

Qualities of Elders in the New Testament

Qualities vs. Qualifications - More people are making reference to these a “qualities” rather than qualifications. Qualifications often tend to focus on ability and past experience. Qualities focus more on personality and character. My personal contention is that these lists actually embody both ideas. An elder has to be both a person of quality (good character) and qualified (able to perform). For the purposes of this lesson, we will use the word “qualities”.

I Timothy 3:1-7

Background:

- This was written to Timothy in Ephesus sometime after Paul’s Roman imprisonment.
- Paul left Timothy behind at Ephesus on his way to Macedonia so that Timothy could deal with false or “strange” teachings (1:3)
- The reason for Paul writing this letter was to encourage Timothy and so that Christians would know how to conduct themselves in the church (3:15)

I. (v.1) This is one of several “trustworthy” or “faithful” sayings in Timothy and Titus

- A. There were false teachings that were being faced
- B. This showed that this saying deserved to be commended, repeated, & emphasized
 - This would have the effect of encouraging those who desired this ministry

II. If any man aspires to an overseership, it is a honorable work he is desiring to do

- A. The phrase “office of overseer” is taken from the single word “episkope” which means “overseership”
- B. What a man desires is the work
 - 1. There are two words which could be translated “desire” in this passage
 - a. Aspire (*orego*) - “to reach out for” or “to strive for”
 - b. Desire (*epithumeo*) - “to eagerly desire, long for, crave, or lust”
 - c. The second word, which is used in the phrase (it is a fine work he desires) is a stronger word than the first.
 - d. The use of the second word may have been to emphasize the overseership as a “work” of service, not *just* a position.
 - 2. It is a good work
 - a. There are two adjectives in Greek translated as “good”

- 1) *Agathos* - "Good, upright, just, perfect, beneficial"
- 2) *Kalos* - "Good, fine, beautiful, honorable, honest"
- b. It is the second word that is used in this passage to describe the honorable work of an overseer.
- c. Acts 20:28 - Why is this work honorable? It is shepherding the church that Jesus paid for with his own precious blood.
- d. This use of this word attaches great value to the work of an overseer
- e. This also would encourage those who desired the ministry.
(There are no words of discouragement in this passage)

III. The singular word "overseer" in verse 2 does not necessarily mean that there is to be only a single elder in a church.

- A. This is written to Timothy in Ephesus, which had a plurality of Elders (Acts 20)
- B. The word for overseer is **always** in the plural in the New Testament with the exception of I Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:7
- C. The reason why these have it singular
 1. It is a generic singular, a singular noun representing an entire class of people. eg. "A Soldier is trained to sleep in the mud" This doesn't mean that there is only one soldier in the Army
 2. Other uses by Paul of the generic singular:
 - a. Concerning Women (I Timothy 2:11)
 - b. Concerning Widows (I Timothy 5:5, 19)
 - c. The Lord's Bondservant (2 Timothy 2:24)

IV. The trustworthy saying is followed by "*dei oun*" -- "It is necessary therefore..."

- A. Since the work of an overseer is an honorable work, it follows that the work must be done by a man of honorable character
- B. Paul provides public and observable qualities to determine character
- C. The qualities focus on 2 areas
 1. Internal - Personal self-discipline, maturity and character
 2. External - Ability to relate to, care for, and teach others

V. The Criteria for the Honorable Man

- A. (v.2) **Be above reproach** Grk: - *anepileptos*- irreproachable (lit. "that cannot be laid hold of," hence, "not open to censure," - Vines
 1. This appears to be an over-arching quality of character that encompasses all that follows

2. Does not mean overseers are to be sinless (I John 1:8; Romans 3:23)
3. It does mean he should have a character that is an example (I Pet 5:3)
4. His character should make it difficult for a charge to be brought against him (Nehemiah 6:13)

B. (v.2) He is above reproach in his marriage “husband of one wife”
(NASB)

1. He is to be an example in family relations by being faithful to his wife
2. Assumes elders are married (no word for “bachelor” in the O.T.)
3. Although it is generally agreed that this verse means that an elders is to be married and faithful to his wife, there is disagreement beyond that.
4. Interpretations:
 - a) The text is simply saying that an overseer is to be a married man
 - 1) There is not adjective in Greek for “married”, so this would be a way to say that an elder needed to be a married man.
 - 2) If this were the intention, why doesn't the text just say that an overseer must be “a husband”, or “the husband of a wife”, instead of “husband of one wife”? The word “one” is there for a reason.
 - b) An overseer must not be a polygamist
 - 1) Deuteronomy 21:15-17 - Polygamy was an accepted practice,
 - a) Although polygamy was accepted, like divorce, it doesn't appear to be God's ideal
 - 1-Gen 4:19-First practiced in the ungodly line
 - 2-Deuteronomy 17:17 - Unacceptable for Kings
 - 3-Prophets used monogamy to describe God & Isreal
 - 4-Gen 2:24 - Quoted by Mk 10:2-9, one man & one woman
 - 5-I Cor 7:2 - alludes to the ideal, each to have their own wife
 - b) Because it was not God's ideal, it was not permitted for an elder to be a polygamist
 - 2) However, the text doesn't say they were not to multiply wives, but they are to be the Husband of one wife
 - a) Prohibition against polygamy is probably not the prime purpose for this instruction
 - b) Early Christians felt that polygamy was wrong, though it was not expressly forbidden in scripture
 - c) O.T. highlights negative outcomes of polygamy
 - d) Hebrew for second wife literally meant “rival wife”
 - c) An overseer must be married, & only once in his lifetime
 - 1) Divorce was rampant in the first century. Since divorce

was against God's ideal & the elder has to be above reproach, he was not to be divorced

- 2) Most apply this to divorce, but the text says nothing about divorce, just that he should be the "husband of one wife"
 - a) There was perfectly good and well used word in Greek for divorce. Why didn't it say "never have divorced"?
 - b) What about if a wife dies and the husband is remarried? Does this go against God's ideal? Did anyone sin in this case? (Rom 7:1-4)
- 3) Remember the over-arching quality, the overseer is to be above reproach, an honorable person.
 - a) A 2nd marriage after the death of a spouse is clearly sanctioned. (I Cor 7:39) He would still be above reproach.
 - b) A 2nd marriage after abandonment is also sanctioned (I Cor 7:27-28 NASB). In this case, he would still be above reproach.
 - c) Therefore, this cannot be a blanket prohibition against 2nd marriages.
- d) An overseer is to be faithful to his wife
 - 1) Grk, literally says: "a man of one woman" or "one man woman"
 - 2) This phrase prohibits polygamy
 - 3) This phrase also prohibits promiscuity & having a concubine
 - a) Having a concubine, or a "lover" was a common and accepted practice in Greek culture
 - b) "The first situation that wrecked marriage among the Greeks was the fact that relationships outside marriage carried no stigma whatsoever, and were in fact the accepted and the expected thing. ...Demosthenes laid it down as the accepted practice of life: "We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of cohabitation, we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately, and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs. ..."

-William Barclay in The Gospel of Matthew, p. 155

 - 4) A husband who is not a womanizer and is faithful to his wife would be "above reproach" in his marital life.

C. (v.2) He must be temperate

1. KJV- Vigilant; TEV/NEB-Sober; RSV/NIV-Temperate; Phillips-A man of self-control
2. Grk: Nephaios - Temperate (in the use of alcoholic beverages), sober,

clear-headed, self controlled

4. Often used figuratively for being free of excess, thus being clear headed.
5. Other uses: 2 Timothy 4:5; 1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8 (verb-Nepho)

D. (v.2) He must be prudent

1. KJV-"Sober"; NIV/TEV-"Self Controlled"; RSV-"Sensible"
2. Grk:
 - a. (adj.) Sophron - Prudent, thoughtful, self-controlled
 - b. (noun) Sophrosune - Rationality, Reasonableness, Good Judgment
 - c. (verb) Sophroneo - Be of sound mind, or sensible
3. Used in 1 Peter 4:7 - Be of sound judgment (sophroneo) and sober spirit (nepho)

E. (v.2) He is to be respectable

1. KJV-"Of good behavior"; RSV-"Dignified"
2. Grk: Kosmion - respectable, honorable, modest, well-behaved
3. Same word used in 1 Tim 2:9 - "I also want women to dress modestly" (NIV). This is an instruction against extravagance.

F. (v.2) He is to be hospitable

1. KJV-"Given to Hospitality"; TEV-"Must welcome strangers in his home"
2. Grk: Philoxenos - Hospitable. (Philo-Love, affection; Xenos-Stranger)
3. Other uses: 1 Peter 4:9; Heb 13:1-2; Rom 12:13
4. Examples: Philemon 22; Acts 10:6; 2 John 10,11 (helped support preachers)

G. (v.2) He is to be able to teach

1. This does not mean that he needs to be eloquent, dynamic, or gifted
 - a. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15
 - 1) Those who build the church are to be "careful how they build"
 - 2) The poor building (which does not survive "the day") is talking about preacher-centered Christians (faith is in man)
 - b. Paul's example: (1 Cor 2:1-4) - Not with eloquent words of wisdom
2. Parallel instruction: Titus 1:9
 - a. The overseer is to "hold fast to the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching"
 - 1) Hold fast(*antecho*) - To cling to, hold fast, or be devoted to. eg: Matt 6:24 - "be devoted to"
 - 2) Teaching - (*didache*) - Teaching (synonymn for didaskalia)
 - b. Reasons he is to "hold fast to the faith word..."

- 1) To be able to exhort in sound doctrine
 - a) Exhort - (*parakaleo*) - Appeal, urge, exhort, encourage comfort
 - b) Sound - (*hugiano*) - Good health, Sound
eg: Lk 5:31 - "Well"
 - c) Doctrine - (*didaskalia*) - Teaching
- 2) To be able to refute those who contradict
 - a) Refute (*elegcho*) - Bring to light, convict, convince, reprove, correct, discipline. Examples:
 1. 2 Tim. 4:2 - "reprove" (Jude 15 - "convict")
 2. 1 Tim 5:20 - "rebuke" (Jn 3:20 - "expose")
 3. Heb 12:5 - "reproved" (Lk 3:19 - "reproved")
 4. Eph 5:11,13 - "expose" (Jn 8:46 - "convicts")
 - b) Contradict (*antilego*) - "Speak against, contradict, oppose, refuse" Examples:
 1. Lk 20:27 - lit. "the ones speaking against the resurrection"
 2. Acts 28:19 -lit. "But (when) the Jews opposed,"
 - c) This all goes right along with "guarding the flock" in Acts 20:28ff

H. (v.3) He must not be addicted to wine.

1. KJV-"not given to wine"; NIV-"not given to much wine"; RSV-"no drunkard"
2. Grk: *paroinos* - "Drunken, addicted to wine"; used only here and in Titus 1:7

I. (v. 3) He must not be pugnacious -but- gentle

1. Pugnacious: KJV-"no striker"; RSV/NIV-"not violent"; NEB-"not...a brawler"
 - a. Grk: *plektes* - Pugnacious man, bully; used only here and in Titus 1:7
 - b. Kin to the word "*plesso*", meaning to strike. Suggests a man inclined to settle disagreements contentiously with a fist
2. Gentle: KJV-"patient"; RSV/NIV-"gentle"
 - a. Grk: *epiekes* - Yielding, gentle, kind, considerate
 - b. Examples
 - 1) 1 Peter 2:18 - "gentle"
 - 2) Phil 4:5 - "forbearing spirit"
 - 3) James 3:17 - "gentle"

J. Note: The KJV includes "not greedy of filthy lucre" which is not included in the Greek text, and should not be included here.

K. (v.3) He must be uncontentious

1. KJV-"not a brawler"; RSV/NIV-"not quarrelsome"
2. Grk: amachos - Peaceable, peaceful (only here and Titus 3:2)
-Grk word is from a (against) + mache (quarrel, fight)
3. Passages concerning quarreling:
 - a. James 4:2 - "fight" (mache) and quarrel (polemeo-fight, dispute)
 - b. I Tim 6:4 - "disputes about words" (logomachias)
 - c. Titus 3:9 - "disputes" (mache) about the law
4. This should not be confused with "contending" (agonizomai-fight, struggle) for the faith
 - a. I Tim 6:12 - "Fight" the good "fight"
 - b. 2 Timothy 4:7 - "fought" the good "fight"
 - c. Jude 3 - "contend earnestly for" (epagonizomai) the faith

L. (v.3) He must be free from the love of money

1. KJV-"not covetous"; RSV-"no lover of money"; NIV-"not a lover of money"
2. Grk: philarguros - Not loving money, not greedy
3. Examples:
 - a. Hebrews 13:5 - Let your character be "free from the love of money"
 - b. I Tim 6:10 - "love of money" (philarguria) the root of all sorts of evil
 - c. 2 Tim 3:2 - Characteristic of false teachers
4. This instruction prevents overseers being in it for the money - I Tim 5:17; 6:5; and therefore being just a hired hand, or "hireling" John 10:12 and only "feeding himself" Ezek 34:8

M. He must be one who manages his own household well (v.4-5)

1. KJV-"one that ruleth his own house"; RSV-"he must manage his own household well"; NIV-"He must manage his own family well"
2. Manages (*proistemi*) - be at the head of, rule, direct, lead, care for, manage
3. Examples of *proistemi*
 - a. I Tim 5:17 - Let the elders who "rule" well...
 - b. I Thess 5:12 - ...labor among you, and "have charge" over you...
 - c. Rom 12:8 - one who "leads", with diligence
4. Managing the household well involves keeping his children under control with all dignity
 - a. "under control" *hupotasso* - to be in subjection (2:12; Tit 2:5; Lk 2:51)
 - b. "dignity" is *semnotes* - reverence, respect, dignity, seriousness
5. The home is the proving ground for the overseer
 - a. If a man does not know how to manage (*proistemi*) his own household, how will he take care for the church of God?
 - b. "Managing" is not just about a position, but about service - An

- elder is to “care for” the church, and care for his family
- c. If an elder can keep his children under subjection with respect, this gives confidence in his ability to inspire the same in the church.
- 6. Both the use of the word *proistemi* and the use of the home as a proving ground shows that elders have a measure of authority in the church.

N. He must not be a new convert

- 1. KJV-“not a novice”; RSV/NIV-“not be a recent convert”
- 2. Grk: *me* - Not *neophuton* - newly planted
 - a. Paints the image of a plant, new ones do not have deep roots
 - b. Example of the Corinthians- I Cor 3:1-3
- 3. Among other things, so he wont become conceited or arrogant & condemned
 - a. This suggests maturity of the “senses” Hebrews - Heb 5:11-14
 - b. This suggests being rooted and grounded in love (Eph 3:17-19)
 - c. This involves no longer being “children” carried about by every wind of doctrine (Eph 4:14-15)
 - d. Maturity is not just knowledge (I Cor 8:1) but love (I Cor 13:8-11)

O. He must have a good reputation with those outside the church

- 1. Reputation - (*marturion*) - Testimony, witness
- 2. I Peter 4:12-19 - Because he is a Christian, an elder may be persecuted anyway

Titus 1:5-9

Background:

- This was written to Titus in Crete sometime after Paul’s Roman imprisonment.
- Paul left Titus behind at Crete to both “set in order what remains” and to “appoint elders in every city”
- The reason for Paul writing this letter was to encourage remind Titus of his work and to ask Titus to come visit him after Paul sent either Artemas or Tychicus to Crete.

I. (v.6)An elder is to be “above reproach” (Grk: anegkletos - irreproachable, blameless)

- A. This word is a synonym for the one used in I Timothy
- B. There are 4 words for “blameless”, each with a different nuance:
 - “**αμωμος** is *faultless, without blemish, free from imperfections*. It refers especially to character. **αμεμπτos** is strictly *unblamed*, one with whom no fault is found. This of course refers particularly to the verdict of other upon one.
 - ανεγκλητος** designates on against whom there is no accusation, implying not acquittal of a charge, but that no charge has been made. **ανεπιλημπτos** means

irreprehensible, designating one who affords nothing upon which an adversary might seize, in order to make a charge against him.

George Ricker Berry in A Dictionary of New Testament Greek Synonyms p.17

- B. Signifies "that which cannot be called into account" - Vines
- C. The words used for blameless in this passage does not imply Moral Perfection.

II. (v.6) An elder is to be Husband of one wife (see discussion on I Tim 3:1-7, same phrase)

III. (v.6) An elder is to have children who believe

- A. Children - (*tekna*) - "Offspring." It is a generic word and does not necessarily dictate a plurality of children.
- B. Believe - (*pistos*) - trustworthy, faithful, dependable, reliable (does not necessarily mean a convert, especially in secular literature where it simply means 'faithful' or 'trustworthy')
 - 1. I Tim 3:1 - "trustworthy" statement
 - 2. Lk 12:42 - "faithful" and sensible steward
 - 3. I Pet 5:12 - our "faithful" brother
- C. Children who are trustworthy are further described
 - 1. Not accused of dissipation (debauchery, being wild, incorrigible)
 - 2. Not accused of rebellion
- D. This is parallel to the instruction of I Timothy 3:4-5, the force of this instruction is for an elder to have respectable children.
- E. This does not necessitate necessarily that all his children be baptized believers, they may not be old enough yet. It does mean that the children are respectable and generally good kids, which is a reflection on parents.

IV. (v.7) An overseer is to be above reproach as God's steward

- A. Paul uses this word twice in his instruction to Titus. The structure implies that this is not just a qualification in itself, but is specific to the things he lists.
- B. Steward is a word used of a person put in charge of and entrusted with his master's household or estate Luke 12:42-48
- C. An overseer, then, is in the most real sense, a steward, since the flock is "the church of God" (Acts 20:28)

V. (v.7) He must not be self-willed

- A. RSV-"not arrogant"; NIV-"not overbearing"
- B. Grk: authades - one who pleases himself, willful, stubborn, arrogant
 - This implies that the elder is not hung up on his own likes or dislikes, but is selfless in considering what is best for the flock
- C. Used only here and in 2 Peter 2:10

VI. (v.7) He must not be quick-tempered: Grk: orgilos - inclined to anger, quick tempered

VII. (v.7) He must not be addicted to wine. (same word used in I Tim 3:1-7)

VIII. (v.7) He must not be pugnacious. (same word used in I Tim 3:1-7)

IX. (v.7) He must not be fond of sordid gain

- A. Although this word is similar to I Tim 3:3, it has a much different connotation
- B. KJV-"not given to filthy lucre"; RSV-"Not greedy for gain"; NIV-not pursuing dishonest gain"
- C. Grk: aischrokerdes - fond of dishonest gain, greedy for money
(aischros - disgraceful, shameful, dishonest)

X. (v.8) He must be hospitable (same word used in I Tim 3:1-7)

XI. (v.8) He must love what is good

- A. There are two types of "good" in Greek for good
 1. *Agathos* - "Good, upright, just, perfect, beneficial"
 2. *Kalos* - "Good, fine, beautiful, honorable, honest"
- B. The word used here is a compound word using agathos: "philagathos", he loves what is upright & just.

XII. (v.8) He must be sensible (same word is used in I Tim 3:2- "prudent")

XIII. (v.8) He must be just

- A. RSV/NIV-"upright"
- B. Grk: dikaios - upright, just, righteous
- C. Examples:
 1. I Tim 1:9 - A righteous (just) man is a law abider
 2. In one sense, Paul will say that no one is righteous (Rom 3:11)

- a. However, Rom 3:21 & 4:3 shows that God imputed righteousness
 - b. This is actually a different *kind* of righteousness than the type that means being in a right relationship with God.
3. The difference between the two concepts of "righteousness"
 - a. Titus 1:8 is not talking about "imputed" righteousness (Rom 4:3)
 - b. Titus 1:8 is talking about the "practice" of uprightness (I John 3:7)
4. This is talking about a man of principles who is fair and just.
 - a. Proverbs 29:7 - Righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor
 - b. Example of Job- Job 1:1; 29:14-17

XIV. (v.8) He must be devout

- A. KJV/ RSV/ NIV-"holy"
- B. Grk: hosios - devout, pious, pleasing to God, holy
- C. The usual meaning for holy means set apart, or dedicated to God. This is not that.
- D. The idea behind this is that an overseer is not necessarily concerned with popularity, but is concerned with purity, and with pleasing God.
 1. Acts 5:29 - Obey God rather than men
 2. 2 Cor 5:9 - Our ambition is to be pleasing to Him

XV. (v.8) He must be self-controlled

- A. Grk: egkrates - self controlled, disciplined, master of self
- B. This word is used to describe a fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:23

XVI. (v.8) He must hold fast to the faithful word (see discussion on I Tim 3:2, "able to teach") for discussion of this.

SUMMARY:

Can any person possibly meet these qualifications? To many people, they seem too high to reach because they appear to demand perfection. However, one should remember the spirit and rationale **behind** these qualities, which are listed by Paul. The qualification for shepherding God's flock **is not** perfection, but suitability. Paul gives guidelines to measure this suitability with the overarching quality that the man be "above reproach", which includes his personal conduct, his conduct with Christians, with outsiders, and his conduct with his family. In addition to being above reproach, he would need to have the ability and the desire to be a spiritual leader, which would necessitate him not being a new convert and being able to teach, refute and exhort Biblically. This ability to lead would be evidenced in his ability to lead his own family.

Seen in this light, it is clear to see that it is not a **perfect** man a church is looking for, but a man **capable** of leading the sheep effectively who lays down his life for the sheep. When going through these qualifications in looking for elders, it should be remembered that these are not just an checklist to be mindlessly checked off, but “qualities” and “qualifications” to look for in relation to a man’s ability to care for the flock.