



Responsibilities & Qualifications of Church Leaders

Thus far, this series has presented leadership plans along with insights about church leaders.

- Part 1 gave an overview of various types of church leadership (congregational, presbyterian, elder board rule, senior pastor, house church, professional clergy, and plurality of elders).
- Part 2 noted the interchangeability of the terms *elder*, *overseer*, *bishop*, *shepherd*, *pastor* and demonstrated that these terms are scriptural names for the same group of church leaders.
- Part 3 indicated that the New Testament pattern of church leadership was a plurality of elders who jointly provided spiritual oversight in and for a church family.
- Part 4 reviewed singular leaders in the Bible as well as when and how the singular leader concept was introduced to the church.
- Part 5 focused on the most important aspect of church leadership, the fact that Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church.
- Part 6 reviewed a church leader's personal characteristics, all of which are the predictable results of faithful growth in Christ.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHURCH LEADERS

Part 6 highlighted common characteristics of believers growing in Christ. For example, all believers are spiritually gifted to minister in ways that build up the Body of Christ and bring glory to God. While ministering to and with others, some believers will shepherd (care for) other believers. In practical terms, some women will disciple other women, and some men will disciple other men and provide spiritual oversight for other families in addition to their own.

Biblical discipleship involves loving, teaching, admonishing, leading, restoring, encouraging, protecting, edifying, praying for, and serving others in the Body of Christ. All believers are to build up one another (Romans 14:19) and, in the process, demonstrate the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:23-24).

Romans 14:19, So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

Colossians 3:23-24, Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

A Christian who discipled other believers is actually exercising some leadership responsibilities yet may never be recognized publicly as an elder/pastor. For example, the following verses describe Christ-like growth and are applicable to every believer, whether new converts or church leaders.

Matthew 20:25-28, But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.²⁶ It is not this way 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."

Philippians 2:1-4, Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

1 Thessalonians 5:14-22, We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.¹⁵ See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.¹⁶ Rejoice always;¹⁷ pray without ceasing;¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit;²⁰ do not despise prophetic utterances.²¹ But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good;²² abstain from every form of evil.

God also graciously gifts each believer. This giftedness is for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:4-7) and is provided by God's sovereign design (Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-11).

1 Corinthians 12:4-7, Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. ⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Romans 12:3-8, For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. ⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷ if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Corinthians 12:8-11, For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

Because every believer's spiritually gifted ministry is vital to God's plan for His church to grow as it should (Ephesians 4:11-16), all believers, including elders, are to minister in accordance with their spiritual giftedness (1 Peter 4:10-11). Effective ministry is accomplished through spiritual giftedness and not because of a title, job description, or congregational expectations.

Ephesians 4:11-16, And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

1 Peter 4:10-11, As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹ Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

A believer who doesn't use his spiritual giftedness to serve others or who persistently tries to minister in areas in which he is not spiritually gifted is not following God's plan for the church (1 Corinthians 12:4-7 and Ephesians 4:16 printed above). Such a believer would not be qualified to serve as an elder. A prospective elder is to minister in accordance with his spiritual giftedness.

A prospective elder must also have a faithful and effective ministry of biblical teaching. This does not mean that he must preach sermons or teach weekly Bible lessons. His ability to teach accurately and understandably could be demonstrated in small group settings in which Scripture is studied or in biblical counseling situations.

Scripture does not indicate he will receive a different or greater spiritual gift when recognized publicly as an elder. Instead, an elder's gifted ministry, exercised in a cooperative fashion with others in the church, is essentially the same throughout his lifetime. If an elder's specific ministry does change after being recognized publicly as an elder, it is only because God has granted corresponding spiritual giftedness for increasing service to others.

Beyond fulfilling responsibilities common to every believer, a church's recognized elders (pastors) have additional oversight responsibilities as the following passages indicate. Notice that the elders did not stand *over* the flock nor *apart* from them but, instead, ministered *among* fellow believers.

Acts 20:28—32 (*the Apostle Paul to the elders at Ephesus*), Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (*explanation added*)

Hebrews 13:17, Obey your leaders, and submit *to them*; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

[For an explanation of what the above verse says about responsibilities of leaders and followers, see **Biblical Insights that are “Out of Sight” (Part 3)** at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Insights%20Out%20of%20Sight--Part%203.pdf>]

1 Peter 5:1-3 (*the Apostle Peter to fellow elders*), Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

An elder’s shepherding/oversight responsibilities in a church family consists primarily of teaching, caring for, leading, guarding, and equipping fellow believers. Elders are to do this voluntarily and eagerly, not for monetary gain nor to achieve positional authority over followers of Christ.

In addition to providing oversight, ministering according to personal giftedness, and exemplifying Christ-likeness in every aspect of life and relationships, elders in the first century also ordained other elders (1 Timothy 4:14), helped to determine biblical policy between churches (Acts 15:22), and prayed for the sick (James 5:14-15). The spectrum of elder responsibilities demonstrates that elders are integral to the life and ministry of a church in any age.

1 Timothy 4:14, Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery (*elders*). (*explanation added*)

Acts 15:22, Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.

James 5:14-15, Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

Elders then and now have different strengths and varied spiritual gifts for overseeing the church. In **What About Peter and James?** at <http://exploringthefaith.com/2011/03/03/peter-and-james/> Curt Parton observes:

Some will be gifted teachers, and their teaching should be appreciated and respected. Others will be better leaders than teachers. Some will thrive in a very public leadership role; others will prefer more behind-the-scenes administration. Still others will be better at pastoring as counselors or in informal discipling. But they still all lead and pastor the church as a group.

There is nothing about leadership by elders that would preclude God from using one of the elders in a very public, prominent ministry. But this doesn’t mean that this elder is now *the* pastor of the church (or the senior pastor). It simply means that his ministry is more public and well-known than his fellow pastors.

To review the practical aspects of biblical eldership, you are encouraged to view the 12 minute video “What is Biblical Eldership” [<http://biblicaleldership.com/what-biblical-eldership>]. The speaker is Alexander Strauch, author of *Biblical Eldership*, the definitive book on the subject.

QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS

Elders have common oversight responsibilities yet varied giftedness and ministries as they serve the body with all humility. What qualifications must mature male believers meet to be recognized as elders in the local church?

Although the world typically selects leaders based on skills, talents, giftedness, etc., the biblical qualifications for leadership are rooted in spiritual maturity and godly character. Before reviewing specific elder qualifications, notice three observations by Steven Cole in “What Does an Elder Look Like?” (<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-9-what-does-elder-look-1-timothy-32-7>).

First, most of these qualities are prescribed elsewhere in the Bible for every Christian, including women. So we all should be seeking to grow in these areas.

Second, spiritual maturity takes time, effort, and discipline. There are no shortcuts. We live in a day when we're used to instant everything. But there is no such thing as instant godliness. The crucial question is: Are you involved in the process?

Third, no one is perfectly qualified to be a church leader. These qualities, for the most part, are not the kind of thing where you can say, "I've arrived!" There is always going to be room for growth. If you require perfection, no one would qualify as an elder. But at the same time, an elder should not be in glaring violation of any qualification. If he is weak in any area, he should be aware of it and should be working on that area.

As Paul says with regard to the ministry, "Who is adequate for these things?" (2 Corinthians 2:16). Then he adds, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of the new covenant, ..." (2 Corinthians 3:5-6). Every elder ought to have a sense of inadequacy in himself when he considers the office of overseer, but also a sense that God has called him to this fine work (1 Timothy 3:1).

Elder qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 (*the Apostle Paul speaking to Timothy*) and Titus 1:5-9 (*the Apostle Paul speaking to Titus*).

[The following is from the New American Standard Version of the Bible.]

1 Timothy 3:1-7, It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. ² An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. ⁴ He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity ⁵ (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), ⁶ and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. ⁷ And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (*underlining added*)

Titus 1:5-9, For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, ⁶ namely, if any man is 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, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. (*underlining added*)

As 1 Timothy 3:1 indicates, an oversight ministry is a desired *work* (a labor of service) and is welcomed, even sought, by some spiritually qualified men. Although numerous Bible versions add that this ministry is an *office*, the original Greek simply says, "if anyone aspires to oversight." Adding the word "office" implies that eldership is a positional authority, a concept that is alien and contrary to New Testament teaching. Eldership is not primarily a position but, rather, a function (work, labor, service). Having an elder/overseer ministry does not promote any Christian man into an ecclesiastical office or provide inherent authority over individual believers or an entire church family [See *Church Leadership—Part 5* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Jesus%20Christ%20is%20Head%20of%20His%20Church.pdf>]

ABOVE REPROACH

The first elder/overseer qualification Paul mentions—to both Timothy and Titus—is the general but far-reaching qualification that an elder is to be **above reproach** (KJV—blameless). The original Greek uses two different words to convey a similar truth in English. In 1 Timothy, the word (*anepilémptos*, Strongs G423) literally means "not laid hold of" (i.e., an accuser will not prevail). In Titus, the word (*anekklétos*, Strongs G410) literally means "not called to account" (i.e., no grounds for charges exist).

To be above reproach, an elder/overseer must have an exemplary life before others, both inside and outside the church. Nothing in his life would bring a reproach to Christ. This does not mean that a divorced man, a former convict, someone previously involved in questionable business practices, or a man formerly known for his sinful lifestyle are all automatically disqualified from serving as an elder. On the other hand, past sinfulness can sometime produce consequences that make it improbable, even impossible, for a man who is now fully committed to Christ to be publicly recognized as an elder/overseer.

This qualification of being *above reproach* is the primary qualification that determines whether a man is ready for further consideration as a potential elder. The remaining elder qualifications fall into five categories: moral character, family life, interactions with others, wealth perspective, and teaching ability.

Believers know that a disciple's Christ-likeness does not suddenly appear. Christian maturity is a lifetime work in progress. Elder qualifications will eventually become evident in a scripturally obedient man who demonstrates wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ in life, ministries, and relationships.

[In the following explanations, KJV refers to the King James Version of the Bible, and NIV refers to the New International Version of the Bible]

MORAL CHARACTER

Temperate [1 Timothy 3:2]—calm, dispassionate, circumspect (KJV: vigilant). A temperate man is careful, steady, and moderate. He is not in bondage to his desires and is not given to excess in any area of life.

Prudent/Sensible [1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8]—serious, sober-minded, earnest, modest, sensible, self-controlled (KJV: sober). This characteristic emphasizes sensibility and being of sound mind or balanced in judgment that guards one from making hasty decisions.

Respectable [1 Timothy 3:2]—orderly or having a well-ordered life (KJV: of good behavior). An elder demonstrates Christ-like behavior and speech that honors His Lord and Savior.

Good reputation outside the church [1 Timothy 3:7]—Being above reproach, an elder is not characterized as being hypocritical and, thus, his life adds credibility to the reality and power of the Gospel.

Not self-willed [Titus 1:7]—not arrogant or self-pleasing (NIV: not overbearing). A biblically qualified elder is not stubborn and is more interested in serving others than pleasing himself.

Loving what is good [Titus 1:8]—a lover of goodness who desires God's will to be done in every situation and relationship

Just [Titus 1:8]—observant of that which is right, especially regarding duty to God and man including giving others their due, being fair and impartial (NIV—upright)

Devout [Titus 1:8]—that quality of holiness that gives equal regard to grace and truth and describes a man in right relation to God, separated from a sinful lifestyle (KJV & NIV—holy)

Self-controlled [Titus 1:8]—having power over or master of one's self with corresponding mastery over sinful desires (KJV—temperate; NIV—disciplined)

Not addicted to wine [1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7]—Not one who lingers long at wine. Not a slave to alcohol or, by implication, drugs or any intoxicating element. (KJV—not given to wine, NIV—not given to drunkenness)

FAMILY LIFE

Husband of one wife [1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6]—literally, a one woman man. For a married man, this requires that an elder be a loyal husband living in a pure marriage relationship without adulterous behaviors or attitudes.

This qualification does not automatically prohibit a single man from elder ministry. The Apostle Paul described himself as a single man (1 Corinthians 7:8) and, certainly, he met all qualifications for servant leadership in the Body of Christ. In addition, Paul also encouraged believers to remain unmarried in order to be singularly devoted to the Lord and associated ministry (1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

1 Corinthians 7:8, But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I.

1 Corinthians 7:32-35, But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; ³³but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, ³⁴and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. ³⁵This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

On the other hand, the somewhat ambiguous qualification of a “one woman man” has different interpretations related to a married man. In the article *Biblical Eldership, Part 1a* (<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/seminars/biblical-eldership-part-1a>), John Piper states:

The word order emphasizes the word ‘one’ so it is not likely that Paul meant to say that the elders have to be married. There are other words for ‘married’ he could have used. He probably would have put ‘husband’ in the prominent place if that were his intention. In 1 Timothy 3:4, Paul gets to the issue of how well a man manages his household. So the point

here probably is not the man's competence as a husband. The point, coming right after irreproachable, is probably one of notoriety. What is this man's reputation with regard to whether he has had one wife or not? It appears that the public standard will be high.

Piper concludes that elders are to be either married (to one and only wife) or single (never married) and, if divorced, never remarried.

The [gotQuestions?org](http://www.gotquestions.org) website (<http://www.gotquestions.org/husband-one-wife.html>) presents a different understanding:

There are at least three possible interpretations of the phrase "husband of one wife." (1) It could simply be saying that a polygamist is not qualified to be an elder, a deacon or a pastor. This is the most literal interpretation of the phrase, but seems somewhat unlikely considering that polygamy was quite rare in the time that Paul was writing. (2) The phrase could also be translated "one-woman man." This would indicate that a bishop must be absolutely loyal to the woman he is married to. This interpretation focuses more on moral purity than marital status. (3) The phrase could also be understood to declare that in order to be an elder/deacon/pastor, a man can only have been married once, other than in the case of a remarried widower.

Interpretations (2) and (3) are the most prevalent today. Interpretation (2) seems to be the strongest, primarily because Scripture seems to allow for divorce in exceptional circumstances (Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:12-16). It would also be important to differentiate between a man who was divorced and remarried before he became a Christian from a man who was divorced and remarried after becoming a Christian. An otherwise qualified man should not be excluded from church leadership because of actions he took prior to coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. Although a "one woman man" description does not necessarily exclude a divorced or remarried man from serving as an elder/deacon/pastor, there are other issues to consider.

The first qualification of an elder/deacon/pastor is to be "above reproach" (1 Timothy 3:2). If the divorce and/or remarriage results in a poor testimony for the man in the church or community, it may be the "above reproach" qualification that excludes him rather than the "husband of one wife" requirement. An elder/deacon/pastor is to be a man that the church and community can look up to as an example of Christ-likeness and godly leadership. If his divorce and/or remarriage situation detracts from this purpose, perhaps he should not serve in the position of elder/deacon/pastor.

It is important to remember, though, that just because a man is disqualified from serving as an elder/deacon/pastor, he is still a valuable member of the body of Christ. Every Christian possesses spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-7) and is called to participate in edifying other believers with those gifts. A man who is disqualified from the position of elder/deacon/pastor can still teach, preach, serve, pray, worship, and play an important role in the church.

The **Grace to You** website (<http://www.gty.org/resources/questions/QA517>) agrees with the above paragraph but also states:

It would seem to be an extremely rare occurrence for a man who has had a divorce, whether biblically allowed or not, to fulfill the role of elder in the local church. *Regardless of the specifics of any one situation, the general principle is this: Does he enjoy the complete and full affirmation of the leaders and people of his own congregation, and is he presently living out the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1? If a particular local church scrutinizes his life and ministry and sees nothing in his present character or past conduct that brings a reproach, he may, in God's good providence, serve as an elder in that place.*

Grace to You concludes by quoting Alexander Strauch in his book [Biblical Eldership](#):

What does 1 Timothy say about sexual and marital sins committed before a person's conversion to Christ? What about people who have legally divorced and remarried (assuming the local church allows for such)? What about the forgiveness and restoration of a fallen spiritual leader? These and many other painful and controversial questions are not answered directly here (referring to 1 Timothy 3). They must be answered from the whole of Scripture's teaching on divorce and remarriage, forgiveness, grace, and restoration, as well as its teaching on leadership example and the full spectrum of elder qualifications.

All deviations from God's standard of marital behavior confuse and perplex us. Sin always confuses, distorts, and divides, so there will always be diverse opinions on questions such as these. This in no way, however, diminishes the local church's obligation to face these issues and make wise, scripturally sound decisions. In all these heartbreaking situations, the honor of Jesus' name, faithfulness to His Word, and prayer are the supreme guides (Alexander Strauch, [Biblical Eldership](#), pages 192-93).

Manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity [1 Timothy 3:4]—An elder leads a well-ordered household with teachable children (KJV—one that ruleth well in his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity, NIV—He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.) 1 Timothy 3:5 goes on to say, “But if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?”

Having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion [Titus 1:6]—This man’s children are believers and cannot be accused of a dissolute life or of not being subject to control. (KJV—having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly, NIV—a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient).

INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS

Hospitable [1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8]—enjoys sharing time and goods with others (which includes strangers as well as close friends and newcomers) and realizes that his time, home, and material blessings are not meant only for himself

Not pugnacious [1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7]—not a striker, indicating he doesn’t have a quick temper. He doesn’t lash out nor “fly off the handle.” (KJV—no striker, NIV—not violent)

Gentle [1 Timothy 3:3]—does not make a stand for his own view. He is thoughtful, considerate, and conciliatory. He is satisfied with less than his due and exercises tenderness in dealing with others (KJV—patient)

Peaceable [1 Timothy 3:3]—is not given to quarreling and, thus, is not a fighter. He is not contentious (KJV—not a brawler, NIV—not quarrelsome)

Not quick tempered [Titus 1:7]—not prone to anger and not characterized by outbursts of wrath. (KJV—not soon angry)

WEALTH PERSPECTIVE

Free from the love of money [1 Timothy 3:3]—an elder’s life is not characterized by a desire to accumulate wealth for wealth’s sake (amassing material things), even when such a result could be accomplished honestly. (KJV—not covetous, NIV—not a lover of money)

Not fond of sordid gain [Titus 1:7]—not greedy but, instead, having personal and business dealings that are characterized by honesty and fairness even if it means losing money. (KJV—not given to filthy lucre, NIV—not pursuing dishonest gain)

TEACHING ABILITY

Able to teach, able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict [1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:9]—this requires a stable faith and marked obedience to the Word of God. He does not teach one thing and live another. This trait requires knowledge of doctrine and ability to use it to exhort, admonish, instruct, and encourage others with God’s Word. This trait also includes the responsibility of opposing false teaching.

Not a new convert [1 Timothy 3:6]—not “newly planted” (KJV—not a novice) In order to teach the Word of God to others in the dimension described above, a prospective elder should have studied and personally applied Scripture in a consistent, faithful manner to his own life. Scripture warns that a new convert may “become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6). Thus, an elder must be a mature believer, being a Christian long enough to demonstrate the reality of his faith and the depth of his walk with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hold fast the faithful word that corresponds to biblical teaching [Titus 1:9]—an elder must be stable in his faith, not hypocritical (teaching one way and living another), and should be obedient to God’s Word in all respects.

See: ***Qualifications for the Evaluation of Elders and Deacons*** by J. Hampton Keathley III at <https://bible.org/article/qualifications-evaluation-elders-and-deacons>

What Does an Elder Look Like (1 Timothy 3:2-7) by Steven J. Cole at <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-9-what-does-elder-look-1-timothy-3-2-7>

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The qualifications listed above are vital to fulfilling responsibilities associated with overseeing a congregation’s growth in Christ, ministering with a team of co-laborers, and, most importantly, leading as servants who follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 20:25-28, But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It is not this way 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.”

Note the following insight by Alexander Strauch, author of *Biblical Eldership* and an elder for more than 40 years at Littleton Bible Church (near Denver, CO). *The following is excerpted from <http://biblicaleldership.com/servant-leadership>*

New Testament, Christ-like elders are to be servant leaders, not rulers or dictators. God doesn't want His people to be used by petty, self-serving tyrants. Elders are to choose a life of service on behalf of others. Like the servant Christ, they are to sacrifice their time and energy for the good of others. Only elders who are loving, humble servants can genuinely manifest the incomparable life of Jesus Christ to their congregations and a watching world.

Strauch emphasizes the necessity for elders to labor as servants with fellow elders and, thus, maintain Christ-honoring relationships with one another.

In addition to shepherding others with a servant spirit, the elders must humbly and lovingly relate to one another. They must be able to patiently build consensus, compromise, persuade, listen, handle disagreement, forgive, receive rebuke and correction, confess sin, and appreciate the wisdom and perspective of others—even those with whom they disagree. They must be able to submit to one another, speak kindly and gently to one another, be patient with their fellow colleagues, defer to one another, and speak their minds openly in truth and love. Stronger and more gifted elders must not use their giftedness, as talented people sometimes do, to force their own way by threatening to leave the church and take their followers with them. Such selfishness creates ugly, carnal power struggles that endanger the unity and peace of the entire congregation . . . As shepherds of the church, elders have been given the authority to lead and protect the local church (Acts 20:28-31). The key issue is the attitude in which elders exercise authority.

Acts 20:28-31 (*Paul to the Ephesian elders*), Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. (*explanation added*)

It is possible for those in leadership to become self-serving and autocratic when they neglect to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture warns elders against such abusive, lordly leadership.

1 Peter 5:3, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock

The same passage admonishes all believers to clothe themselves in humility:

1 Peter 5:5, You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

The original verb for “clothe” in the above verse is ἐγκομβόομαι, transliterated as egkomboomai and pronounced eng-kom-bo'-om-ahce (Strong's G1463). It means “fasten” or “gird.” Thayer's Greek Lexicon (<http://biblehub.com/greek/1463.htm>) states that it is related to the word for “the white scarf or apron of slaves, which was fastened to the girdle of the vest . . . and distinguished slaves from freemen.”

Thus, all believers—young men and elders—are responsible to put on humility as their work-clothes, and in doing so, demonstrate their subjection to one another in love. Strauch elaborates:

Following the biblical model, elders must not wield the authority given to them in a heavy-handed way. They must not use manipulative tactics, play power games, or be arrogant and aloof. They must never think that they are unanswerable to their fellow brethren or to God. Elders must not be authoritarian, which is incompatible with humble servanthood. When we consider Paul's example and that of our Lord's, we must agree that biblical elders do not dictate; they direct. True elders do not command the consciences of their brethren but appeal to their brethren to faithfully follow God's Word. Out of love, true elders suffer and bear the brunt of difficult people and problems so that the lambs are not bruised.

The elders bear the misunderstandings and sins of other people so that the assembly may live in peace. They lose sleep so that others may rest. They make great personal sacrifices of time and energy for the welfare of others. They see themselves as men under authority. They depend on God for wisdom and help, not on their own power and cleverness. They face the false teachers' fierce attacks. They guard the community's liberty and freedom in Christ so that the saints are encouraged to develop their gifts, to mature, and to serve one another.

Strauch concludes:

In summary, using Paul's great love chapter, we can say that a servant elder "is patient ... kind ... not jealous; ... [a servant elder] does not brag ... [a servant elder] is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly ... does not seek [his] own ... [a servant elder] is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth ... [a servant elder] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS TO DETERMINE AND PUBLICLY RECOGNIZE AN ELDER

Assuming that a mature Christian man meets an elder's scriptural qualifications, is it automatic for him to become a recognized elder in the church? The simple answer is "no" because there may be time, health, employment, or family obligations that prevent him from completing an elder's ministry responsibilities.

On the other hand, assuming that there are no personal obstacles that limit a spiritually mature man's involvement in an elder ministry, what is necessary for a man to be recognized as an elder? Not surprisingly, the process begins with God.

1. Acts 20:28 states that the Holy Spirit chooses those who are elders in a church: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." (*underlining added*)

God, through the Holy Spirit, superintends the actual development and eventual recognition of scripturally qualified elders. Acknowledging this divine sovereignty, followers of Christ should faithfully pray for guidance with regard to the selection process and eventual public recognition of elders in their church family.

1. Responding to the Holy Spirit's equipping and leading, a prospective elder will desire on-going responsibilities and ministries associated with an elder ministry.

As 1 Timothy 3:1 states, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*." The word for "desire" in the original (ἐπιθυμέω, epithyméō, Strong's G1937) means to "greatly desire to do or have something" or "to set one's heart on" something. Similarly, the word for "aspire" in the original (ὀρέγω, oregó, Strong's G3713) literally means to "stretch one's self out toward something in order to grasp it." In both cases, the words indicate that the desire to serve is not merely a passing wish, but rather, a settled commitment that leads to sacrificial action.

1. The potential elder is presented to the congregation to recognize and affirm the call to elder ministry. The biblical standards for scripturally qualified elders should impact a church's method for choosing elders. Many churches establish a leadership nominating committee. This committee usually tries to discover who is willing to accept a leadership role (pastor/elder) and typically focuses on the skills, gifts, and talents needed to fill a specific role. The committee, however, may not examine the biblical qualifications that a prospective elder must meet.

Biblically speaking, an elder examination committee composed of elders already in ministry should replace any other type of nominating committee. Current elders should know other men in the church who demonstrate spiritual maturity and are already serving others. These fellow servants can be approached about potential eldership and associated biblical qualifications. In addition, a prospective elder could inform current elders of his desire to join them as a fellow elder. This would not prevent other believers from suggesting potential elder nominees to the examination committee, but the primary decision-makers with regard to new elders should be the elders who are already functioning in that role.

In **Answering the Key Questions about Elders** (<http://www.gty.org/resources/positions/P11>), John MacArthur states:

Patterns of church leadership developed as the first-century church matured. We can trace three steps in the process of ordaining leaders. Initially, it was the apostles who selected and ordained elders (Acts 14:23). After that, elders were appointed by those who were close to the apostles and involved in their ministry. For example, Paul specifically charged Titus with the ordaining of elders (Titus 1:5). In the third phase, the elders themselves ordained other elders (1 Timothy 4:14). Always the ultimate responsibility for appointing elders was a part of the function of church leadership.

Acts 14:23, When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Titus 1:5, For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

1 Timothy 4:14, Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.

Scripture does not give step-by-step details for officially recognizing (ordaining) elders/pastors in a church. There seems to be some latitude for an entire church family to have some level of involvement in the elder recognition process. This potential involvement, however, must honor Christ and conform to biblical principles and not simply be an adaptation to cultural norms.

*A resource concerning elders, their ministries, and their selection process can be seen at: **The Biblical Elder** by Keith Delong at <http://solochristo.com/theology/Church/biblicalelder.htm>*

CONCLUSION

Even though the Bible has far more information about elders than about water baptism and the Lord's Supper, this scriptural plan of church leadership has largely been overlooked throughout church history. In its place and lacking biblical support, a clergy dominated hierarchical leadership structure has been the norm for over 17 centuries. In recent decades, however, many churches have realized that an elder servant leadership plan was the norm in the first century church and should be the norm today.

On the other hand, many churches have also discovered that changing a 1,700 year old pattern of church leadership is difficult and often misunderstood. Part 8 of this Church Leadership series will address some of the practical challenges and anticipated responses that are associated with changing from a hierarchical leadership model to a servant elder ministry.

Other References related to elder ministry in the local church—

A Biblical Philosophy of Ministry by J. Hampton Keathley III at <http://bible.org/article/biblical-philosophy-ministry>

Answering the Key Questions about Elders by John MacArther at <http://www.gty.org/resources/positions/p11/answering-the-key-questions-about-elders#top>

So What Exactly do Elders do? by Curt Parton at <http://exploringthefaith.com/2011/04/30/what-elders-do/>

A website dedicated solely to the subject of a plurality of elders in the local church—

Biblical Eldership at <http://biblicaleldership.org/>