

PathLights

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

September 30, 2018

Qualifications of Elders (1)

by Frank Himmel

There is no more crying need among God's people than for shepherds to lead us. The qualities God requires of a leader cannot be developed overnight; they take years of preparation and building. If we are to have overseers tomorrow, we must be working toward that end today.

Four errors need to be avoided when considering whether to appoint a man to the eldership. One, interpreting the Biblical qualifications so stringently that one would have to be flawless to qualify. Two, minimizing one or more of the requirements so that unqualified men may be appointed. Three, placing more weight on some requirements than others. The family qualifications have been so greatly debated through the years that we sometimes, perhaps unintentionally, treat those as the main criteria. All these qualities are necessary to one's effectively leading God's people. Four, adding to God's standard, making rules He did not. That is just as wrong as ignoring what God has said (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18-19).

Consider God's criteria, itemized in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. We will begin with the qualifications

relating to one's character, specifically those stated from a negative standpoint.

1. *Not addicted to wine* (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7). A drunkard is not fit to lead God's people. A shepherd needs a clear, alert mind as he watches the flock. Alcohol produces the opposite effect. The Bible pictures drunkenness as the height of foolishness (Ephesians 5:17-18). "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1, KJV). Would you want a fool watching for your soul?



2. *Not pugnacious* (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7). Several translations render this "not violent." Thayer says the word describes a "bruiser, ready with a blow." It is one who settles things with his fists. The next two negative qualifications are related to this one.

3. *Not quick-tempered* (Titus 1:7). The nature of his work exposes an elder to some negatives: people doing things they ought not and failing to do what they should, dissatisfaction with and sometimes even opposition to decisions made, brethren squabbling with each other, etc. A hothead will be easily provoked by such circumstances and "fly off the handle." In his rage he will likely say and/or do some things that are out of order. Elders, in fact all Christians, must be "quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger" (James 1:20). ▶

4. *Not quarrelsome* (1 Timothy 3:3). This word is similar in meaning to *pugnacious* in the second qualification. It literally means “not fighting” (Vine). That is not to suggest that an elder will not stand for the truth. He must. But it does suggest that he is not always looking for an argument. There is a difference between contending for a thing and being contentious; between arguing a point and being argumentative. An overseer must strive without stirring up strife and discuss without being disgusting!

5. *Not covetous* (1 Timothy 3:3, KJV). The NASB says “free from the love of money.” Later in this same letter Paul wrote, “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil...” (6:10). That is true in our personal lives and in reference to the Lord’s church as well. In fact, the collection and use of money have been at the core of many divisions among brethren.

Shepherds who are lovers of money may provide the poor example of working when they should be worshipping. They will lead the flock into miserly giving and spending. Such men are the reason some churches have substantial bank accounts yet ignore preaching opportunities. They may consistently opt for the cheapest alternative over better ones. They may refuse to spend for facilities, materials, or other tools that would aid the growth of the flock. Such thinking is shameful.

6. *Not fond of sordid gain* (Titus 1:7). At first glance this seems to be the same as the preceding characteristic, but there is a difference. The emphasis here is on the

When you brood
over your troubles,
you hatch despair.



manner of making money: “dishonest gain” (NIV). The elder must not make his living by illegal, immoral, dishonest, underhanded, or even questionable means.

Perhaps Paul also had in mind one being an elder for the sake of profit. 1 Timothy 5:17-18 says elders are worthy of financial support, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. Yet Peter cautioned, “Shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness” (1 Peter 5:2).

7. *Not self-willed* (Titus 1:7). Weymouth renders it “not overfond of having his own way.” First of all, an elder must be willing to submit to God’s will. Too many have forsaken God’s way and led churches into unauthorized innovations. But even in matters left to human judgment, these must be the kind of men who respect each other’s judgment and consider the will of those they serve. Men like Diotrephes (3 John 9-10) are a disaster.

Next week we will consider the positive qualifications relating to character. ■

Service Leaders for the Week		
	Sunday	Wednesday
GREETER	Howard Moore	Mark Clifton
SONG LEADER	Bruce Williams	John Baucom
OPENING PRAYER	Shayne Hyman	
LORD’S SUPPER		
BREAD	J B Williams	
CUP	Daven Daniel	
CONTRIBUTION PRAYER	Adam Wilson	
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	Bruce Hollander
CLOSING PRAYER	John Baucom	Josh Baucom