

# ELDERS



*"Until Christ is All and in All"*

## WHAT IS AN ELDER?

The elder is a biblically qualified man, entrusted by Christ to lead, teach, care for, and protect the members of a local church. The Bible refers interchangeably to the office of elder as “pastor”, “shepherd”, and “overseer.”

## WHAT ARE THE BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ELDER?

The qualifications of an elder are found in 1Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. Elders are to be men of exemplary character and adequate gifting. Many of the qualifications detailed for elders are commanded of all Christian men, implying the primacy of the elder as an example. An elder:

- **Aspires to the office** (1Timothy 3:1a) — The word aspire means to “strive to attain”, “desire”. He must want to serve as an elder. 1Peter 5:2-4 says elders should not serve under compulsion, but willingly, eagerly.
- **Is above reproach** (1Timothy 3:1a; Titus 1:6a, 7a) — An elder is to live his life in such a way that gives no one reason to criticize him. He has no obvious flaws that make his life open to the charge of hypocrisy, bringing shame to the gospel. He is not without sin, but gives no one reason to criticize his sincere devotion to Christ.
- **Is a one-woman man** (1Timothy 3:2b; Titus 1:6b) — This does not mean a pastor must be married, but it does mean those who *are* married, ought to be faithful husbands. All sexual and intimate

emotional desires for the opposite sex are reserved for his wife exclusively.

- **Is sober-minded** (1Timothy 3:2c) — Sober-minded means temperate, clear-headed, and circumspect. He thinks clearly and soberly about things.
- **Is self-controlled** (1Timothy 3:2d; Titus 1:8c) — He is moderate, prudent. He must be disciplined, in control of his emotions, his thoughts, and his actions. He should not be quick tempered.
- **Is respectable** (1Timothy 3:2e) — An elder lives a respectable life. He is to be a reputable man. He must be modest, proper, and orderly. He engenders the respect of those who know him.
- **Is hospitable** (1Timothy 3:2f; Titus 1:8a) — In his life, there is a general openness to other people, whether demonstrated by shared meals, giving of his time, or simply being consistent in building relationships with others.
- **Is able to teach** (1Timothy 3:2g; Titus 1:9b) — He has a good handle on the word of God, of Christian doctrine, and possesses some ability to teach it to others.
- **Is not a drunkard** (1Timothy 3:3a; Titus 1:7d) — Being self-controlled and sober-minded, an elder maintains a clear state of mind at all times. He should not be mastered by alcohol, drugs, or any other substance. Nor should he be addicted to activities such as gambling, pornography, or gaming.

- **Is not violent** (1Timothy 3:3b; Titus 1:7e) — Elders do not bully. They do not intimidate with violence or coerce with the threat of harm.
- **Is gentle** (1Timothy 3:3c) — An elder is considerate, yielding, equitable, seemly, and moderate.
- **Is not quarrelsome** (1Timothy 3:3d) — He is peaceable. He is not contentious. He does not look for a fight.
- **Is not a lover of money** (1Timothy 3:3e; Titus 1:7f) — A pastor is free from the love of money. He is not covetous. He is not motivated by monetary gain.
- **Manages his household well** (1Timothy 3:4a; Titus 1:6c) — An elder presides over the affairs of his household well, “**with all dignity keeping his children submissive**”. He takes management of his home seriously. This does not mean his home is perfect, but he is an example to God’s church of the way a man leads in the home. As other men in the church endeavor to serve their family well, they can use him as an example. Paul tells us why, “**for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?**” (1Tim 3:5)
- **Is not a recent convert** (1Timothy 3:6a) — While there is no age qualifications for a pastor, he must not be a new Christian, “**or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.**”
- **Must be well thought of by outsiders** (1Timothy 3:7a) — Elders must have a good reputation among non-believers. This is so “**that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.**”
- **Is not arrogant** (Titus 1:7b) — Pastors are not overbearing or stubborn. He does not insist on his own way. He is always considerate of others.
- **Is not quick tempered** (Titus 1:7c) — Like his God, an elder is slow to anger. He cannot be hothead.
- **Is a lover of good** (Titus 1:8b) — An elder loves the good *of* others, good done *to* others, and doing good *for* others.
- **Is upright** (Titus 1:8d) — He is just, righteous. He must live a morally upright life.
- **Is holy** (Titus 1:8e) — An overseer is devout, pious. He is separated unto God, devoted to God and His word. He models Christ to the people he serves.
- **Is disciplined** (Titus 1:8f) — Pastors are self-controlled, self-ordered men. A pastor is not lazy or idle. He is disciplined in all his spending. He stewards his time and money well.
- **Must hold firm to the word, being able to rebuke those who contradict it** (Titus 1:9) — As an overseer of God’s church, an elder must know the word well enough that he can spot error and confront it. A pastor must be able to “**reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching.**” (2Tim 4:2)

## WHAT DOES AN ELDER DO?

Elders have four broad responsibilities in the local church. They (1) teach the Bible; (2) oversee the church; (3) care for the people; and (4) protect the congregation from spiritual danger.

First, elders teach God's word to God's people (Eph. 4:11). They build the church under their care by **"preaching and teaching"** (1 Tim. 5:17). The Lord told the Apostle Peter to **"feed My sheep"** (John 21:15). Pastors equip God's people for the work of ministry by teaching the Scriptures at worship gatherings, training classes, and through private, one-on-one discipling and exhortation.

Second, elders oversee the flock entrusted to them (1 Peter 5:2). Elders manage God's church (1 Tim. 3:4-5), leading, guiding, and governing according to the revelation of Scripture and Christian prudence. This they do for the good of the members of the church and the glory of God.

Elder oversight is related to the spiritual equipping of the people. There are times when overseers must weigh-in on other matters, but most of their time ought to be devoted **"to prayer and to the ministry of the word."** (Acts 6:4) The physical needs of the church fall under the care of the deacons. (For more information on deacons, see our paper entitled "Deacons").

Thirdly, pastors are to care sincerely for the people entrusted to them by God (Acts 20:28). A shepherd must be genuinely concerned for the welfare of every member of his respective church, not seeking his own

interests, but those of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:19-21).

Like Christ, he nourishes, cherishes, and cares for the people of God (Eph. 5:25-30).

Fourth, elders protect the flock, looking out for "wolves" that can come from inside or from outside the church (Acts 20:28-30). Elders are to remain alert, paying close attention to the congregation. When they discern potential sources of spiritual danger, they remove it from the church.

Elders are a gift of the Lord Jesus Christ to His church (Eph. 4:11). They are regular, godly men who've accepted the responsibility to see Christ formed in His people. They are men of exemplary character and wisdom who joyfully serve God's people for their increased delight in Christ and eternal good. God's people are told to **"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."** (Heb. 13:17)