

4. The tough qualifications for leaders

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About a half century ago, being a pastor, elder or deacon was respected. But now according to the Barna Group survey, being a pastor barely makes to the top ten most respected occupations in America.

There is no one else to blame except those who made this mess. I am talking about the pastors who were selfish and greedy. As a pastor, I am supposed to feed the sheep that God allows me to take care of with the Word of God, not skin them because of my selfishness.

My prayer for you all is that you become the best fed sheep in the world, not because I am a profound Bible teacher, nor deep theologian, but I hear my Lord's teachings and pass them to you without my own editorials.

Just because somebody feels like to be a pastor or deacon, that doesn't mean that he or she can walk right into the position. The candidate must meet the qualifications according to the Bible and we find it in this Book 1 Timothy chapter 3. It is not a politically correct one, actually, it doesn't even try.

A. QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS

1 Timothy 3:1-7 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

According to the New Testament, the terms "bishop," "pastor," and "elder" are the same. Bishop means "overseer," and that person has the responsibility of overseeing the work of the church. "Elder" is the translation of the Greek word 'presbutes', which means "an old man." Finally, "pastor" means "shepherd," one who leads and cares for the flock of God.

It is good for a growing believer to desire to be a pastor/elder, but the best way to achieve it is to develop Christian character and meet the qualifications that mentioned here. But the most important thing is the call of God. While a person strives to be godly, God would call him to be a pastor/elder. Without that call from God, it is nothing more than human effort that would not last long and make himself and others around him miserable.

Before we go over these verses in detail, we need to see who cannot be in this office:
1) Popularity

In far too many churches, charisma, visibility in the community and professional success put an individual in leadership. Popularity alone is an unreliable barometer for determining leadership skill, wisdom or character. Remember, being in majority doesn't make them to be right and true. It only means that the majority people agree with that person or agenda for that time. Nothing else.

2) Politics

Some people get into leadership by slick political maneuvering. Pulling the right strings, shaking right hands and throwing around weight in the right place. That might work somewhere, but not in God's sight.

3) Pocketbook

Money can't buy everything. But in some churches it can get you a seat on the elder board. We often assume that, simply because a person has wealth, he qualifies for leadership. Wealth doesn't necessarily signal integrity.

We find 16 items of qualifications for an elder. They are not easy to meet them. It takes a long time a person to meet these kinds of qualifications.

1) Blameless: There must be nothing in his life that satan or the unsaved can take hold of to criticize or attack the church. No man living is sinless, but we must strive to be above reproach.

2) The husband of one wife: The idea here is of "A one-woman man." It is not that a pastor/elder must be married. If so, then both Jesus and Paul could not be spiritual leaders in our churches. Nor is the idea that pastor/elder could never remarry if his wife had passed away or was Biblically divorced. The idea is that love, affection and heart is given to one woman, his lawful and wedded wife.

This means that the church leader should not be a playboy, an adulterer, a flirt and does not show romantic or sexual interest in other women than his wife, including the depictions or images of women in pornography.

I know that some denominations insist that any man who was married and divorced before he got saved cannot be qualified as a pastor/elder. But the same denominations don't have a problem for a former murder becoming a pastor.

Another very important point we see here is that being a pastor/elder is limited for male, not female. If a female is allowed to be a pastor, the Bible would state that. Like "the married person of one spouse".

Again, I know some denominations allow women to be pastors/elders. It is against the Word of God. I am not belittling women. Many of you know that I have great respect for women, their godly hearts and desires to serve the Lord. But the Word of God is final. God means what He says in the Bible.

3) Temperate: The idea is of someone who is not given to extremes. They are reliable and trustworthy, and you don't have to worry about wide swings of vision, mood or action.

4) Sober-minded: This describes the person who is able to think clearly. He does not constantly crack jokes, but knows how to deal with serious subjects in a serious way. This does not mean he has no sense of humor. It means that he knows when to become serious.

5) Good behavior: It is about a man whose life displays discipline and grace.

6) Hospitable: Some men love to teach the Word of God. They are regular preaching machines. But they don't want to open their hearts and homes to the people they

come across. A pastor/elder or his wife must be hospitable to the fellowship of a local church. What the church doesn't need are leaders who are unapproachable and cold.

7) Able to teach: Teaching the Word of God is one of a pastor/elder's main ministries. He must be a careful student of the Word of God. The pastor who is lazy in his study is a disgrace in the pulpit. That is why I guard my studying time very carefully.

8) Not given to wine: Some Christians make an excuse of their drinking with what apostle Paul said to Timothy. It is true that Paul advised Timothy to use wine for medicinal purposes in 1 Tim. 5:23. The Jewish people diluted their wine with water to make it like grape juice for daily drinking purpose. It was a well-known fact that water was not pure in those days.

However, what is our excuse when we have good drinking water from faucets or grocery stores? They drink because they want to. Am I saying that no alcohol for any Christian? Yes and no. You think about this. What kind of testimony would you give to the non-believers when you have a glass of wine or beer bottle in your hand while you talk about salvation through Jesus? Would it be convincing? I think not. Drunkenness violates God's standard, not just for leaders but for all Christians.

One of our church congregation came to me some time ago. She told me that she decided not to drink wine anymore for the sake of her testimony to non-believers. That shows an obedient heart and maturity of her faith.

9) Not violent: Paul is warning us away from someone who is quick to get upset, physically or verbally, always looking for a fight or argument. A good leader knows how to take heat without spreading the flames.

10) Not greedy for money: The King James Version puts it far more memorably: "*not greedy of filthy lucre*". It is possible to use the ministry as an easy way to make money, if a man has no conscience or integrity.

11) Gentle: A gentle leader's words and actions are seasoned with grace, forgiveness and kindness. But he doesn't let people walk all over him either.

12) Not quarrelsome: It is an ability to get along with and accept the views of others for non-essentials. But when it comes to the essentials, he doesn't back off. He builds people up instead of tearing them down.

13) Not covetous: The covetous man is never satisfied with anything, always demanding something more or different.

14) One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence: Leading the church certainly involves management and more, because the church is a family, not a business. It has a heavenly Father, not a chairman of the board, brothers and sisters, not shareholders. A word of caution, though: nobody's home is going to be perfect 24/7.

15) Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil: It calls for someone who has been seasoned by life's triumphs, failures, joys and disappointments. A brand new believer, right out of the spiritual womb, can easily fall victim to discouragement or pride.

16) He must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil: These characteristics must be evident to all, especially unbelievers to see. He should have a good reputation among unbelievers.

It is not easy to serve as a pastor/elder. Extensive qualifications? Yes. Unreasonable? No. God takes leadership seriously. The Good Shepherd love His sheep too much to leave them unprotected. Character is the best defense against wolves.

B. QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEACONS

1 Timothy 3:8-13 Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.

12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

It is a mistake to see one office as more prestigious than the other, though elders have more responsibility before God. Each is more a matter of calling than status. The English word 'deacon' is from the Greek word 'diakonos', which simply means "servant."

Here are the qualifications of deacons:

1) Reverent: A deacon should be worthy of respect, a man of godly character worth imitating.

2) Not double-tongued: He should not be a gossip.

3) Not given to much wine **4) Not greedy for money**

5) Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience:

The word 'mystery' here means "truth once hidden but now revealed by God." The great doctrines of the faith are hidden to those outside the faith, but they can be understood by those who trust the Lord. Deacons must understand Christian doctrine and obey it with a good conscience.

6) Let these also first be tested: The Greek word for 'test' is "dokimazo". It means "to test in the hope of being successful." A person who becomes a deacon must be tested and prove that he is a true servant of God, not looking for selfish promotions.

7) Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

8) For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

C. QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEACONS' WIVES

1 Timothy 3:11 Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.

It is difficult to know if Paul here referred here to female deacons, or the wives of male deacons. The original wording will permit either possibility. But if you put this verse in contexts with v12, you can tell apostle Paul is talking about the qualifications of male deacons' wives.

The deacon's wife is a part of his ministry, because godliness must begin at home. Their wives must be Christians, women who are serious about the ministry.

These qualifications are valuable for every person – not only those who aspire to leadership. They are clear indicators of godly character and spiritual maturity.

When we serve God, we serve Him because we love Him, not because we can get recognized by men. If we get discouraged because other people don't recognize our effort, then we need to examine our motives of the work we do in the church.

D. THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

1 Timothy 3:14-16 These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; 15 but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. 16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

The church must be, very consciously, the place where God is. The Church is God's house because He is the Architect and the Builder. He inhabits in the midst of the praises of His people. He is honored there and He rules there. His Word is taught there and use it as the guideline for our lives.

The pillar and ground – foundation of the church is truth. Tragically, many churches today sell truth short and they have weak pillars and shaky ground. The church is to confirm and model the truth, not invent its own message.

Our confession of faith revolves around Jesus Christ and no one else. He is the center and source of our belief. Our doctrine, the bylaws and programs should be all be based on Christ and His Word, not tradition or assumption.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Having godly character only comes from complete submission to our Lord Jesus and His Word.

2) When we serve God, we serve Him because we love Him, not because we can get recognized by men.

If we get discouraged because other people don't recognize our effort, then we need to examine our motives of the work we do in the church.

3) Our confession of faith revolves around Jesus Christ and no one else.

He is the center and source of our belief. Our doctrine, the bylaw and programs should be all be based on Christ and His Word, not tradition or assumption.