

# PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light to my path"  
Psalm 119:104*

October 21, 2018

## Qualifications of Elders (3)

by Frank Himmel

Though the Bible says more about an elder's character than any other aspect of his life, a man must possess more than good character to be qualified. We now expand our study by examining the qualifications in the areas of reputation, experience, and ability.

### Reputation

"And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church..." (1 Timothy 3:7). All of us ought to be concerned about what others think of us. We are an influence for something, either good or bad. Elders, as those who go before the flock, who will be known as leaders of the church, must especially have good reputations. The reason is obvious: "so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." Not only will a misbehaving elder fall into reproach, the entire congregation will as well. The world judges us by what they see in our members, especially our leaders.



Of course, it is possible for someone to unjustly hold in contempt a candidate for the eldership. Some take a dim view of anyone who would serve Christ! Such critics' views are not under consideration here. Generally speaking, if one's character (what he is) is as it should be, his reputation (what others think he is) will follow suit.

### Experience

The elder must not be a novice (1 Timothy 3:6). The English word *neophyte*, a newly planted one, a beginner, comes from the word Paul used here. It does not refer to age per se but to time spent in serving the Lord.

A number of reasons might be offered in support of this qualification. The Holy Spirit offers one: "not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil." When men are given too much authority too quickly, it often goes to their heads. Pride and conceit have no place in the eldership. Elders are servants, not lords over the flock (1 Peter 5:3).

How much time must elapse before one is no longer a new convert? It depends. Spiritual maturity is what is needed. Some have been in the church ten or twenty years, yet they know little more than some novices. People progress at different rates. Their own abilities, their personal efforts at growth, the teaching they are exposed to, opportunities they are given for training, and other such factors determine the amount of time necessary. Common sense is needed here.

## Ability

1. *Able to teach* (1 Timothy 3:2). One of the elders' primary tasks is to feed the flock. They are "pastors [shepherds] and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). Since theirs is a teaching function, it stands to reason that one of the qualifications is able to teach.

The Greek verb means "apt and skilled in teaching" (Thayer). It is the same requirement later stated for preachers (2 Timothy 4:24). That does not necessarily mean every elder must be a polished public speaker, yet each one must be capable of instructing the sheep. 1 Timothy 5:17 implies that some elders may spend more time preaching and teaching than others.

Regarding an elder's level of knowledge and teaching skill, a man might be capable of teaching one congregation but not another with a different knowledge or educational level. Each congregation is the best judge of an man's capability to effectively teach that group.

2. *Holding fast the faithful word* (Titus 1:9). To be able to teach one must surely know God's word! Two particulars are given in relation to this requirement. First, that he will be able to exhort in sound doctrine. A shepherd must know which way to encourage the sheep to go. Second, that he may be able to refute those who contradict. When wolves attempt to lead the flock astray, it is the shepherds' task to recognize their error and stop it. (Sadly, in some congregations it is the shepherds themselves who are leading the march into unauthorized practices!) Preachers also have a responsibility in this area (2 Timothy 1:14; 4:2).

## If You Had a Bank . . .

If you had a bank that credited your account each morning with \$86,400, that carried over no balance from day to day and allowed you to keep no cash in your account, and every evening canceled whatever part of the amount you failed to use during the day, what would you do? Draw out every cent, of course!



Well, you do have such a bank. Its name is "Time." Every morning it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Each night it writes off, as lost, whatever of this you have failed to invest to no good purpose. It carries over no balances. It allows no overdrafts. If you fail to use the day's deposits the loss is yours. There is no drawing against tomorrow. You must live in the present—on today's deposit. Invest it so as to get from it the utmost in life.

How much teaching the elders do personally and how much they assign to others, how much time they spend in public teaching and how much in private, what methods are used—these and like questions are matters of judgment. The best eldership has a balance of abilities.

Our last article in this series will deal with the family qualifications. ■

### Service Leaders for the Week

|                     | Sunday              | Wednesday     |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| GREETER             | Bruce Williams      | Josh Baucom   |
| SONG LEADER         | Carlos Garcia       | Ian Brown     |
| OPENING PRAYER      | Steven Turner       |               |
| LORD'S SUPPER       |                     |               |
| BREAD               | Albert Lee Harrison |               |
| CUP                 | Stachys McLeod      |               |
| CONTRIBUTION PRAYER | Adam Wilson         |               |
| SERMON/INVITATION   | Frank Himmel        | Carlos Garcia |
| CLOSING PRAYER      | John Baucom         | Adam Wilson   |