

Qualifications of an elder
First Timothy 3:1-7

1. Paul gives the qualifications for elders who are also called bishops and pastors. They must desire the office. They must be without blame. Elders must be men and each elder must be married to one wife. They must be even-tempered, sensible, hospitable and able to teach. The elder must not be a fighter or contentious, but he must be gentle and not greedy. Elders must have children who are under control. Elders must not be new converts. They must have a good reputation among non-Christians.
2. **Verse 1**
 - 2.1. **1 - Faithful is the saying, If a man seeketh the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. (ASV)**
 - 2.2. **This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop,^[a] he desires a good work. (NKJV)**
 - 2.3. **The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. (ESV)**
 - 2.4. This is the second of the faithful sayings of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus (1 Timothy 1:15; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8).
 - 2.5. **Faithful is the saying** means this is a truth which can be trusted. The office of bishop is a work, not just an honorary position. Faithful suggests “trustworthy.” It simply means that it is something the believer can rely on with complete trust and confidence.
 - 2.6. **Desire** means “to wish or long for; crave; want...to express a wish to obtain; ask for; request.” Vine lists five different Greek words where desire is used as a noun and ten different Greek words where desire is used as a verb. The central idea, especially as used here, means “to desire earnestly...stresses the inward urge rather than the object desired.
 - 2.7. The church needs good men who desire to do this work for God. Paul taught that it is **a good work**.
 - 2.8. The organization of the church, as outlined in the Bible and practiced in the first century, was very simple. Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:21-22). He is the only head of the church. There is no other organization except in the local congregations. The church in Ephesus had bishops who were called elders. Each church is to have bishops who have the qualifications listed here and in Titus 1:5-11. Elders are responsible to Christ who is the head of the church. There is no ecclesiastical hierarchy between elders and Christ. There must always be a plurality of elders over each church.
 - 2.9. In the Bible, the overseers of a local congregation are called by three names and each name has two translations of that name.
 - 2.9.1. They are called **bishops** as in this verse. Bishop means an **overseer** (Acts 20:28). The function of bishops is to oversee the church.
 - 2.9.1.1. In verse 2 *bishop* is from *episcopos*, from which comes *episcopal*. It occurs only five times in the N.T. In Acts 20:28 it is translated “overseers” and applied to the Ephesian elders by Paul. He refers to the “bishops and deacons” at Philippi (Phi.1:1). In Titus 1:7, and following, we again find what is required of a “bishop.” Finally, in 1 Pet.

2:3-5, Christ is called “the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls”It literally means “one who watches over.”

2.9.2. Second, bishops are called **elders** (Acts 20:17). Elder is translated “presbyter” (1 Timothy 4:14). Elder and presbyter indicate age and the wisdom that comes with age.

2.9.3. Third, bishops are called **pastors**, which means shepherds (Ephesians 4:11). In the Bible, the pastors of the church were not the preachers; they were elders or bishops. The pastors are to the church what the shepherds are to a flock of sheep. They are to lead the church, teach the church, feed the church, guide the church, protect the church and take care of the church. The elders, pastors and bishops all refer to the same group of men who oversee the church and take care of it.

3. **2 - The bishop therefore must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, orderly, given to hospitality, apt to teach;**

3.1. The Holy Spirit clearly reveals the positive and negative qualifications of men to be appointed to serve as elders. Those who have these qualifications and are appointed by the church are Holy Spirit-appointed elders, but those who do **not** meet these qualifications, even though appointed by the church, are **not** appointed by the Holy Spirit!

3.2. Paul teaches the qualifications which each bishop must have. **Must** indicates these qualifications are necessary, essential, imperative, binding and obligatory. There are two things taught. First, in order to please God an overseer must have these qualifications. Second, in order to do the job of overseeing, an overseer must have these qualifications.

3.3. **Without reproach** refers to the elder’s reputation among members of the church. He has a good character that is not open to criticism. He is a man known for his pure life and integrity. He has a good reputation and deserves it.

3.3.1. The ASV has “without reproach.” Vine’s says that “one who cannot be laid hold of...who gives no ground for accusation.” Vine’s says the bishop is one “that cannot be laid hold of, hence, not open to censure, irreproachable.” If one is to be taken hold of, there must be a handle, i.e., some obvious flaw in his character upon which one can seize to bring upon him blame and reproach. The candidate for this office should be without a handle.”

3.3.2. It is said of Zacharias and Elizabeth that “they were both righteous before the Lord, walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6). Samuel’s life was such that no charge could be brought against him (1 Sam. 12:1-5).

3.4. **The husband of one wife** means he is a man. He is married. He is not a polygamist. He is faithful to his one and only marriage partner.

3.4.1. The husband of one wife - This forbids celibacy and polygamy and clearly declares that one who serves as an elder must be married. The man who marries again after his first wife is dead is still the husband of one wife (Rom. 7:1-4). The man who is Scripturally divorced and married again is still the husband of one wife (Mat. 19:3-9). **Whether it would be wise to appoint him to serve as an elder might depend upon a number of things.** This verse also eliminates the idea of women ever serving as elders.

- 3.5. **Temperate** means he is well balanced and self controlled. He is not given to excesses. He is moderate. This refers to his physical, moral and mental tastes and habits.
- 3.5.1. To be calm, dispassionate, and circumspect." It refers to an attitude of mind that is reflected in the life.
- 3.5.2. It is an attitude of sober, careful judgment in all matters.
- 3.6. **Sober-minded** means he is discreet and sensible. He is a man of sound mind. He is not swayed by sudden impulses over which he exercises no mastery. The sensible person is always ready and willing to learn.
- 3.6.1. Sober - "Thayer says it means one "of sound mind, sane, in one's senses...curbing one's desires and impulses, self-controlled, temperate."
- 3.6.2. A man of balanced judgment is not carried away with every "wind of doctrine." He should not be given to silly, childish things-although this does not exclude wit or humor. It carries with it the idea of a man who is capable of directing and conducting himself wisely and having a good understanding.
- 3.6.3.
- 3.7. **Orderly** means well behaved, dignified. His outward life exhibits his inner thoughts. He is a man of honor.
- 3.7.1. Of good behavior - " He is a man that lives a well-ordered life. A man that is disorderly in his own life and business would allow the church to become disorderly in conduct also. "Good behavior" covers a multitude of things.
- 3.8. **Given to hospitality** means he is a "lover of strangers." He extends the hospitality of his home to others. It refers to generosity toward guests.
- 3.9. **Apt to teach** means he is capable of teaching the word of God. First, he first must have been taught the word of God. He must know the word of God. He must be living the word of God. In Christianity, a teacher must practice what he teaches. **Apt** means he is qualified to teach.
- 3.9.1. The word means apt and skilled in teaching. This characteristic does not refer to the **willingness** to teach, but to the **ability** to do so. One should have the aptitude for teaching both privately and publicly. Titus 1:9 says, "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers."
- 3.9.2. The word "apt" is a relative term, just as many of these others are; but every man to qualify as an elder must be able to teach to a degree that the church can be edified. Too many serving as elders never read and study the Bible much. Therefore, they do not know the Bible and cannot teach what they do not know. This situation is one of the tragedies in the church.
4. **3 - no brawler, no striker; but gentle, not contentious, no lover of money;**
- 4.1. **No brawler** means he is not given to wine, or addicted to wine. It means one who drinks wine and is quarrelsome. He is not a drunkard. He is not quarrelsome like one who drinks wine whether he is drunk on wine or not.
- 4.1.1. **Not given to wine** - The ASV and the RSV, instead of "not given to wine," have "no brawler." The margin in the KJV says "not ready to quarrel, and offer wrong, as one in wine." A footnote in the ASV has "not quarrelsome over wine." No more dangerous and hurtful practice is known to man than the use of strong drink. This word not only signifies one who is inordinately attached to wine, a winebibber or tippler, but also one who is overbearing, abusive, insolent, whether through wine or otherwise." Using alcohol as a

beverage is sinful (Pro. 23:21-35). The example of an elder is very important.

- 4.1.2. The phrase in verse three consists of two Greek words (***me paroinos***) and, literally translated, means “not beside, by, or at wine” (Vine, 1966, p. 146; Robertson, 1934, p. 613). The phrase is enjoining abstinence, and even the act of situating oneself in the presence of people and places where the consumption of alcoholic beverages is occurring. The ASV translated the expression “brawler” to emphasize the violent behavior that proceeds from the use of alcohol. Calling for elders to be abstinent is consistent with other terms used in the same listing: ***nephalion*** (1 Timothy 3:2)—“free from intoxicants” and “abstinent in respect to wine” (Perschbacher, 1990, p. 284), and ***sophrone*** (Titus 1:8)—“of a sound mind, temperate” (Perschbacher, p. 400), “soberminded” (Moulton and Milligan, 1930, p. 622), “self-controlled” (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 810). **Elders must refrain from the use of intoxicants, and they must not associate with places and people who do use them.**
- 4.2. **No striker** means he is not violent. He is not one who likes to settle things by fighting with his fists. He does not have a chip on his shoulder and is always ready to fight. He is not given to blows. This word means one “ungoverned in temper, ready to resent insult or wrong, real or imaginary. Thayer says that a “striker” is “a pugnacious, contentious, quarrelsome person.”
- 4.3. **Not greedy of filthy lucre** - These words are left out of the ASV in this verse, but they are found in Titus 1:7. A bishop must not be eager for base gain. Phillips translates it “not a money grabber.” Peter says an elder’s oversight must not be motivated by money (1 Pet. 5:2). Men who desire the office as a personal means of profit or whose main interest is material things are unworthy.
- 4.4. **But gentle** means he is kind and considerate to others. He is the kind of person who is willing to yield when it comes to his own rights in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 6:7. He does not demand his rights.
- 4.5. **Not contentious** means he is not quarrelsome. He is not one who is always looking for a fight. He is not always arguing.
 - 4.5.1. The contentiousness condemned here is that of a person who contends with reference to his own likes and dislikes where no principle of Truth or righteousness is involved. There are men who meet all other qualifications but they are contentious. They will not surrender to others even in matters of judgment; they want their way.
 - 4.5.2. This does not mean that one is not to stand and contend for the Truth, but many are ready to contend over unimportant matters. Such always live in torment and strife. Even truth and right should not be maintained in a contentious way.
- 4.6. **No lover of money** means he is not greedy for money. He will not get money by dishonest means. His main concern in life is not to be rich. He has principles that cannot be corrupted by money.
 - 4.6.1. Not covetous - Literally it means “not loving silver (money).” The NIV has “not a lover of money.” Elders must realize that life is more than possessions. Jesus said, “take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). Paul stated that we are to ‘put to death’ “covetousness which

is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). Covetous elders are holding down many congregations in their work. They will not “turn loose” of the money. They object to a building program, an adequate educational program, a mission program, to Gospel meetings, and many other things, all because it **will cost too much to do these things**. This does not mean that elders should jump at everything the preacher and the congregation suggest, but they must “drive the work of the Lord, and a covetous man will not do this.

5. **4 - one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;**

5.1. The elder must be a man. He must be married. He must have children. He must exercise loving leadership to his wife and children. He must train his children in such a way that they are obedient children. He must teach them to be respectful. They must be respectful of God, of their parents, of other people and of the laws of the land. The training ground for an elder is in the home.

5.2. **One that ruleth well his own house**

5.2.1. Ruleth is from proistemi, which, according to Vine, means literally “to stand before,” and thus “to attend to (indicating care and diligence) and hence “is translated to rule....” Joshua could speak for his house: “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Jos. 24:15). God said, concerning Abraham: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him.. .”(Gen. 18:19).

5.2.2. The man that is ruled by his wife should not be appointed as an elder. Brethren should observe the wife and children of a prospective elder. Do they respect him? Do those who know him best regard him as competent in this regard?

5.3. **Having his children in subjection with all gravity**

5.3.1. His children are to be in submission to his will. The children are to exhibit that seriousness and sobriety of conduct, which is in accordance with their father’s office.

5.3.2. Titus 1:6 states that he must have “faithful children not accused or riot or unruly.” The ASV states “having children that believe.” This raises several questions. How many children should a man have? Is a man with one child qualified? Should all of his children be Christians?

5.3.3. How many children must one have to be qualified? Some contend that the statement means there must be a plurality and that all of them must be Christians. Some contend that the qualification means one or more children with at least one being a Christian. Thayer says the Greek word teknon is sometimes used for “offspring,” sometimes for “children” (Mat. 2:18), and sometimes it is used for “child (Luke 1:7). The term means either one or more.

5.3.4. What is meant by “faithful children” in Titus 1:6? According to Thayer the Greek word translated “faithful” here means “one who has become convinced that Jesus is the Messiah and the author of salvation.” The same word is used in Acts 2:37-41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 15:9, and in each case it describes obedient believers that are converts to the Gospel of Christ. Thus a man’s children who have reached the age of accountability **are** to be Christians, for that man to meet the eldership qualifications. It does not

follow, however, that once-faithful children who fall away as adults necessarily disqualify a man.

5.3.5. A man whose wife and children are not members of the church cannot qualify as an elder of the church. More trouble arises in the church when this one qualification is ignored and men are selected whose wives cause trouble and whose children are unfaithful. When you try to lead and direct people under such conditions they mock you and resent your trying to tell them how to live when your own family is in such a horrific condition.

6. **5 - (but if a man knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)**

6.1. The same qualities, needed for the proper leadership of a family, are the qualities needed for the leadership of the church. If a man cannot manage his own family, he will not be able to manage the family of God.

6.2. A man's rule or management of his own family demonstrates his ability or inability to help rule the church.

7. **6 - not a novice, lest being puffed up he fall into the condemnation of the devil.**

7.1. **Not a novice** - The word *neophytes* is found only here in the New Testament. "Literally it means 'newly planted' and is so used in the Septuagint. In Christian literature alone it is used figuratively in the sense of 'newly converted.'" Since one must be old enough to have believing children, having his house in subjection to himself and to God, this would certainly preclude a "youngman"-minus these qualifications - serving as an elder of the church. It would also eliminate one just recently "born into the kingdom," regardless of his age. Certainly a "novice" would not have the experience to oversee the church. The time period here is probably not as important as the progress or lack of progress of a man in growth and understanding of God's Word, There were some among the Hebrews who were still "novices" (they had not grown) after thirty years (Heb. 5:12-14). Elders were appointed in some congregations within a short period of time after the church was established (Acts 14:23). No one should remain a novice long after his conversion.

7.2. A novice would tend to be lifted up with pride at being immediately elevated to the highest office in the church. He is likely to succumb to the same condemnation into which the devil fell. Paul intimated here that pride was the cause of the devil's fall. Much of the apostasy in the church is due to this reason. Paul is simply stating that a young convert should not be elevated to such a high office. Condemnation will await one who thus falls, just as it did the devil.

8. **7 - Moreover he must have good testimony from them that are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.**

8.1. **Them that are without** are people in the community who are not Christians. The elder must have a good reputation from those who are not members of the church. The church must be a light to the world. If the church appoints a man to be an elder who the world thinks is bad, this man will not be a light to the world. He will bring reproach upon the name of Christ.

8.2. Christians must practice what they preach. The world must see Christians as sincere even if they do not accept the truth of the gospel. The world does not like Christians; however, they can usually tell if Christians are sincere or not. If the prospective elder does not have a good reputation among non-Christians, he may have flaws that will subject him to being overcome more easily by Satan.