

State of the Church 2020, Part 2

Qualifications of Elders – 1 Tim 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9

Introduction – We began this short series on the State of the Church by stating that the church needs faithful and qualified rulers to shepherd the flock of God. This requires that we submit ourselves to whatever the Scriptures require and that we do so unapologetically even when the progressive Christian culture says, “wait, did God really say...” (Gen 3:1). Our difficulty is not that these passages are unclear; our difficulty is that they are unpopular.

Qualifications of Elders (1 Tim 3:1-7) – The church welcomes all sinners (just look around) because the gospel is that Jesus Christ came to save such ones. We proclaim a new way of being human because of the work of Jesus in us and so the bar for *fellowship* is simply this – is Jesus at work in you? Welcome. But this work brings about lives that are transformed and changed and it can be seen in those lives. And that is why the bar for *leadership* is much different. We will return to this point later.

Bishop or Elder (or Shepherd)? – As mentioned last week, these Greek words are used interchangeably in the New Testament (i.e. Titus 1:5-7) referring to the same office which we call the office of elder.

Blameless – With regard to his life in general and the following list in particular, the grace of God is manifest in such a way that this man is not open to charges. It does not mean he has never sinned; else we would never have any elders.

The Husband of One Wife – Literally, “a one-woman man” and indicates a man who is faithful to his wedding vows with his eyes, heart, and body (Heb 13:4). If married, he is devoted to his wife, and regardless if married or not, he is not a flirt, a voyeur, or a fornicator of any stripe.

Self-Controlled – That is a good summary of “*temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior.*” He is prudent, sensible, and discreet. He is a man who can be trusted to handle serious and complex issues as he cares for his flock. He is passionate and zealous for his flock, but he is always principled in his actions.

Hospitable – He opens his home and his life to strangers. He has this disposition because he knows how much grace he has received and longs to share it, giving it away to others.

Able to Teach – In his letter to Titus, Paul writes “*holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict*” (Tit 1:9). An elder is doctrinally sound and as a shepherd, he can bring forth to others that which has been given to him with grace and effectiveness (see also 2 Tim 2:2).

Not Given to Wine...Not Greedy for Money...Not Covetous – These three can be summarized as not seduced or controlled by things of the world. Specifically, he has sane drinking habits, he is content with what God has given him, and he is not given to sidelong glances.

Not Violent...But Gentle, Not Quarrelsome – He has a reasonable temperament. He is not a bully (lording it over), he is not violent in word or deed, and he is not looking for a fight for the sake of a fight. And by the way, this begins in the home. Which leads us to the next one...

Household Authority (vv4-5) – The home is a little church and the man is the shepherd there first. Is the home in order? Is the family protected, fed, loved, warm, and at peace? Is the Word of God clearly the foundation of all that is going on and is there the aroma of grace? Do the children love their father, respect their father, and follow in the faith of their father as disciples of Jesus Christ? Titus 1:6 makes clear that the children are to be believers. Obviously, fathers whose homes are not like this need to turn all their shepherding work towards those first under their care.

Not a Novice – The word is neophyte and refers less to his age as much as to his spiritual maturity. Think of the damage that has been caused by raising up some celebrity who converts and then is quickly placed in positions of authority. They should be tested as those who are mature, “*that is, by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*” (Heb 5:14).

A Good Outside Reputation – It is alright if they think he is a “Jesus-freak,” but he ought to be known as such a great co-worker or neighbor on so many levels that it almost doesn’t matter – until he brings up that “Jesus-stuff” again.

Biblical Balance – There is a balance between wooden perfectionism on the one hand, and a refusal to obey the plain teaching of these requirements on the other. In our day, a refusal to obey the plain teaching exists in at least two areas.

An Elder Must be a Man – The office of elders (including pastors) is to be limited to and filled by qualified men. Paul already made this clear in 1 Tim 2:11-14 which is why it is implicit in 3:1-7. Women are to be learners and encouraged to learn (there is no scriptural argument for limiting the education of women). We must be careful here to affirm what the Bible plainly teaches. In the context of the formal worship service, a woman is not allowed to teach or rule over a man. Contextually, women are not to be ordained as elders or ministers. This does not mean that men must never learn from women, nor does it mean that women are not co-laborers with men in the work of the gospel ministry in general (Phil 4:3, Acts 18:26, Titus 2:4, Prov 1:8).

In 1 Tim 2:11-14, the reasons given are two: the nature of creation and the circumstances surrounding the fall. Notice that Paul does not appeal to the prevailing customs of Ephesus. In fact, this would be in direct contrast to those customs. Notice that it does correspond to the creation/marriage order and the gospel pictured in marriage. Men, representing Christ as elders, provide Word and sacrament to the church, corporately the bride of Christ, made up of men and women together.

The Faith and Faithfulness of His Children Matter – Especially in conservative and reformed circles, this qualification is often set aside. Excuses are made because “maybe all my children aren’t elect” or “they were good kids until they went off to college.” Such excuses betray another missing qualification which is one of taking covenantal responsibility when you are placed in a position of authority. Our homes and family lives are not only the testing ground for leadership; they are the real thing of leadership, the warp and woof of what will form the church community.

Qualifications for All of Us – These qualifications are for all of us. We are supposed to learn the harvest of all Christian living from those who are given spiritual responsibility for us (Heb. 13:7, 17), so it makes sense that Paul would begin by requiring this of church officers. Leaders in the church are not called to super-spiritual living so that rank-and-file Christians don’t have to worry about it. Rather, they are to set the pattern, so that other Christians might imitate them, as they imitate Christ. All of us are to have all of Christ for all of life.

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