

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH (PART 1)

God has not left the crucial work of shepherding the local church to just anyone. Instead, God has outlined specific characteristics those who will be appointed to this role must possess. Following Biblical models (Acts 1:15-26; 6:1-7), members of a local church should look out among themselves to see who possess the various characteristics required by God, so they can be appointed to the work (Titus 1:5)! Therefore, we should consider the specific characteristics God has required for elders (overseers, shepherds) to be appointed in every church.

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7; TITUS 1:5-9

These two passages contain the specific characteristics God has required of those who should be appointed as elders, though other passages are also applicable (e.g., Matthew 5:3-12; Romans 8:1-11; Galatians 5:16-26; 2 Peter 1:3-11; Ephesians 4-5; Colossians 3, etc.). As you consider these specific passages, however, you must recognize that each of these characteristics is presently required of the one who will be appointed as an elder. Therefore, you can treat each as a “yes” or “no” question about those being considered, with each requiring a “yes” response. While there is judgment involved in each characteristic, opinions must be dealt with appropriately (Romans 12:16; Ephesians 4:1-6) and comparisons with others must be avoided (2 Corinthians 10:12).

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

First, he must be a man (1 Timothy 3:1; Titus 1:6). Some translations specifically mention that this person must be a man (NASB 2020). The fact that he is the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6) and the restrictions God has placed on women in assemblies of the church (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-14) also plainly demonstrate this.

Second, he must aspire to be an elder (1 Timothy 3:1). He selflessly desires to serve the Lord and the church in this capacity. He reaches out to do what He can to serve God in this way if He is able

(Matthew 25:14-30), not compelled to serve against his will (1 Peter 5:2).

Third, he must not be a new convert (1 Timothy 3:6). He is an older man who has life experience (implied in the term “elder”). Plus, he also has experience in living for Jesus. Although no specific physical or spiritual age is given, he has progressed from the milk to the meat of God’s word (Hebrews 5:12-14; as he must be able to teach, 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9). If a new convert were appointed as an elder, he may become prideful in being appointed to this office.

Fourth, he must hold to the faithful message as taught (Titus 1:9). He is knowledgeable of and accepts true Bible teaching (Acts 2:42; 2 Timothy 1:13), though still growing in it. Now, he can feed others rather than rely on others to feed him (Hebrews 5:12-14). Then, not only is he knowledgeable of God’s message, but he also obeys what the truth requires (James 1:22-25)!

Fifth, he must be blameless and above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). While he has sinned and has his own struggles (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8-10), he lives in a way that no charge of wrongdoing can stick to him (Titus 2:6-8). He lives in a way that is morally right and corrects wrongs he commits. He is, therefore, a faithful disciple of Christ who (though imperfect) is worthy of imitation (Hebrews 13:7).

Sixth, he must have a good reputation among outsiders (1 Timothy 3:7). Though not perfect in his past, this man has a positive reputation outside the church. As a neighbor, employee, family member, friend, co-worker, etc., he has a positive reputation as one who does what is right (even though some are offended by the gospel, Matthew 5:10-12; 10:34-39; Luke 6:26).

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

First, he must be the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). He is a married man. More than that, he is a one-woman man. He is faithful to his wife and is not involved in polygamy, adultery, pornography, lewdness, etc. Also consider that wives (particularly of deacons, 1 Timothy 3:11) are to be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, and faithful in everything.

Second, he must have children (1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6). There is no mention of how many children he must have. In fact, even having one child can result in

someone having children (Genesis 21:7; Matthew 22:24-28; 1 Timothy 5:10).

Third, he must manage his household competently (1 Timothy 3:4-5). His home is God's proving ground for his ability to lead the local church. So, he has demonstrated a track record of leading his family in a way that is godly and honorable. This gives the congregation confidence in his ability to shepherd God's people faithfully.

Fourth, he must have faithful children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion (Titus 1:6). He has sought to lead his children to become disciples of Jesus (Ephesians 6:4; Proverbs 22:6). Although children are responsible for their own choices when they're grown (Isaiah 1:2), he has demonstrated his ability to lead his family wisely and spiritually. His children have generally followed his direction and are not characterized by rebellion (to him or to the Lord), giving the church confidence in his ability to shepherd them in spiritual ways.

ABILITY CHARACTERISTICS

First, he must be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9). As a shepherd must be involved in the work of feeding and equipping the flock (1 Timothy 5:17-18; Ephesians 4:11-16; Hebrews 5:12-14; 13:7), he has developed his knowledge and ability to teach others the Lord's ways. This ability includes teaching non-believers and believers, whether publicly or privately.

Second, he must be able to encourage and refute with sound teaching (Titus 1:9). As a shepherd, he will be tasked with helping those who desire to follow Jesus grow in the faith and protecting them from spiritual dangers (Acts 20:28-31; Ephesians 4:11-16). So, he can use his knowledge and experience in the Scriptures to encourage people to follow Christ through difficult times and situations (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 4:2). Then, he also can identify, challenge, and answer false teachings and false teachers (Titus 1:10-14; Romans 16:17-18).

CONCLUSION

God does not want just anyone to be selected and appointed to be elders in local churches. As it is a crucial work, it is a work that requires people to possess the appropriate characteristics. By selecting and appointing men who actively possess all these characteristics, a congregation can have godly older men who will oversee and shepherd them and will be a blessing to the work of God's kingdom!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What passages should be considered when selecting those who will serve as elders?

How should a consideration of these characteristics be approached?

Why can a woman not serve as an elder?

What must be true about a man's desire to serve as an elder?

What must be true about a man's spiritual knowledge and the way he conducts his life?

What must be true about a man's marriage?

What must be true about a man's ability to lead his household?

What must be true about a man's ability to teach God's word?