

1Tim 3:1-7, 5:17-22; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pt. 5:1-4: Elder Qualifications

Intro:

Today is a one-off sermon given some unique circumstances. You, the church have expressed the desire to particularize, which means that we will have local elder leadership instead of a provisional (remote) session. In order to do that, we will need at least one ruling elder per the BCO. Today we will nominate that candidate for review with the session and presbytery.

That said, it makes sense that we should go over the qualifications of the elders found in the Scriptures. We will primarily be in 1Tim 3 but will also look at a few other passages.

READ 1Tim 3:1-7

I. What is an elder?

Words used: Episkopos and prebuteros. ***In 1Peter 5:1-2 both terms are used synonymously making it clear that the position is one in the same.***

Episkopos is used 5x in the NT and is usually translated “overseer” 1Tim 3:1&2. It is always used in reference to someone who has authority to lead in ministry.

Presbuteros is used 57x in the NT. It is translated “elder.” It is used to designate a position of leadership but adds to it the component of age. In about 10 occurrences in the NT, it just means “older man.” But, in the context of church leadership it is used concurrently with episkopos while maintaining the idea of spiritual seasoning and maturity over time.

Being an elder is an office or official position (3:1). It is not an ad hoc position or something temporary. It is formal and planned. It comes with the title. It is an office, meaning it is an official position inside the church for its governance and direction. There are three primary duties of elders we will look at now and another in a minute:

-1Tim 5:17 “rule”. To rule means to exercise judgement in making decisions. It means to control or be in charge of something. There is an administrative burden that elders bear to direct the church. Our Book of Church Order, or the BCO has the following to say regarding elders:

BCO 7-2 The officers of each congregation are the pastor(s), who is a teaching elder; the ruling elders; and the deacons.

7-3 Its jurisdiction being a joint power, is lodged in the hands of the church Session, consisting of the Pastor(s) and Ruling Elders.

4-4 b. The ordinary and perpetual officers are elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) and deacon (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:8-13). Elders may be teaching elders (Ephesians 4:11); evangelists (Acts 7:1-60; Acts 8:4-8; Acts 8:25-40; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5); or ruling elders (1 Timothy 5:17). All these offices, and none other, are ordained and defined by Christ, the Lawgiver. The elders are the ecclesiastical rulers of the church, who are all of the same rank, dignity, and authority; but they are divided into two classes, teaching elders and ruling elders. **10-6** These ruling elders are of the same rank, and possess the same authority with the teaching elder. And while the titles of bishop, pastor, and minister, belong to the teaching elder by way of eminency, because he excels by reason of his entire consecration to the work, as well as by the superiority of his functions, they also belong to the office of the ruling elder, seeing that, in order to rule with diligence, he must take the *oversight* of the flock; in order to its protection he must *guard* and *guide* it; and in order to discharge the chief duty of his office, he must *serve* Christ diligently in the exercise of government. They should, moreover, cultivate zealously their aptness to teach the Bible and should improve every opportunity of doing so....

-1Peter 5:2 “shepherd” and “overseeing”. If we continue to read the passage, it is clear that the elders are to be doing what Jesus does for His people in terms of caring for them and ministering to them. Elders are to protect them from wolves (false teachers), exercise discipline, and lead and guide. Each one of those things requires prayerful and thoughtful action.

So, what is an elder? An elder is an official leadership position in the church that requires ruling, shepherding and overseeing. It is in some sense, a superintendent role under the leadership of the ultimate boss, the Lord Jesus, Himself.

II. What are the qualifications?

1. A man...

-“if any man...”

-“husband...” doesn’t necessarily mean that he must be married but that is the norm. Nevertheless, to be a husband assumes he is indeed a “he.” We will look at this more specifically in a moment. But for now...

-History and scripture dictate that the office of elder is reserved for males only. This is not meant to denigrate or suppress women in any way. Instead, this position reflects the order God has given both in nature and in the revealed word. Men have the responsibility and weight of leadership, in the home, church, and government as the three spheres God has outlined for authority. So called churches with female leadership defy God’s word and are emblematic of the evil rebellion of effeminacy more in line with the worldly system of Satan. Feminism is an example of a Jacobin tactic rooted in the

atheistic French revolution that has coopted and hijacked Christianity for its own sinister purposes. Female leadership in the church is meant to undercut God's word in the disguise of fairness and equality. Elders must be men. That is not male chauvinism (also a French word invented to assume guilt), but Biblical solidarity. Elders are men.

2. Desire

-“if a man aspires to the office of overseer...”(3:1)

-“not under compulsion but willingly...” (1Pt 5:2) No reluctant elders allowed. He must be an eager, freely volunteering, man. No one is twisting his arm or making him do something he doesn't want to do. He has been given the desire by God to accept this burden of leadership.

3. “Able to teach” end of v2

must be able to teach. His giftedness must include teaching. This, along with “ruling” are the two primary distinctions between this office and that of the deacon, which we will address at a later date.

We have already seen that there is a difference in office between the deacon and the elder with the primary difference being on gifting for handling the word. This is confirmed further in Acts 6. Here we now subdivide the elder position into teaching and ruling elders. Teaching elders have as their primary responsibility to preach and teach (v17). They also rule but their emphasis is on preaching and teaching. This is why I preach most Sundays, because I am ordained as a TE. TEs also rule but this is their primary function.

Ruling elders on the other hand are able and do preach and teach from time to time but their primary function is to rule. That is, they attend to the administrative and relational needs of the church. This is their focus. They might, for instance, look after finances, give input on the spiritual health and focus of the church. All elders must be able, ready and willing to teach. Teaching elders are required to have formal education and studies in the original languages. Dagan and I have both received such education and following examinations to test such knowledge, have been ordained as TEs. TEs also are generally formally pastors as mentioned earlier in BCO 10-6. The TE is the primary preacher in the weekly divine service.

Both, education and title designate the TE from the RE, Ruling Elder. The RE, likewise can and does exercise gifts of teaching but does not necessarily receive formal education and have the call of pastor. However, he does and should teach, and occasionally preach, in the absence of a TE or by convenience. He should possess the gift and gumption for teaching and exercise it regularly in the church. Again, see BCO 4-4 and 10-6 above.

4. Character and lifestyle (v2-7; also see spreadsheet)

-Inner character qualities

*above reproach -no obvious moral inconsistencies. Think of the sin lists in the NT and Proverbs. He must not be in clear contradiction to any of those things.

*husband of one wife (literally: one woman man), not “not divorced.” It means that he is a faithful and focused husband, not pursuing other women or “chasing skirt.”

*temperate -not given to excess. Proverbs has much to say about this. He is a man of restraint.

*sensible -he is ruled by the Scriptures and LOGIC. He is not given to emotionalism and emotional decision making. He has good judgement.

*respectable -he is the kind of man that other men want to be like.

*hospitable -he is generous and has a welcoming spirit and home. This one gets some guys who look more like the privatized culture in their relationships. Elders are to be friendly, with open homes and lives towards others.

*able to teach -we already covered this one.

*v3 not addicted to wine -not a drunkard. Doesn't have a lifestyle of an excessive drinker.

*not pugnacious -He is not to be argumentative or a “know it all”, aggressively exerting his opinion. He's not obnoxious.

*considerate -he is sensitive to the needs of others and their situations. Not selfish.

*peaceable -he is an amiable man seeking to get along with others when he can. Not overly argumentative. Not a warmonger or fighter. The KJV said “no striker”. He is not a hot-tempered man. He is peaceable. Although he fights wolves, he is generally a peacekeeper in his attitude and demeanor.

*free from the love of money -not greedy. He is not seeking financial gain from the position and is not gripped by dollars. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus... You cannot love both God and money... you cannot serve two masters...

*not a new convert (v6). He must be seasoned and tested. A man of gravitas faith. Again, this speaks to the title given “elder.”

-Outward lifestyle:

-Family (v4) -he must lead his family well, maintaining a Biblical lifestyle. His children's outcome reflects his character and leadership. They must follow him, and his family should be in order.

-Outside church(v7) he must have a good reputation in the community. He must be respectable around town and not have any obvious sin that the outside world would look upon him and call him a hypocrite.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, an elder is an official position of the church with specific requirements including desire, a gift of teaching, and circumspect character. A classic New Testament church needs both, Teaching elders (TE) and Ruling elders (RE) who lead by example in their character and direct the church in its kingdom activity in allegiance to the Lord Jesus.

Today, we will accept a ruling elder nomination to begin the process of particularization, that is the moving of our leadership from remote to local. Only nominate someone willing, that is able to teach, and fits the character qualifications mentioned above.

Application:

- 1. Pray for our session.** I do not say this flippantly. We truly need your prayers. I pray for our session and leaders on Thursday as matter of intentionality. Please pray for us strategically and regularly. Unless the Lord builds the house, the laborers labor in vain. We need His guidance, His protection, and cannot do what we need to do apart from the work of the Spirit of God. We are utterly dependent upon Him. Pray for me as your pastor and pray for us as leaders.
- 2. Aspire to be a leader.** It is a good thing and ought to be pursued. I know the women in the crowd are asking about their role, and Titus 2 gives a good example of what older women are to be like and how they are to function. There are also plenty of verses about what younger women are to be doing. We all need to excel in our roles and positions. Aspire to lead in godliness and character.
- 3. Be a person of character.** Young people are called to “flee youthful lusts” and be fervent and go hard after God in maturity and integrity (2Tim 2:22). Wives are called to help and submit to husbands so as to strengthen the family. Husbands are called to give of themselves sacrificially to provide and lead their families. Everyone should be a person of character like what is epitomized in the qualities of an elder.

Closing Prayer:

Father, be glorified through our actions today. Thank you for the chief shepherd, the Lord Jesus. As we take the Lord’s supper, we trust that the Lord Jesus gave His life as a ransom for many and we get to experience Your grace in this meal. Let us commune with You as we take the elements. Thank you for the bread and the wine. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.