

Qualifications for an Elder

1 Timothy 3:2-3

Our text for today is 1 Timothy 3:2, 3 NAS:

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.*

Last week we began our study in 1 Timothy chapter three where Paul tells us the requirements that must be met for a person to hold the office of **elder**. Thus far we have covered the first three requirements that appear in verse 2 of 1 Timothy chapter three.

² *An overseer, then, must **be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate,***

Let us briefly review each of these first three items and then we will pick up on the others.

1. “Reproach” means **disapproval or disgrace**. Perhaps the translation in the KJV gives a better idea here of what is meant when it uses the word, “*blameless*.” An elder then must be above and beyond doing anything that would be contrary to God’s teachings for how to live or that would bring disgrace on the church in the eyes of outsiders.

2. “The husband of one wife” should be self-explanatory. It does not mean that if a man has been widowed and remarries that he is not allowed to be an elder. It simply means **the husband and wife are to be devoted to one another and no one else** for the good of the family. They must be an example to others of faithfulness to their one-and-only marriage partner. Unfaithfulness in the marriage relationship is a sin against which Scripture warns repeatedly. When found in the leadership, it has a very negative effect on the whole church.

3. “Temperate” means the absence or avoidance of extravagant living. Exercising moderation in all things. Putting that in easy-to-understand contemporary English, an elder does not overindulge in any kind of living.

That is where we left off last time, so let us continue in 1 Timothy 3:2 with Paul’s requirements for an elder in the church. And we will begin with a couple of stories:

“A runaway success.” That’s how organizers view **Operation Dial-A-Friend** in Clackamas County, Oregon.

And it's the type of success story that warms the heart.

Dial-A-Friend started as a daily telephone check on the elderly. Volunteers agreed to phone designated shut-ins to check on their condition and to cheer them up. The volunteers immediately started to go *'the second mile.'* Not only did they routinely phone daily, but the calls soon led to visitation, shopping trips, and 'the growth of real friendships.'¹

"A certain minister preached one day on Heaven. The next morning he was met by one of his wealthy members, who said:

"Pastor, you preached a good sermon about Heaven. You told me all about Heaven, but you did not tell me where Heaven is.'

"Ah,' said the pastor, 'I'm glad of the opportunity this morning. I have just come from the hill yonder. In that cottage there is a member of your church who is extremely poor; she is sick and in bed with fever. If you will go and take her a good supply of provisions and say, "My sister. I have brought these nice provisions in the Name of our Lord and Saviour," if you ask for a Bible and read Psalm 23, and then get down on your knees and pray, if you don't see Heaven, before you get all through, I'll pay the bill.'

The next morning the wealthy man said:

"Pastor, I saw Heaven, and I spent fifteen minutes in Heaven, as certainly as you are listening."²

Now just one more and this will lead us into our text for today.

"Nobody likes me at school,' said the son. 'The teachers don't, and the kids don't. The superintendent wants to transfer me, the bus driver hates me, and the custodians have it in for me. I don't want to go.'

'You have to go,' insisted the mother. 'You're healthy. You have a lot to learn. You've got something to offer others. You are a leader. Besides, you are 49 years old. You're the

¹ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX: Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

² Ibid.

principal, and you have to go to school.”³

No matter what our age we all still have a lot to learn. Now let us look at the fourth requirement for an elder, as listed in 1 Timothy.

4. “Prudent.” *To be prudent* means to show good judgment in both conduct and speech. The Greek word (*sohróna*) also has the meaning of sensible, discreet, and self-controlled. The godly elder does not go off half-cocked on trendy notions and concepts of the day. Instead, he searches the Scriptures to see if those ideas line up with God’s Word. A prudent person also does not readily accept the teaching of false prophets. We might say that a prudent person hears no evil, speaks no evil, and does no evil.

1 Timothy 1:3-7 NAS:

³ *As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines,*

⁴ *nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.*

⁵ *But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*

⁶ *For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion,*

⁷ *wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though **they do not understand** either **what they are saying** or the matters about which they make confident assertions.*

5. The fifth requirement is to be **“Respectable,”** which means to behave in a manner that has been considered worthy of the esteem and respect of others. It includes the idea of being proper, orderly, and organized in one’s behavior.

6. The sixth is to be **“Hospitable,”** which describes a person who conveys **an honest pleasure in receiving** guests and providing for the social enjoyment of others.

Romans 12:9-13 NLT:

⁹ *Don’t just pretend to love others. **Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.***

¹⁰ ***Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.***

¹¹ ***Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically.***

¹² ***Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.***

³ Ibid.

¹³ *When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. **Always be eager to practice hospitality.***

Hebrews 13:2 NLT:

² *Don't forget to show **hospitality** to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained **angels** without realizing it!*

A **hospitable person** is literally a *friend of strangers* (φιλόξενοϛ). He/she satisfies their needs. Remember, there was not any welfare provided by the state in those days. The homeless, the penniless, the widows and orphans, and the sick had no one to help them other than family or friends. If they could not get help from those sources, where could they get it? They were dependent on the kindness of relatives and friends, and if they could not find help there, the last hope they had was the church.

2 Timothy 1:16 NLT:

*May the Lord show special kindness to **Onesiphorus** and all his family because he often visited and encouraged me. He was never ashamed of me because I was in chains.*

I might add that approximately 90% of the resources of Village Church go to helping the needy, in one way or another.

7. The seventh requirement is to be **“Able to teach,”** which means the ability, willingness, and delight in teaching the true Word of God without any alteration. To be able to teach, one must first be a student of the Word.

1 Timothy 5:17 NLT:

*Elders who do their work well should be respected and paid well, especially those who work hard at **both preaching and teaching.***

2 Timothy 2:1-2 NLT:

¹ *Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus.*

² *You have heard me **teach** things that have been confirmed by many **reliable witnesses.** Now **teach these truths** to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.*

2 Timothy 2:24 NLT:

*A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, **be able to teach,** and be patient with difficult people.*

All elders should have the gift of teaching to one degree or another. But it stands to reason that no one can be capable of teaching if someone does not first teach them. As Paul said in the verse above: “You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will

be able to pass them on to others." One qualified teacher teaches others who in turn instruct others, a process that continues through each generation.

Now even though each of the elders should have some ability to teach, it became obvious early in the church that some had a very special gift for teaching, and these elders became pastors. So the work of the elders was somewhat specialized, based on each individual elder's spiritual gift. The Church expanded rather early to where one or two of the elders who had a special gift for preaching and teaching would handle that function while the rest of the elders divided up the various responsibilities for running the church and caring for the people, as we see in Acts 6.

Acts 6:2-4 NAS:

² *So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.*

³ *"Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.*

⁴ *"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*

Continuing in 1 Timothy 3:3 (NAS) we find in addition that an elder should:

not (be)⁴ addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.

8. The eighth requirement states that an elder must **"Not be addicted to wine or engage in pugnacious behavior."** This requirement refers to drunkenness, which often leads to fighting. An elder does not allow himself to become drunk and bring disgrace to the church by any unbecoming behavior. Scripture clearly states that anyone who cannot practice moderation has no right to be in the position of elder.

Titus 1:7 NLT:

For an elder must live a blameless life. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money.

Literally Paul says, *"not a striker (NAS)."* He is referring to a man who is always ready to use his fists. Years ago backwoodsmen would literally wear a chip on their shoulder as a challenge to fight anyone who would dare to knock it off. We get the expression, *"He has a chip on his shoulder"* from this former practice.⁵

It probably would not create a very positive image for the church if the morning newspaper read: **"Pastor arrested in drunken brawl. Vows vengeance against**

⁴ Parentheses mine.

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opponent.”

Proverbs 23:29-30 NLT:

²⁹ *Who has anguish? Who has sorrow? Who is always fighting? Who is always complaining? Who has unnecessary bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes?*

³⁰ *It is the one who spends long hours in the taverns, trying out new drinks.*

In the Old Testament, there is a vivid example of the consequences of drunkenness.

1 Samuel 25:32-38 NLT:

³² *David replied to Abigail, “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you to meet me today!*

³³ *Thank God for your good sense! Bless you for keeping me from murder and from carrying out vengeance with my own hands.*

³⁴ *For I swear by the Lord, the God of Israel, who has kept me from hurting you, that if you had not hurried out to meet me, not one of **Nabal’s** men would still be alive tomorrow morning.”*

³⁵ *Then David accepted her present and told her, “Return home in peace. I have heard what you said. We will not kill your husband.”*

³⁶ *When Abigail arrived home, she found that **Nabal** was throwing a big party and was celebrating like a king. He was very drunk, so she didn’t tell him anything about her meeting with David until dawn the next day.*

³⁷ *In the morning when Nabal was sober, his wife told him what had happened. As a result he had a stroke, and he lay paralyzed on his bed like a stone.*

³⁸ *About ten days later, the Lord struck him, and he died.*

What do you think the cause of death might have been? The news or the hangover?

9. The ninth requirement for being an elder speaks of a person who is **“gentle and peaceable,”** who is not quarrelsome and hostile toward others.

Paul is contrasting the term, *“pugnacious,”* with *“gentle, peaceable.”* The elder is not to be *“a striker”* or given to violence or violent methods. Instead, he is to be gentle and peaceable. In our society, “to be a man” often means “to love a good fight.” Look at how people respond to the violence that often breaks out at sports events. I once heard someone say they went to hockey games, not so much to see the game as to watch the fights. Such a society considers a gentle and peaceable man to be a wimp or a milquetoast. But as Paul is using the words here, nothing could be further from the truth. A Christian who, in a gentle and peaceable yet strong and firm way, takes a stand for truth is far stronger than someone who immediately resorts to violent words or their fists. As Warren Wiersbe had said, “Pastors must . . . ‘disagree without being disagreeable.’ Short tempers do not make for long ministries.”⁶ We would add that it takes more brains and creativity to make your point in a gentle, peaceable way than to throw out some 4-letter words or a few punches. This is emphasized elsewhere in the New Testament as

⁶ Wiersbe, Warren. *Be Faithful*. Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1981. Page 44.

well.

Titus 3:2 NLT:

They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone.

Philippians 4:5 NLT:

Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

James 3:17 NLT:

But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere.

Such a person never backs down from the truth of the Gospel but is willing to give up his/her own rights in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 6:7 NLT:

Even to have such lawsuits with one another is a defeat for you. Why not just accept the injustice and leave it at that? Why not let yourselves be cheated?

“The qualities of **yieldedness, fairness, reasonableness, gentleness, helpfulness, and generosity** should all be found in one who is appointed to the position of **elder**. One who approaches this ideal is *Barnabas*.”⁷

Acts 11:22-24 NAS:

²² *The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent **Barnabas** off to Antioch.*

²³ *Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord;*

²⁴ *for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.*

10. Free from the love of money. This quality kind of piggybacks on what we have just discussed.

1 Timothy 3:8 NLT:

In the same way, deacons must be well respected and have integrity. They must not be heavy drinkers or dishonest with money.

In other words they must not have the same attitude as Judas. What did Judas care about?

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John 12:4-6 NLT:

⁴ *But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said,*
⁵ *“That perfume was worth a year’s wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor.”*
⁶ *Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples’ money, he often stole some for himself.*

Generally, people who are selfish are also interested in only themselves, which for the most part generates a love for money above anything else including God. Such a person could not be trusted handling the finances of the church.

An elder must not consider making money to be his focus in life even if the method by which he seeks his fortune is honest. Furthermore, he must not be in the ministry to try to make money. You may remember the story of the *Rich Fool* in Luke:

Luke 12:16-25 NLT:

¹⁶ *Then he told them a story: “A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops.*
¹⁷ *He said to himself, ‘What should I do? I don’t have room for all my crops.’*
¹⁸ *Then he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods.*
¹⁹ *And I’ll sit back and say to myself, “My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!”’*
²⁰ *“But God said to him, ‘**You fool!** You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?’*

²¹ *“Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”*

²² *Then, turning to his disciples, Jesus said, “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food to eat or enough clothes to wear.*

²³ *For life is more than food, and your body more than clothing.*

²⁴ *Look at the ravens. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for **God feeds them.** And **you are far more valuable to him** than any birds!*

²⁵ *Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?*

Churches today tend to use a different set of requirements other than those listed in 1 Timothy 3:2-3 to choose pastors and other church leaders. They look for education, personality, showmanship, media savvy and the like. But Paul felt strongly enough about God’s true requirements that he had similar directions for another pastor. As we close this morning, we want to draw your attention to those words as well.

Titus 1:5-16 NLT:

⁵ *I left you on the island of Crete so you could complete our work there and appoint elders in each town as I instructed you.*

⁶ *An elder must live a blameless life. He must be faithful to his wife, and his children must be believers who don't have a reputation for being wild or rebellious.*

⁷ *For an elder must live a blameless life. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money.*

⁸ *Rather, he must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must love what is good. He must live wisely and be just. **He must live a devout and disciplined life.***

⁹ *He must have a strong belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with **wholesome teaching** and show those who oppose it where they are wrong.*

¹⁰ *For there are many rebellious people who engage in useless talk and deceive others. This is especially true of those who insist on circumcision for salvation.*

¹¹ *They must be silenced, because they are turning whole families away from the truth by their false teaching. And they do it only for money.*

¹² *Even one of their own men, a prophet from Crete, has said about them, "The people of Crete are all liars, cruel animals, and lazy gluttons."*

¹³ *This is true. So reprimand them sternly to make them strong in the faith.*

¹⁴ *They must stop listening to Jewish myths and the commands of people who have turned away from the truth.*

¹⁵ *Everything is pure to those whose hearts are pure. But nothing is pure to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, because their minds and consciences are corrupted.*

¹⁶ *Such people claim they know God, but they deny him by the way they live. They are detestable and disobedient, worthless for doing anything good.*

Remember, the person who wants to serve in the Church must keep in mind who his/her real boss is—the Lord God Himself, not the congregation—and must bring a heart of love and obedience to that service. Now go in peace and remember, **WHATEVER YOU DO, DO IT TO THE VERY BEST OF YOUR ABILITY. REMEMBER, YOU ARE DOING IT FOR THE LORD.**