

“Elders Among Us”
Titus 1:5-9
October 23rd, 2016

Just two weeks from this coming Tuesday on November 8th, we reach the end of what seems an extremely long and tiring march to electing a new President of these United States. One thing that absolutely fascinates me about such public elections is the varying expectations and qualifications we place on candidates.

Our Constitution spells out 3 requirements for President. It instructs that no person except a natural born citizen, or a citizen of the United States, at the time of the adoption of the Constitution, shall be eligible for the office of President. Further, prospective candidates must be at least 35 years of age, and they must have at least 14 years as a resident within the United States.

All presidential candidates must meet those minimum qualifications. But, there are widely different traits and characteristics candidates bring to the table. For starters, they belong to a particular political party or run independently of party affiliation. During the primary season this year, we’ve had the privilege of casting our votes for the candidates we thought best to serve us in public office. To do that, we maintain a grid of values and beliefs that we apply to each candidate, finally choosing the one that best mirrors our own values and beliefs. It seems to get more difficult when we get to the general election.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, it is probable that you use God’s Word to help you decide the best prospect for President, senator, justice, representative, or justice. You’ve heard it said by some that we’re not electing the pastor or theologian of the United States, which is true, but as Christians our Bible-based beliefs should also compel us to choose candidates who share our world and life view. And, there are many issues and party platforms that help us with our votes, things like the sanctity of human life, biblical marriage, economics, and protecting Constitutional freedoms for us and future generations.

What do you think ought to be qualifications to serve God’s church as an elder?

- * Having read the Bible entirely through at least once.
- * Knowing where in the Bible the Ten Commandments are listed.
- * Being able to list the Ten Commandments from memory.
- * How about memorizing **John 3:16** and/or **Romans 8:28**.
- * Having read the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms* and the *Presbyterian Church in America Book of Church Order*.

We should hope that our elders would know where to go in the Bible for many of life’s issues. The elders are the ones who shepherd God’s people, and their primary ministry is the Word of God and prayer. *Shouldn’t those whom God has raised up to be the leaders of a congregation meet moral and experiential standards as well?* Yes, they should.

Today, we conclude a very brief 3-sermon series on the Eldership of the Church. Beginning today and running for the next 30 days through November 22nd, communicant members of this congregation may nominate eligible male members of the congregation to train for the office of

Elder. The intent of that training period is to ensure those nominated meet the qualifications of sacred Scripture.

The Theme: God has created an organizational structure for His Church. Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, and He has delegated responsibility for the ministry of the local congregation (body) to elders. Elders are entrusted with the care of the souls of those for whom Christ lived and died. Two primary New Testament passages discuss the qualifications of elders (**1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9**). Today, we'll look primarily at the latter text.

Titus 1:5-9:

“For this reason I (Paul) left you (Titus) in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— ⁶if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. ⁷For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, ⁸but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, ⁹holding 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.”

I've divided this passage into four categories of qualification for elders. Elders should be:

- MP 1 – Men of Character;**
- MP 2 – Men of Commitment;**
- MP 3 – Men of (self) Control;**
- MP 4 – Men of Conviction**

Opening question – *Why did Paul direct Titus to appoint elders in every city?* To put in order (and perhaps to restore order) what was lacking. For the local congregation to be in order, it must have good leadership. Elders are God's representatives for that purpose.

Paul then lists several qualities to help Titus (and us) decide who should serve the church as elders. First, they must be **Men of Character**. A portion of one's character is known by integrity, which is wholesome living out the gospel message in one's life.

A middle-aged business executive approached the front entrance of the office building in which he worked. A young feminist walked up at the same moment, so the executive stepped back and held the door open for her to pass on through. She looked at him and said with annoyance, “Don't hold the door for me just because I'm a lady.”

To her surprise, he looked right back and replied, “I'm not. I'm holding it open because I'm a gentleman.”

The first qualification for elders listed in this passage is actually mentioned in *two* different verses (6 & 7) - Elders must be **blameless**. This does not mean that elder candidates are sinless. If it mean that, no one would be qualified to serve the Church as an elder (except Jesus!) No, to be blameless means qualified candidates should not be chargeable with **offense**. They must be above reproach.

Jumping down to verse 8, we see another character qualification - Elders must be **lovers of good**. This means that they are men who love virtue (in contrast to vice). To be a lover of good is to promote **good** in others. They are Christians who are ready to do what is beneficial for others.

Staying in that 8th verse, we see another character qualification listed. Elders must be **just**. When we consider that there are three biblical courts within the Lord's Church (the local court is the Session of a congregation, the regional body is the Presbytery, and the world-wide court is the General Assembly), elders must be fair and impartial as judges in the church – they must be just.

Verse 8 also says that elders must be **holy**. To be holy, one must first be a believer in Jesus Christ. There is no holiness in this fallen world apart from Him. So, elders must be **Godly** men whose lives are marked by the pursuit of holiness in all they do, think, and say.

As we go through each of these four categories of qualification for elders, I'll ask you to consider how you are meeting them in your own life. For certain, if you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, you cannot. In fact, if your life were to end today (and it might), and you're not a Christian, your eternity will be dreadful and miserable. To you, on the authority of God's Word, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, I exhort you to turn away from yourself and to Jesus Christ for salvation. Let me or one of the elders know how you can know this for certain.

For all of you, how do you measure up? Are you a man or woman of character?

The second category of qualifications in this passage is that elders are to be **Men of Commitment**. This means that when they make promises or take vows, they keep them! As believers in Jesus Christ, they've made the commitment to be productive, involved members of a local congregation. They aren't dating the church, they've married her! They are not passive in their membership, they support the church with their presence, their time, and their finances.

Verse 6 reveals that if elder candidates are married, their wives are to be the focus of their affections. Elders, if married, are to be one woman men. They must be **sexually pure**, giving themselves only to their wives.

Further, if married, and blessed with children, the men who would be elders in God's Church have raised, or are raising, their children to be God-fearing young men and women. The children of elders should not be prodigals, which means **living wildly**. Just as the man himself must be above reproach, so the elder candidate's children must not bring harm or disrepute to the church.

Of course, this raises a couple of questions. *Does an elder have to be married with children?* No, he does not have to be married. Neither the text here in **Titus 1:6**, nor over in **I Timothy 3:2** require marriage of elder candidates. But, he does have to be sexually pure, even if he is not married. He should not have put himself in the path of great temptation, or place the church's reputation in question, by living in sin with a woman outside the bond of marriage. Both verses **do** say that if elder candidates are married, they must have only one wife; she must be the sole devotee of his affection.

There's another question the text presents. *How are we to think biblically of the elder candidate with an unbelieving wife and/or children?* Let's consider those separately, though briefly. *If a Christian husband has a wife who is a non-believer, should he be considered for service as an elder in the church?* Probably not, especially so if the Christian man married an unbelieving wife. Marriage is for both unbelievers *and* believers in Christ; they shouldn't get married if one is, and one isn't. Scripture is clear that is sin. For instance, this is **2 Corinthians 6:14** – “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” The answer is “none!”

It may be that the couple were not Christians when they got married, and the husband later professed saving faith in Christ. Even though they were properly eligible for marriage to each other since they were equally yoked, serving the church as an elder could bring great grief upon the believing man's home life since his wife doesn't also serve Jesus. **1 Timothy 3:5** gives a scriptural principle that if a man's home is not in spiritual order, he cannot be expected to bring order to the larger family, Christ's Church. Practically speaking, the man in this situation isn't ready, and he shouldn't be placed in the potentially difficult position of trying to lead a church when his home life needs his attention more.

And, that brings us to the elder candidate's children. The godly father realizes that he has an important role and responsibility in raising his children to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. That requires him to use all the means of grace to raise godly seed. As we are reminded during every baptism of our covenant children, the father should be praying with and for their children, reading and teaching his children the Scriptures (a good tool to help with that is the *Children's* and *Shorter* catechisms), and he must assimilate his children in the body life of the local congregation (which God also commands to teach all people, especially so the children of the church) to live and serve God in Christ Jesus. While they might not yet be believers, elder candidates with children at home should place a priority on the salvation of their children.

But, what if a Christian father has adult children that do not walk with the Lord? Does that render him ineligible for service as an elder in the church? Not necessarily. The realization of salvation for his adult children may yet be in the future. The Bible teaches that salvation is from the Lord, not from man. It is Jesus who saves, not us. Our responsibility is to plant seeds, and water those planted. It is the Lord's responsibility to bring the increase! If the father with unbelieving adult children did all that he could to bring the gospel into their lives when they lived under his authority at home, then he could do no more. His hope for his children's salvation is in God's hands; he should still be praying for his adult children, and witnessing to them as he has opportunity. He could be a marvelous elder, too.

How do you measure up? Are you a man or woman of commitment; a person of your word?

We've seen that elder candidates must be **men of character**, and they must be **men of commitment**. They must also be **Men of (self) Control**. They must have a grip on themselves!

Verse 7 teaches they must be in control of their temper and passions, not hot-headed, and not having short fuses on their tempers. This 7th verse also teaches they must be in control of their use of alcohol and money. A man who cannot drink responsibly cannot be trusted to rule the

church responsibly. Likewise, the man who is greedy for money cannot be trusted to make good financial use of the Lord's money entrusted to the church.

Verse 8 teaches elder candidates must be hospitable, meaning they must have a love for **strangers**. This means making visitors to the worship services and fellowship events feel comfortable and welcome; it could mean they make sure visitors have lunch with someone in the church, if they don't do so themselves. It surely means they'd open their homes for travelers.

What this category comes down to is this - to be in control of themselves, the elder must be under the **control** of the Holy Spirit. Such men will be readily and obviously submissive to the leading of God's Spirit in his life.

So, how do you measure up? Are you a man or woman of self-control?

The fourth and final category is that elder candidates must be **Men of Conviction**. Their convictions are scriptural ones. They love truth (synonym for God's Word), and they have the desire to teach it.

How can you tell if a man has a Love for God's Word, the Holy Bible? He oozes it; he bleeds it. It's in his hand when he comes to Sunday School, Bible study, and church, and it's regularly in his conversation. He's looking at God's Word each day at home or work, and he's got it open before him when he's at the church.

Verse 9 teaches that the elder candidate is able to exhort and encourage others. The Greek word for encourage here is *parakaleo*, the very same name for this year's recipient ministry of the Women in the Church Love Gift which we saw in the video earlier in this service. True encouragement of others is rooted in God's Word. Elders should be ready with a passage to help those in need of encouragement.

Elder candidates must also be able to convict those who oppose by **doctrine and teaching** what God's Word has to say about matters. They must be able to expose the errors of those who rebel. That means they must be students of God's Word.

How do you measure up? Are you a person of conviction? Are you a student of God's Word?

For sure, each and every believer in Jesus Christ should strive to meet such qualifications as we've studied here for elders. It's interesting, too, when we use such qualifications to help us decide political candidates – *if you don't measure up, then what will you do to bring yourself closer in adherence to these standards?*

A few things about the 30-day nomination process, as this message comes to a close:

1 – Don't nominate someone, just to nominate someone. It is better to have few qualified elders, than many unqualified ones.

2 – Don't raid the Diaconate to populate the Session. We've just installed four men to repopulate the Diaconate, and they are busily ministering among us. Pray for them!

3 – Make doubly sure if you nominate men that they are qualified. Ask them if they've had a conflict with others in the Church; if you don't know, ask if their children are walking with the Lord, and if not, what they did to raise them to do so; ask them about their personal devotional life.

4 – If you are a male member of the church who has been asked to consider being nominated, don't respond immediately – take it to the Lord in prayer. If you're married, discuss it with your wife and adult children. Ask the person nominating you why they think you are qualified. Seek the input of other godly friends and the elders.

Elders in the church are to be:

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MP 2 – Men of Commitment;

MP 3 – Men of (self) Control;

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