

The Church

Elders - The Pre-Qualifications and Qualifying - Part 5

Pre-Considerations

When our Lord was here He told a parable of the consideration needed before building a tower or a king going to war without considering the obligations it would place on him (Lk. 14:28-33). The same holds true for an individual who desires the work of overseership. There must be a consideration of the obligations and qualifications. We humans can often, to our dismay, find that we have said or done something rashly without thinking the matter through. Peter knew from experience how easy it is to state things rashly (Matt. 17:4), and Saul learnt the consequences of acting rashly (1 Sam. 15:7-23). God knew our presumptuousness and the hazard pride can produce, therefore, it is easily understood why the Holy Spirit had the words, “take heed” repeated. It was said to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:28); to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:16); and to Archippus (Col. 4:17).

To “take heed” means to be cautious and on guard, watching for yourselves and for the saints of God. They must ever be watchful because of the dangers of Satanic influence on the guise of spirituality. When considering any service for God, the individual must spend much time before God asking several questions such as:

- a) Why would I want to do this work?
- b) Am I ready for the riggers and demands of it?
- c) Will my wife support me in it?
- d) Am I seeking this work for the glory of God and Christ?

An individual must not assume that because of an apparent exercise it is what the Lord wants them to do, even if supported by inward impulse, being asked to, or indicators seem to indicate such. This fact stands true whither one is giving out tracts, taking a Sunday School class, seeking to be an evangelist or a bible teacher full time. The same interrogation of ones motives must be weighed. David sincerely thought the Lord would have him build a temple for His glory. He had the means and why would God have given him the pattern for the temple if it was not His desire for David to built it? Besides, the prophet of God was in fellowship with him in the desire. Surely this was the will of God BUT it was not (2 Sam. 7:1-17). Our hearts were not changed at conversion, they are still deceitful, and only God can show us our true motivation for any work. Therefore, the first pre-consideration is to spend time with God and ones spouse, seeking to clearly know the mind of God as to whither to assist in being an overseer or not.

God has a great care for the “flock of God” for, “He hath purchased (it) with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). The book of Exodus informs us that God fitted certain men to oversee the construction of the Tabernacle (Ex. 35:34-35). Likewise, the Holy Spirit gives particular men the qualities needed to be an overseer. To assist us in recognizing them there has been given a written record of the very specific qualifying credentials needed for one to be an elder.

The Elders in The Old Testament

As already stated, “elders” did not start with the church. There were elders under the law (Ex. 24:1) from whom we can learn valuable lessons:

- a) Their names:
 - i) Apart from being called “elders”, they were described and known as, “The renowned of the congregation”; “Princes of the tribes of their fathers”; and “Heads of thousands in Israel” (Num. 1:16).
- b) They were appointed by God (Num. 1:5).
- c) They were a full representative of the entire congregation, being from each tribe (Num. 1:4-15).
- d) Their qualifications were prescribed by God and those qualifications were:
 - i) Their pedigree (Num. 1:18). Did they have the right birth, irrespective of education, etc.
 - ii) They were not children or novices in alertness and warfare (Num. 1:18, 20).
 - iii) They led the people in worship (Num. 7:2-3, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 42, 48, 54, 60, 66, 72, 78), and appreciation of the altar (Num. 7:84).
 - iv) They met in conference (Num. 10:4).

The Church

Elders - The Pre-Qualifications and Qualifying - Part 5

- v) They sided with God and His revealed will in the discipline of the error over Midian (Num. 31:1-13).
- vi) They judged and had wisdom to assist in solving the problems of the people (Num. 32:1-31).

Looking at the work of being an elder from another perspective, God fitted certain men to oversee the construction of the Tabernacle (Ex. 35:34).

Being that God was:

- a) Exceedingly careful about who looked after those who were the “apple of His eye” (Deut. 32:10), certainly He has just as great a care for those whom He hath purchased “with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).
- b) Exceedingly careful about those whom He chose to build the Tabernacle, is He less careful about those who have the responsibility to build the local church? (1 Cor. 3:10)

Elders and The Local Church

Today the Holy Spirit gives certain men the qualities needed to be an overseer. To assist us in recognizing them there has been given a written record of the very specific qualifying credentials.

Some observations can easily be made:

- a) The individual must have the qualifications, and these indicate authenticity. For instance, I professed to be a baker, but the only way that could be evidenced was that I could bake at a professional level. If a man professes to be an elder, or if he is announced to be an elder, then by his life he must show evidence of the qualification. If a man does not have the qualifications, then irrespective of what he or others think, he cannot be an elder. Some may argue that no man can have all these qualifications, but several things then come to mind. If God had said, “If he has the most of them”, we could have used that as an excuse. I have heard it said, “Sometimes we just have to do with what we have”. To me that is a tragedy for it indicates a casual attitude to the credentials God has decreed and an insult to God, for it indicates weakness. Surely, if God gives the qualifications, can He not give the enabling power to be all that he requires?
- b) Among the credentials it is seen that there are no references to his spiritual gifts or natural abilities, nor are there any to his social position, education, or wealth.
- c) No qualification is more or less important than the others.

It is often said that the Holy Spirit makes men overseers, a scripture which is badly abused for there are those who are elders, and yet they have very very few of the qualifications. God never gave any man a work to do that He had not qualified him for. Yet, such men hold on to the position and power irrespective of the damage being done to the saints, and the church claiming the Holy Spirit made them an overseer. In summary, there are four qualifications:

- a) The Biblical stated qualifications
- b) Recognition by others that the individual is already doing the work of shepherding
- c) Good report from the outside world
- d) A desire begotten by the Holy Spirit

By What Authority Do Elders Function In A Local Church?

We shall discover that elders who met the qualifications are equipped and then appointed by God. One of the principles by which God acts is He never gives an individual a work to do for which He has not equipped them. As long as men are guiding the saints according to the scriptures, with the right motivation and purpose, all the authority of God and Christ is behind them (2 Tim. 2:24-25; Titus 1:9-11).

The Church

Elders - The Pre-Qualifications and Qualifying - Part 5

Biblically Stated Qualifications Can Be Divided Into Distinct Groups:

1) The qualifications which have a reason attached to them

- a) He must have his children in subjection, “for if a man know not how to rule (*direct care for*) his own house” (1 Tim. 3:4-5).
- b) “He must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:7).
- c) He must be, “Holding fast the faithful word . . . that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9)
- d) “Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6)

2) The reemphasized qualifications

- a) The qualifications reemphasized are: “The husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6); “no striker” (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7); “sober” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8); “not given to wine” (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7); “filthy lucre (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7). Note that the word translated “blameless” (1 Tim. 3:2) (anepilotes) is a different word from that in Titus 1:6 (anegkletos). Some are very similar but with a slight difference. For instance, “having children in subjection (1 Tim. 3:4) with “having faithful children” (Titus 1:6). Observe the distinction between the references to the father and children in Timothy and Titus. In Timothy the stress is on the father, “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity” (1 Tim. 3:4) but in Titus the qualifying depends on the character of the children, “Having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly” (Titus 1:6).
- b) The qualifications are dependent on his fidelity to God, home, local church, his mind, actions, and growth.
 - 1) Positive qualifications
 - 2) Negative qualifications
 - 3) Qualifications for his children

3) Positive qualifications, characteristics he must have

Qualification	Meaning	Reference
Blameless	Without reproach, one at whom an accusing finger cannot be pointed at. Only in 1 Tim. 5:7 and 6:14 where it is translated “blameless” and “unrebukeable”. The word means giving no handle for reproach. No accusation can be proven against him.	1 Tim. 3:2
Husband of one wife	A one woman man, if his wife has died, he can remarry.	1 Tim. 3:2
Vigilant	The Greek word is translated “sober” in 1 Tim. 3:11 and Titus 2:2. It means to be circumspect.	1 Tim. 3:2
Sober	Possessing self control of emotions and behavior, self restrained	1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8
Good behavior	Well behaved, respectable. Orderly, the opposite is roughness or uncouthness	1 Tim. 3:2
Given to hospitality	Loving strangers	1 Tim. 3:2

The Church
Elders - The Pre-Qualifications and Qualifying - Part 5

Qualification	Meaning	Reference
Apt to teach	To know the Scriptures so that he can teach others, he must have a willingness to teach others. They must also recognize when teaching is needed on a particular theme.	1 Tim. 3:2
Patient	Gentle, eager to show consideration and forbearance	1 Tim. 3:3
Ruleth his own house well	Standing before his family as an example, his own house. Superintending his home in gravity, being held in respect by his family	1 Tim. 3:4
Having his children in subjection	Having well ordered children	1 Tim. 3:4
Good report of them without	His testimony in the community must be that of an individual who is intrinsically good. He must have a good testimony, for what a slight on the character of God if a man, who is known by the outside world, as one whose business dealings are questionable.	1 Tim. 3:7
Blameless	It means no accusation can be brought against him, he is unaccused.	Titus 1:7
A lover of good men	The word translated "lover of good men" is only found here.	Titus 1:8
Holy	Having the characteristics of one set aside for God.	Titus 1:8
Temperate	Self control	Titus 1:8
Holding fast the faithful word	Committed to the truth of the Word of God and maintaining truth.	Titus 1:9

4) **Qualifications emphasizing what he must not be**

He must not be:	Meaning	Reference
Given to wine	Not drunk or disorderly	1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7
A striker	Quarrelsome or self willed; never becomes insolent	1 Tim. 3:3
Greedy of filthy lucre	Of monetary gain	1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7
A brawler	Not antagonistic, disinclined to disputing, but will not flinch from the truth.	1 Tim. 3:3
Covetous	Not a lover of money	1 Tim. 3:3
A novice	One who is young in the faith, or despite being saved a long time is immature for such a work	1 Tim. 3:6

The Church
Elders - The Pre-Qualifications and Qualifying - Part 5

He must not be:	Meaning	Reference
Self willed	Arrogant, self-pleasing, inconsiderate of others, an individual who has his mind set and will not be moved from it.	Titus 1:7
Soon angry	Prone to anger, one who flares up quickly	Titus 1:7
Domination	Neither as being lords over God's heritage	1 Pet. 5:3

5) Qualifications for his children

They must not be:	Meaning	Reference
Accused of riot	Riot: Free from any criminal activity, profligacy, wastefulness	Titus 1:6
Unruly	Unruly: insubordinate, will not submit to the rules, seemingly of the home. If an individual is subject to the rules of the home he will automatically be to the rules of the country.	Titus 1:6

Concluding Thoughts

The gospel preacher and the Bible teacher must have high standards, but far greater is the work of the elders. When God gives three passages of the scriptures to their qualifications, He is making it clear their work is of momentous importance. Reality is there is no one else who has a greater affect on the saints and church than the elders.

As we consider the qualifications, it is evident that very few, if any, could come up to this standard, which leads to several questions:

- a) In an ideal world with perfect believers, which of these would not apply to every saint? But we are not in an ideal world with perfect saints therefore, "Are we just to take what is available?" Does a man have to have all these qualifications? What if he is deficient in one, or perhaps two? Then which ones can we decide are less needful than the others? What if he has every one of them except he has a quick temper and gets into fierce arguments? What if he is the husband of one wife but is covetous of money, grasping for it by any means? What if he had them all but had a problem with drink? Would he be disqualified?
- b) God is dealing with the ideal elder. Because He is holy and holiness is perfection, we ought to strive to be as close to the scriptural ideal as possible. Had God said, "Come as close to these as you can", then we would have taken undue liberties.
- c) If all the men did fulfill these qualifications, what spiritual giants the overseers would be! Instead of crying, "we don't have these men today", then brother, let us look at the qualifications, and then ask God to help you to be the elder you can be.

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**