

The Qualifications Of Elders

Introduction. The future of any congregation depends upon its leadership. The selection of elders or overseers is a fearful responsibility because of the direction it gives to a local church. If elders fail to fulfill their responsibilities, wolves can come in and devour the flock (Acts 20:28). If elders fail to watch for souls (Hebrews 13:17), the weak can be overtaken in sin.

God provided all that was needed for the church to accomplish its purpose of glorifying Him (Ephesians 3:21). This includes an arrangement for His people to work together in autonomous groups which we call local churches or local congregations. It also includes rigid qualifications for men who are to have the responsibility of caring for God's people.

Throughout history, men have disapproved of God's organization. The result is a substitute organization of their own choice. Men see little significance in God's organization. This study will consider the qualifications of elders. When members understand the responsibilities, there will be a greater appreciation of the work of elders.

I. ***Attitudes Toward The Qualifications Of Elders***

A. Erroneous attitudes toward the qualifications.

1. No man can qualify today, therefore we cannot have elders today.
 - a) Some today believe that an elder must be inspired by God.
 - b) Elders in the early church were certainly inspired, but so were preachers and other Christians. Can we not fulfill those roles today because of a lack of inspiration? Certainly not!
2. All the Bible qualifications are for the group of elders rather than for one man.
 - a) The origin of this attitude was an attempt to escape some essential quality mentioned in the scriptures to allow some esteemed man to enter the eldership.
 - b) The language of the apostle to both Timothy and Titus tells us that these qualities are for one man, as will be seen later.
3. Blamelessness is the only qualification for an elder.
 - a) The origin of this attitude grew out of the desire to emphasize some quality and minimize the importance of another.
 - b) Of course, the normal consequence of this attitude is that any man can be an elder whether he is young or old, experienced or not, married or single, just so he is a man and is blameless.
4. Qualifications involving marriage and family relations are not essential.
 - a) It has been taught by several that a man does not have to be married or does not have to be a father in order to qualify for

the eldership.

- b) What rule of interpretation allows someone to set aside a part of a list of things toward a common end and bind others?
- 5. All qualifications are flexible and not absolute.
 - a) This idea weakens the standard of God to the extent that the range from side to side is so broad that almost any sort of person may be appointed to the eldership.
 - b) When pushing this idea, some questions come to mind that must be answered. Just how flexible are the qualifications for the eldership? How far will they stretch or shrink? Who is permitted to do the stretching or shrinking?
- B. The disregard for the qualifications of elders.
 - 1. Appointing young men to the eldership.
 - a) The idea of "elder" is one more advanced in age in both years and experience.
 - b) Although the exact age is not given in scripture, a man must be old enough in age and experience to have all the qualifications in a high degree listed in the Bible.
 - 2. If one does the work of an elder, he is an elder.
 - a) Some believe that if one performs the work an elder is responsible for, he might as well be made an elder.
 - b) Before anyone can do the work demanded by the Lord, two prerequisites are necessary: (1) he must be properly prepared in character, attitude and relationship; and (2) he must be properly authorized to do the work.
 - 3. Appointing the best we have.
 - a) The major premise of this contention is that God only requires of man what he is able to do.
 - b) While this premise is agreeable, the conclusion is faulty. It does not follow that God will lower His standard just to be convenient for an unqualified man to be an elder.
 - 4. All of these disregard the authority of Christ.
 - a) If we regard lightly or totally ignore any of the qualifications laid down by the Holy Spirit, it is the same as disregarding the authority of Christ because He speaks to us through the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-13; Hebrews 1:1-2).
 - b) Most of the trouble in a church with elders comes directly or indirectly from unqualified men in the eldership.
- C. The proper attitude toward the qualifications of elders.
 - 1. The qualifications do not demand a perfect, sinless man.
 - a) All of God's standards are perfect; in fact, all that relates to God is perfect. There are no perfect Christians on earth who do not need the cleansing ability of Christ's blood, therefore there are

- no perfect men who are elders.
- b) Every elder must have all the qualifications to a high degree, but to argue that they must be perfect is holding them to a higher standard than any other Christian.
- 2. The qualifications are musts.
 - a) "Must" is defined as "necessity in reference to what is required to attain some end."
 - b) The qualifications are not expedients. They are also not preferences or options; that is, we take what we prefer or leave off what we oppose.
- 3. All the qualifications are essential.
 - a) It takes all the qualifications of an elder to make an elder, just as it takes all the qualifications of a Christian to make a Christian.
 - b) The fact that some of them appear difficult to obtain does not in the least nullify the requirements of God concerning the qualifications of an elder.
- 4. The qualifications must be developed before the appointment.
 - a) The office of an elder is not for the purpose of developing the qualities of an elder, but because he has developed the qualifications, he can perform the work of an overseer.
 - b) The New Testament tells us that men who were considered for the eldership must first "be proved" (1 Timothy 3:10).

II. ***God Has Revealed The Kind Of Men He Wants To Lead His People***

- A. Desire -- No man will do a job who has been forced into it or has had the obligation put on him against his wishes. It takes years to acquire many of the qualifications necessary to be an elder; therefore, one must desire the office early enough in life to prepare for it.
- B. Above reproach -- The elder must have lived in such a way that no charge of guilt can be proven against him. The scriptures demand a clean, honorable and influential Christian life in every man who enters the eldership.
- C. Husband of one wife -- The elder must be married, but he must not be a polygamist. After one reaches the qualifications by the experience gathered in ruling his family, he does not lose the ability because he loses his wife.
- D. Temperate (vigilant) -- The elder must be in good control of himself and abstain from all that is unlawful. He must be watchful and alert, having a foresight to know the end of a course being followed. He can watch himself and others against sin.
- E. Prudent (sober) -- The elder must be calm, even tempered, cautious, circumspect and wise in the full use of the mind and body under all circumstances to the point that good sense is shown in all judgment,

reason and understanding.

- F. Respectable (good behavior) -- The elder must be well-arranged, dignified, courteous and chaste man in the whole manner of his life. He must be honest, fair, diligent, kind, courteous and polite.
- G. Hospitable -- The elder must love strangers and receive them into his home to entertain them and generously supply their needs. He must really love and delight in helping strangers.
- H. Able to teach -- The elder must be capable as a teacher. He must have an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the Bible in general so as to teach it to others either publicly or privately. The term "shepherd" or "pastor" indicates that the nature of an elder's work is to feed or teach the gospel.
- I. Not addicted to wine -- The elder must not be subject to wine or any other intoxicating drinks.
- J. Not pugnacious (striker) -- The elder must not be a man who is always ready to fight those who are against him. He must not be ill-tempered or unable to govern his temper.
- K. Gentle (patient) -- The elder must be very kind and meek in character rather than a bitter, unkind, stern and disagreeable person. He is not to be easily provoked, revengeful or impetuous.
- L. Uncontentious (brawler) -- The elder must not be one to battle and wrangle for opinions and self-interest. He should not contend and fuss over matters with anyone.
- M. Free from the love of money (covetous) -- This is different from the next qualification in that this deals with the attitude toward money. Some elders guard the Lord's money in such a selfish way that just as little as possible is spent. Elders are responsible for seeing that the money is spent wisely in serving the Lord.
- N. Not fond of sordid gain (greedy of filthy lucre) -- The elder must not obtain money in a wicked and unlawful manner. He is not to be greedy to obtain and selfishly keep the wealth of this world. He must be a lover of the church and the souls of men far beyond the love for the wealth of this world.
- O. Has children who believe (manages or rules his own household well) -- A man can have one child or a number of children, but they must all be Christians. The man who has one child or ten children is a father, and the man who has none is not a father. The issue here is that a man can lead his children to the Lord and prove this to the congregation.
- P. Not a new convert (novice) -- The elder must have been a Christian long enough to understand and have a knowledge of the Bible and have experience in life. This will give experience in handling the affairs of the church.

- Q. Good reputation with those outside the church -- The elder must have a character which is shown to be good and honorable to those who are not members of the church. Those outside of the church must consider him a good, honest and godly man.
- R. Not self-willed -- The elder must not be someone who wants and demands his own way in all matters regardless of the outcome. An elder must hold his office with other men, and when he cannot yield his own will in matters of judgment, division will be the result.
- S. Not quick-tempered (soon angry) -- The elder must not be hot-headed and quick tempered. God is slow to anger and we are taught to be like Him. He must not be easily affected with anger, irritated, provoked, wrathful or resentful.
- T. Love what is good -- The elder must love and promote good things rather than evil. He must love the good character of men who are following Christ and encourage them to do even greater works.
- U. Just -- The elder must be upright, fair and honest in all his dealings with other people, rendering to each one his due without partiality. He must be proper and equitable in his actions.
- V. Holy -- The elder must be undefiled by evil or wickedness. He must be a consecrated and godly man who is free from sinful affections. He will not let sin reign in his body.

Conclusion. Congregations all across this land are full of faithful men who should be encouraged to develop qualities and desire this honorable work. We must remember that God's law is perfect to accomplish the purpose for which it is given. When it is followed the church can accomplish what God intends for it to accomplish.

Every congregation should desire to have qualified men who will accept the awesome responsibility of watching for souls and serving as shepherds of the flock. The church will grow when there are qualified men who will lead as God instructs. God's ways are best because they are His ways. His ways are higher than man's ways and thoughts. God has revealed His ways and thoughts as to how man can be acceptable to Him. Are you willing to be obedient to His commands?

I am deeply indebted to H.E. Phillips for this material.