

# Qualifications for Eldership

1 Timothy 3:1-7

10:30 AM Halifax: 5 March 2023

## Introduction:

Last week, I suspended our sermon series in Hebrews to consider what the Bible says about the office of ruling elder.

- I did this because we are currently taking nominations for ruling elders.
  - As members of the congregation, it is your responsibility to choose men to serve among you.
    - You need to know what God says in His Word about what kind of men are qualified to take this office so that you can choose well.
  - Presently, you have been asked to submit nominations to the session.
    - Any nominees will be examined by the session, and if the session finds one or more men who are both willing and qualified to serve, we will present their names to you at our congregational meeting on March 26<sup>th</sup> for your approval.
    - If any of the nominees receive an approval of whatever percentage of the votes the session determines beforehand (last time we did this, it was 80%), we will make arrangements to ordain the man (or men).
- Last week, we began by comparing 1 Timothy 3 with Titus 1, noting that Titus was instructed about ordaining the first elders in new churches whereas Timothy was instructed about ordaining elders in an established church.
  - We saw that for Titus, there is no mention of deacons. This is because the office of elder included the office of deacon. Deacons can be added later, but elders are essential to the establishment of a properly constituted church.
  - We also saw how Timothy mentions that the elder must not be a novice lest he be swallowed up with pride, whereas Titus does not mention that because it was a mission church—they would all be novices.
    - This teaches us that we are not to apply the qualifications in a wooden way.
  - After noting another difference or two, we zeroed in on the fact that those who desire the office of elder desire a good work.
    - Not everyone has the ability to be an elder—obviously children, women, and those men who lack the necessary gifts—but we should all want to have the basic godliness that is called for.
    - A lot of more men among us ought to be serving by now but cannot because they have been slack about the pursuit of godliness.
      - Repentance is needed!
      - You need to go to the high priest that the Lord has provided for us, Jesus Christ and find forgiveness and strength to change your ways!

Today we are going to look at the list of qualifications in First Timothy 3.

- Some of the qualifications have to do with gifts and abilities. Not every man is able to develop those,
- But most of the qualifications have to do with the godliness which every man and woman ought to have and look to the Lord for grace to cultivate!

As last week, our scripture reading will be from 1 Timothy 3:1-7: Here is God's word.

**1 Tim 3:1-7: This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. <sup>2</sup> A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; <sup>3</sup> not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; <sup>4</sup> one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence <sup>5</sup> (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); <sup>6</sup> not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.**

May the Lord add His blessing.

- Before we begin to look at the qualifications, let me remind you of what I explained last week about this word bishop.
  - Today, the word bishop has a lot of baggage. When we use it, we often use it of an individual who exercises authority as an individual that belongs to a Presbytery.
  - The Bible does not use the word that way.
    - The Bible uses it of a body of men that serve in the local congregation. They do not serve alone, but their authority is exercised with at least two or three.
  - The word means *overseer*—technically, one who visits people to minister to their needs and who is to govern them with his fellow bishops in submission to Christ.
    - The term is used here to refer to the office of the elder.
    - Paul uses the terms elder and bishop entirely interchangeably.
      - We saw an example of this last time in Titus where Paul tells Titus to appoint elders in every city and then says, “**for a bishop must be blameless.**”
        - There is not one bishop of Crete or even in the cities of Crete—not an elder in every city, but elders in every city.
      - The church deviated from apostolic order when it began to elevate one man to exercise the authority of a whole Presbytery—or even to preside over an entire congregation. It is a violation of the revealed will of God.

**- Now let's go to today's subject: the qualifications for the office of elder or bishop.**

**I. The general qualification is that one who serves as a bishop must be blameless.**

- A. In the Bible, the Lord speaks of certain men who were blameless... men like Job, Noah, David, or Zacharias.
- They were said to be blameless because they walked sincerely in the covenant of grace.
  - a. Not only did this mean that they had respect for God's commandments, but it also meant that they looked to God's provision for the forgiveness of sin in Jesus Christ as He was presented to them.

- b. They were blameless because they were walking by faith in Jesus Christ, relying on Him for forgiveness and righteousness, and receiving grace and strength from His Spirit to live in consistent obedience to Him.
  - c. And when they did sin, they dealt with it and did not let it mature.
- B. The focus of the word *blameless* that is used in Timothy has to do with a man's reputation.
1. It is a blamelessness that other people can see—it has to do with a man's outward behaviour.
    - This is not to say that he ought not to be blameless before God.
    - Woe to that bishop who is a hypocrite and not even in Christ at all.
    - He will be appointed to his place with the devil on the day of judgment!
  2. But we cannot see a man's heart.
    - The word used here speaks of a man who is **above reproach**,
      - a man who **is not objectively chargeable**.
    - Like Stephen the martyr (or even Jesus Himself), he may have men charging him with all kinds of things falsely—Jesus was called a glutton and drunkard...
      - He may have many detractors and many enemies—
        - but none of the charges are legitimate!
        - No significant charge against him can stick because his reputation will not allow it.
          - Sure, faults can be found, but none that are serious or outstanding.
- C. Outward blamelessness with respect to a man's reputation is at the head of list—note that it is also at the end of the list, verse 7:
- **1 Tim 3:7: “Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”**
1. It is something that must be recognisable both by those within the church as well as those on the outside (if they are honest).
    - A man called to do the good work of a bishop must have this blamelessness.
    - If he is not at least outwardly walking in Christ, how can he help others to live in Christ?
  2. The devil is the accuser of Christians. He wants to find ways to discredit us.
    - He especially targets elders.
    - He is willing to twist the truth and slander us, but if he can find an outstanding fault in a Christian leader, his job is made easy.
      - He can a lot of mileage out of a man who is not blameless.
      - You can see his glee in the way his servants behave when a Christian leader falls.

- If those on the outside see an elder lying, cheating, being greedy or abusive, the devil will jump on that in a heartbeat.
- 3. All the other qualifications fit under this heading of blamelessness.
  - Blamelessness must be the summary of the man's life.

➤ Now let's look at the specifics.

## **II. The first specific qualification is that he is to be the husband of one wife.**

A. Literally translated, he is to be a "one woman man."

1. At creation, God instituted marriage with this rule:
  - **"A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."**
  - The man is to nourish and cherish his wife as his own flesh, which she has indeed become by God's declaration!
2. This is not simply a prohibition of going after other women,
  - it is also a calling to go after *his* woman!
  - He is commanded to nourish and cherish her.
  - He is to be devoted to her alone and to be ravished with her love.

B. This was certainly not what was commonly practised in the Greco-Roman culture when Paul wrote this...

- Demosthenes speaks of the prevailing attitude in his *Oration*:
  - "Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children."
- In our society, we have gone even lower than the Greeks in that we do not even care about legitimate children any more!
  - But a man who serves in the church of Jesus Christ must faithfully live in his Lord's institution of marriage!
- This becomes even more pressing for him since marriage for him is a picture of Christ and the church.
  - Not only is the Christian man to be devoted to his wife's physical needs, but he is also to take responsibility for her spiritual welfare.
- If he neglects the one woman he has been commanded to care for, why would it be thought that he would truly care for the church?
  - If he is not a faithful bishop to his bride, why should he be expected to be a faithful bishop to Christ's bride?

## **III. The next three items in the list are related—he is to be temperate, sober-minded, and of good behaviour.**

- These all speak of what we might call self-mastery.

- They speak of a man who is in control of himself rather than controlled by his passions.
  - Interestingly, all three of these words are often found in lists of virtues in the pagan writings of Paul's day.
  - As those created in God's image, Paul recognised that even the corrupt culture in which he lived was able to recognise virtue, and he intentionally borrows from their own writings in speaking of the qualifications of a bishop.
    - Remember, it is the outward behaviour that he is focusing on—behaviour that is to be regarded by outsiders as well as those in the church.
  - The Bible often speaks of having our behaviour honourable before unbelievers!
    - What a shame it is when we, as God's people, do not even measure up to our pagan's neighbour's standards when those standards are right!
    - What a greater shame it is when even elders come short of the world's standards!
      - The bishop should at least measure up to these!
- A. As a **temperate** man, he is to be free from every form of excess, passion, or rashness.
- His bodily passions and appetites do not control him, he controls them and uses them to the glory of God.
    - He is not controlled by food or drink. Instead, he receives them with thanksgiving to the glory of God.
    - He is to show others how to truly enjoy the good things of this life.
  - He does not *have* to watch the ball game when he has neglected his wife all week,
    - Nor does he *have* to buy a new car when his house needs new shingles.
    - Nor does he eat or drink compulsively.
- B. As a **sober-minded** man, he keeps his wit about him and does not forget what is really important—
- He is able to apply the word of God to his life with sound judgement.
  - He does not run off with the latest end-times theology—
  - Nor does he become captivated by some new slick multi-level marketing scheme that is going to solve everybody's financial problems.
  - He must not be one who gets worked up about whatever is going on in the world with pandemics or conspiracies, for he knows that God is in control.
- C. As a man of **good behaviour**, he has an orderly life.
- He does not have a mountain of unpaid bills or unfinished tasks.
  - When he is given a task, you can forget about it because he won't!
  - He is a responsible man—a man you can count on.

**IV. Next, we are told that he must be hospitable.**

- A. This word literally means, *a lover of strangers*—love in the practical sense of one who helps strangers by giving to them according to their needs.
- In Paul's day, this was important because of persecution.
    - All believers were to have their homes ready to welcome guests who were fleeing persecution.
    - The bishop was to be characterised by this behaviour that ought to be the behaviour of every believer.
      - When people come to church, he should do what everyone ought to do and reach out to that person—perhaps inviting them to his home or for coffee.
      - To use another illustration, you ought to be the one who welcomes the person that moves into your neighbourhood, or the one who helps that new guy at work to feel welcomed and learn his way around.
      - The bishop is to be an example of such hospitality.
- B. The basic idea here is that a man qualified to serve as a bishop is not so wrapped up in his own affairs that he has no concern for anyone else's.
- When he sees his neighbour's need, he cares and he acts to do whatever is in his power to minister to it.
    - We live in a day when people don't care. We are out to change that!
  - Not that he can't walk down the street without being late because he is stopping to meet every need he sees—
    - but rather that he orders his life to be a needs-meeter: he has an orientation to helping people and is ready to go out of his way to do so, even when it is for people he doesn't know.

**V. Next, we are told that he must be able to teach.**

- A. What is in view here is taking the word of God and helping others to apply it to their own lives.
- Each one of you must learn how to apply God's word in your own life and to your own situations...
    - If you have a family, you must learn to apply God's truth to your household so that Christ, His promises, and His calling are continually set forth in your house as Deut 6 speaks about.
  - Since an elder's primary task is in applying the word of God to the church in governing her and to the members of the church in giving oversight to them,
    - this must be a prominent ability in his own life.
    - Not everyone will have the same ability in this regard.
      - This is one of the qualifications that has to do with one's ability and gifts, and some men will never be capable of gaining that.
      - But those who are especially apt to teach are to use that ability to help others to apply the word in their lives.

- This will include refuting errors as well as implementing directives of the word, and it will include setting forth the glory and beauty of Christ to others to encourage their trust and adoration of Him.
    - One thing elders are always needing to do is direct people to Christ as their priest. People go seeking for human priests on earth when they don't know Christ as the only priest who can actually help them.
- B. It is very sad to say that this requirement of being apt to teach has sometimes not been sought after in the ordaining of elders...
- Last week, I spoke about the sad results of several generations of believers who were taught by men that were not fit to teach.
    - We saw how the survey of evangelicals that Ligonier did last year found that 65% of professing evangelicals believe that people are born innocent and that 56% said that God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.
  - Being able to teach is very important for the ongoing health of the church!
    - This is very important, especially for ministers or teaching elders, but also for ruling elders.
    - If they do not understand God's word and how to apply it, no matter how respectable they may be in society, they will not make good elders.
    - They have to recognise error in ministers and also lead the way in helping the congregation to find sound ministers.
- VI. The next qualifications are in verse 3. Here we see that an elder must be a man who takes leadership for the good of others... not to serve himself.**
- This is a problem that many people have in leadership. They really don't care about the people they are supposed to serve.
- A. We are told that a man who wants to be an elder must be gentle.
- If he is there for the good of others, he will be gentle, that is, he will be kind and gracious.
1. Too many pastors act as if they are there to fight with Christ's sheep rather than to lead them because their focus is on themselves.
    - They become cantankerous and demanding, always ready to pick a fight.
  2. No doubt, Paul had in mind such persons in 1 Tim. 6:3-5 when he wrote these words:
    - **1 Tim. 6:3-5: If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, <sup>4</sup> he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, <sup>5</sup> useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means of gain*. From such withdraw yourself.**

- Their goal is to win an argument and prove a point rather than lead in the truth for the good of the flock.
3. In contrast, the man who is there for others speaks words for edification—which come off with gentleness—loving concern.
- This does not mean that he never finds occasion to speak strongly—
  - Jesus Himself overturned the money-changers' tables and spoke sharp, biting words against the scribes and Pharisees—even sarcastic words.
  - But He dealt ever so gently with earnest souls who were struggling and stumbling along in their service to Him.
  - He did not adopt an abrasive, harsh manner in order to gain respect from His followers, but led with gentleness.
  - Do you know Him in this way?
    - If you do not, it will have an influence on your behaviour—it will make you perhaps indifferent or an angry or touchy person—or sullen and bitter.

B. Four characteristics are given that mark out a self-serving man.

1. A man given to wine is not a man who cares about others—his focus is not on helping, but on avoiding.
- A bishop is not to be drunk with wine, but filled with the Spirit.
  - The Spirit-filled life is life that worships God and serves others.
2. Likewise, a man who is covetous tries to use his authority for personal gain.
- The most extreme examples of this behaviour in a religious leader would be among the Hindu gurus who command their disciples to live in poverty while they drive fine cars, have many women, live in fancy houses, and have hundreds of servants.
  - There are a lot of politicians that call for extreme measures from the citizens, but consider themselves exempt. They want us to get rid of cars, but they fly around on private jets.
  - Unfortunately, there are some Christian leaders who are not much different—as we have seen the sad history of some of the televangelists.
  - There is no note of helpful gentleness in such men, but a lust for power and control.
    - Rather than loving Christ and His people, they love money and fame.
    - Such men ought not to be allowed to serve as elders in the church of Jesus Christ.
3. **Violent** speaks of a man who uses his fists to deal with his problems.
- It literally refers to a fist fighter.
  - He uses his fists rather than gentle, well-thought-out words that are aimed at edification.



4. **Quarrelsome** speaks of a man that does the same thing with his words that the other does with his fists—some may err in both.
  - Instead of solving problems, this man picks fights.
  - Parents, you have all fallen into to this I'm sure!
    - Your correction of your children shifts from a "I want to help my child" to "I want to get even with my child."
    - You begin to attack and berate rather than to patiently correct...
  - When this happens, you forget all about leading them to Christ.
    - You become quarrelsome rather than gentle and provoke your children to wrath.

TRANS> Such behaviour should not characterise a bishop.

- He is there to minister to Christ's sheep and he must always keep this in view.

**VII. Verse 4 and 5 bring up the very obvious point that a man's real testing ground is in his own family. He is to have faithful children.**

A. Because God has promised faithful children to obedient parents, this verse assumes that children who are not in submission are the way they are because their father does not know how to rule his own house.

- We would be more comfortable if this verse said:
  - "a man who rules his own house well, *doing all he can* to lead his children to Christ."
  - But look at it—
    - Is that what it says?
    - Is there any way to read it that way?
  - I don't think there is!
    - Like it or not, this verse says that he is not merely to try or to do all that **we** think he ought to do to have submissive children...
    - It says that he is to actually have his children in submission with all reverence, and that if he doesn't, it is because he doesn't know how to rule his own house!
    - His children are out of line because his leadership is deficient.

B. We live in days when nobody believes God's covenant promise to parents—nobody takes it seriously...

- And so we want to change the meaning of these plain words, and we have lots of willing accomplices when we do!
  - But these words cannot be twisted to mean something other than what they say.
- Even though we might be able to point to a thousand examples of very useful and able elders who have unruly families, it does not change what God says here!

- It may be that even though we *think* these men are useful that in fact they are causing harm to the church of Jesus Christ.
    - Instead of ministering to others first, they should take care of things at home first!
    - They are like the man who builds a beautiful house before he has laid the foundation.
  - It may be that the reason the church in the last 100 years has had such a terrible time passing the faith on to the next generation is because we have so many men leading us as elders who do not know how to pass their faith on to their *own* children.
    - They may be very adept at helping us find ways to feel good about our children by plugging them into all kinds of programmes—
    - And I suppose that has some benefit in that it makes us feel better—
    - But of course the truth is, we don't need to feel better if we aren't being responsible at home—we need to feel pressure from the Holy Spirit until we repent!
- C. In our times of weakness, we have to be careful not to be too rigid with this standard (or with any of the other standards).
- The sad state of the church is such that if we are, we will not have enough elders in our churches.
  - It would be folly to remove all the men who have a rebellious child or two, or to refuse to ordain them.
    - At the same time, we should look for men who accept their own responsibility for contributing to the rebellion in their children and who identify how they contributed to it and repent.
    - And we should use the requirement of faithful children as an evaluation so that other things being equal, we would lay hands on a man who has faithful children before we would a man with unfaithful children.
      - It is also true that if he has some children and most of them are faithful, he could then be said to have faithful children overall.
    - We want to strive to attain the standards set forth here as fully as we can, but neither do we want to close churches by setting the standards too high.
      - All of the qualifications call for judgments to be made.
      - None are to be woodenly applied.

TRANS> I already mentioned that this flexibility is brought out directly in the next requirement—namely, that the man is not to be a novice.

**VIII. Verse 6 tells us that the man who would be an elder must not be, literally, a newly planted tree.**

- It says, 1 Tim 3:6: “**not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.**”

A. I pointed out to you in the previous sermon that this requirement is not mentioned at all in Titus.

- The reason is that Titus was tasked with overseeing the establishment of the first elders in the congregations at Crete where the gospel had just been received.
- To require this at Crete would have meant that there could be no elders there because they were all newly planted trees—all new recipients of the good news that the Messiah has come. So it is a relative maturity that is in view.
- It was different at Ephesus, where Timothy was.
- The congregations had been established at Ephesus for quite a few years.
- It would have been folly to put new converts in office there when there were many believers that were more mature.
- As the warning declares, it would have put them in a place of temptation to pride.

B. Great care needs to be exercised to guard against occasions for pride.

- Pride is what brought the Devil down.
- But we should not be so careful that we would prevent a mission church from having any shepherds at all to care for her.
- Again, wisdom has to be exercised in applying all the requirements listed for officers.

### **Conclusion:**

We have already looked at verse 7 today.

- I pointed out that the list of requirements begins and ends with a call for the man to be blameless—someone who has a good reputation both within the congregation and outside the congregation.

So what do you need to take away from all this that we have seen about elders?

- You need to see that the office of elder is a good work...
  - And that should lead you to desire to see this work flourish in our church...
  - It should lead you to pray for God to raise up faithful elders here.
  - It should lead men in the church to strive to meet these qualifications.
  - Indeed, all of us should endeavour to meet these qualifications.
  - We belong to our Lord Jesus Christ, and He is at work in us to make us fruitful.

We should give thanks to the Lord when He does give us faithful elders to shepherd us...

- It is a mark of His grace and kindness toward us.
- If we are truly seeking the glory of the Lord, He will give us faithful elders.
- If we are not, if we are indifferent about the church and indifferent about our own walk and whether God is glorified through our lives or not,
  - He will give us elders according to our desires... and that may be no elders at all—as we see churches closing down all across Canada.

- God gives you what you ask for!
- The reason He gives bad leaders to His church is because the people stop seeking to behold Christ and His glory.
- Why should God continually set forth His Son to a people who don't want to see His Son but whose hearts are else where?
  - If you want to have sound elders, see that you are a lover of Jesus Christ.
  - God will be pleased to present Him to you gloriously through faithful representatives.