "not given to filthy lucre" (KJV). Free from the love of money (ἀφιλάργυρον 1 Tim 3:3b) describes the characteristic positively. A man who gambles,

hoards his money, or is pursuing the elder office for financial advantage is disqualified, as would be one who refuses to at least tithe.

13. Not a New Convert (μὴ νεόφυτον 1 Tim 3:6) means not “newly planted” and gives our English word “neophyte” (BDAG). The age at which a Christian qualifies for eldership is not designated. Still, Paul appointed elders from men less than a year old in Christ during his first missionary journey (Acts 14:23). However, they were not novices as they were steeped in Judaism. The principle is to appoint mature men in Christ, especially mature in humility, to fight pride from being appointed to office.

D. Positive Characteristics (Tit 1:8; 1 Tim 3:2b, 3b, 7)

14. Hospitable (φιλόξενον Tit 1:8; 1 Tim 3:2), or “loving strangers” (Hendriksen), also should characterize one considered for the office of elder. The word for “hospitable” here is a compound word (φιλόξ, “brotherly love” plus ξένος, “stranger, alien”), which means showing love towards those one doesn’t know. Does the man love and care for believers and strangers or treat people with contempt, especially if they are of a different social status or race? One who still struggles with racial, religious, or social prejudices is disqualified based on this requirement. “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:14).
15. Loving What is Good (φιλόγαθον Tit 1:8) has the same root (φίλος, “brotherly love”) as above, meaning “loving goodness, virtuous, ready to do what is beneficial to others” (Hendriksen; cf. Phil. 4:8). The KJV, “a lover of good men,” is an inaccurate and unfortunate translation in its exclusiveness (especially since believers are commanded to love all men; cf. Rom. 13:8-10). “Loving what is good” means loving God and what God loves. This characteristic disqualifies from office one who approves of abortion, premarital and extramarital sex, and other harmful practices forbidden by Scripture.
16. Sensible (σώφρονα Tit 1:8) suggests being “of sound mind, reasonable, sensible, serious, keeping one's head” (BDAG). Prudent (σώφρονα 1 Tim 3:2) expresses the same concept with a different English translation of the same Greek word. This connotes that an elder needs to be wise and balanced in his judgment, marked by a proper self-image (humility without self-condemnation), as Romans 12:3 exhorts. This quality excludes men who lack proper judgment or proud “know-it-alls.”
17. Just (δίκαιον Tit 1:8) is defined as “upright, righteous” (BDAG). Being just suggests a man who demonstrates impartiality in his decision-making. He is fair, able to make mature judgments, and characterized by practical righteousness, which is affirmed in his lifestyle.
18. Devout (ὄσιον Tit 1:8) especially emphasizes a man's relationship with God as “devout, pious, pleasing to God, holy” (BDAG). One demonstrating this quality continually progresses in holiness to be more like Christ. He has made it a priority to “put on the new man” (Eph. 4:24). He is one of whom people declare, “He sure is a godly man!”
19. Self-Controlled (ἐγκρατῆ Tit 1:8) also refers to being “disciplined” (BDAG). A man with excesses in habits, tardiness, anger, etc., is revealed to be undisciplined in his lifestyle and, therefore, not qualified for the office of elder. The point here is to require someone to exercise control over his own life before he is given control over the church.

E. Teaching Requirement (Tit 1:9; 1 Tim 3:2)

20. Able to Teach (διδακτικόν 1 Tim 3:2) and Holding Fast the Faithful Word... to Exhort (Encourage)... and to Refute... (Tit 1:9) both specify that elders should have some aptitude for teaching, although not necessarily possessing the *gift* of teaching (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph. 4:11). They need not be scholars, but they should have a good grasp of the Word of God for two purposes (Tit 1:9b): (1) to exhort (encourage) others in sound doctrine, and (2) to refute those who contradict [sound doctrine]. This teaching qualification is no light order, especially since the responsibility covers a church-wide scale. An elder must be well grounded in the “faithful word which is according to the teaching” (Tit 1:9) and yet to be able to communicate the Word in a non-offensive manner. This characteristic excludes those with no aptitude for teaching on a group or one-on-one basis and those with only a superficial knowledge of the Bible, especially its basic doctrines.

III. Summary of the Qualifications

The 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 elder qualifications mostly describe a man's character, not his abilities (the exceptions being “able to teach” and “managing his household well”). From this observation, it can be concluded that God is more concerned with *who* a man is than *what* he can do, especially as this is revealed in his family relationships and general reputation as a man of God.

IV. Practical Implications

The qualifications for elders are presented as a unit. No ratio or percentage of them that need to be true of a man appears in 1 Timothy 3 or Titus 1. Paul stressed each characteristic as vital. Therefore, *all* traits are necessary to accept a man as an elder. (If *all* the qualities were not mandatory, who would be so presumptuous as to decide *which* ones are optional?)

This requirement of all the qualifications does not infer that the man must have *arrived* as a man of God but that he is progressing toward greater spiritual maturity with these qualities as a foundation. The church should be instructed in the meanings of the requirements in a series of messages, and then, as a congregational body, it should decide upon each possible elder candidate put forward by a committee that recommends elders.

The question arises concerning how long it will take to identify such men in a congregation. Scripture gives no time indication here. The temptation in some churches is to appoint men too quickly to this office, leading to selecting elders who don't scripturally qualify.

However, this also doesn't mean that the body of believers should sit around and wait for qualified men to appear like magic. The pastor needs to build his life into several men with the prayer that many would eventually qualify to assist him as an elder.

These men certainly can and should assist the pastor before assuming the title of elder. They need not be elders to be helpful to the church. Being disciplined by the pastor allows them time for growth into men of God who can serve as elders with the pastor as models of a church with high, biblical standards of church leadership.

Alexander Strauch summarizes the importance of elder qualifications:²

It is highly noteworthy that the New Testament provides more instruction concerning the qualifications for eldership than on any other aspect of eldership. Such qualifications are not required of all teachers or evangelists. One person may be gifted as an evangelist and be used of God in that capacity, yet be unqualified to be an elder. An individual may be an evangelist immediately after conversion, but Scripture says that a new convert cannot be an elder (1 Timothy 3:6).

When we speak of the elders' qualifications, most people think that these qualifications are different than those of the clergy. The New Testament, however, has no separate standards for professional clergy and lay elders. The reason is simple. There aren't three separate offices—pastor, elders, and deacons—in the New Testament-style local church. There are only two offices—elders and deacons. From the New Testament perspective, any man in the congregation who desires to shepherd the Lord's people and meets God's requirements for the office can be a pastor elder.

² Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: Restoring the Eldership to Its Rightful Place in the Church*, rev. (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1997), 21. This is a pamphlet size summary of his earlier full-length book available for US\$14.99 at <http://www.discerningreader.com/bibelalstrau.html>.