

## WHO QUALIFIES TO BE AN ELDER OF THE CHURCH?

based on Titus 1:5-9

along with parallel readings of Scripture:

**Exodus 18:13-23**

**1 Samuel 16:1-13**

### Introduction to the idea of qualification

It's a very difficult question I'm addressing this morning, and we're seriously handicapped because:

- *anyone* we look at is flawed anyway; and
- we can never know, for sure, the heart of man.

We're up against it – because only God has inside knowledge ... read 1 Samuel 16:7.

In our own church, recently, I *really felt it* as I took part in electing two new elders at Reservoir – it troubled me, because:

- *anyone* I looked at was flawed anyway; and
- it was MI ... because I could *never know*, for sure, the heart of man.

How I wished there was something to guide me.

It's been said that it's like buying a second-hand car. Ever done that? Risky, isn't it?

- every car you look at is flawed anyway, simply because it's used ... even the finest 2<sup>nd</sup>-hand car is flawed; and
- you can never know, for sure, its hidden workings.

Back to the eldership ... has God given us any guidance? Yes, of course he has, and we find, for one example, the teaching of Paul to Titus.

Maybe it's been a while since you've read this powerful little letter of Scripture. Paul writes with a stated purpose: to build up the faith of God's people so they will live godly lives (vs. 1). The setting is that it was written for the people of Crete. Titus was commissioned to remain as pastor to Island of Crete ... to finish the discipling work that Paul started. And, the question is: HOW? How does good discipling get done? The work was to be carried out through elected elders in every town, wherever there was a group of believers gathered as a church (vs. 5)

Let's read it again: Titus 1:5-9 ... Remembering the question: Who qualifies to be an elder of the church?

The way I'm presenting this to you today is with:

- one key summary description;
- a four-part checklist of qualifications.

### 1. The one-word summary description (vs. 6 and then repeated in vs. 7)

Can you have a one-word description of an elder of the church? If so, it's: "blameless" NB used twice. Literally: = "without charge"; or "without accusation against their name".

[of interest to some as a word study: this is exactly what he says to young Timothy in his supervision of new churches ... after appointing elders he suggests further that they appoint deacons and in this he says a deacon must be "blameless". The context is helpful (1 Tim 3:10)].

I think this word sets the standard for everything else we're to cover from this passage of Scripture. Of course, it's not the same thing as sinless. Please don't read: "blameless" as "sinless" otherwise Paul, describing himself as the worst of sinners, would not qualify as a leader of the church. What it does mean is that there must be nothing obvious about the

person that's inconsistent with being a follower of Jesus. Nothing outstanding that disqualifies him from being an example to the flock entrusted to his care.

The rest of the teaching explains "blameless".

## **2. Four-part checklist of qualifications (vs. 6-9)**

Ever seen a Roadworthy Certificate? When buying a 2<sup>nd</sup>-hand car? It's intense ... pages of specifications and tests and ... each one ... a separate line-entry with a little box to be ticked off ... and then the whole page is signed-off at the bottom by a qualified mechanic.

Consider this like the Roadworthiness checklist for elders. Only four boxes to tick.

### **a) Would you want your church to be run like the man's home? (vs. 6)**

This is to flush out the man who has one face for church, but the real face comes out at home. We are to look at a man's family life

Specifically, "the husband of but one wife". Which is an attempted translation of a curious Greek expression Paul uses: "a one-woman man". He uses it again in his letter to Timothy on the same subject: "a one-woman man". (1 Timothy 3:2). Whatever it means exactly, it goes to faithfulness in marriage.

This much for sure: You can't be a "one-woman man" if you aren't in love with your wife, not respecting your wife, giving her consideration. You can't be a "one-woman man" if you've got eyes for another woman (lust in the heart), or you've divorced without proper reason and married again.

Sexual purity is essential.

When taken along with the rest of vs. 6 we get the sense:

- devoted and faithful as a husband
- devoted and faithful as a father

Yes, of course, our children grow (that's a habit of theirs) and they grow up and leave the home and make their own decisions. This qualification speaks to when they're in the home and part of your family and under your direct supervision. (Somewhere, never quite sure when it happened ... but there's a moment when you suddenly realise they're no longer under your control).

Bottom line ...

Ask: Would I be happy if the church was run like this man's home is run? Does he honour Jesus Christ in the home? Does he treat his wife with love and does he speak of his wife favourably and give her honour? Are his children under control ... living good and godly lives?

### **b) Are there any danger signs of a life out-of-control? (vs. 7)**

You know the signs of a car-in-trouble? Transmission grinds from neutral into reverse. The engine belt begins to sing. Steering wanders across the road. Breaks shudder. Shockers clunk.

Are there danger signs in a man's life? When we recite these ... don't limit the exploration of this question to these five words ... look wider than just this five-point check list: Are there danger signs in a man's life. Or, the contrary, are the major places where ungodliness breaks out? Where are the five areas of weakness? For each I'll read our NIV translation and then a word or two to elucidate its meaning (not that these words need much more explanation):  
• not overbearing = this warning is about the self-willed man, stuck in his own preferences and, in personal stubbornness, will not give way – the overbearing man says: "it's my way ... or the highway". An overbearing leader crushes the spirit of the people.

- not quick-tempered = warning about the man easily angered; consider how that gospel life in the church is conducted in relationships, that a sinner comes to know Jesus as Saviour through relationships ... all of which are fractured if a church leader explodes in a fit of temper. You do not want as a leader someone who is irritable, fiery and unpredictable.
- not given to drunkenness = the heavy drinker who is then impaired in judgment and skewed in behaviour by indulgence in beer, wine or spirits.
- not violent = speaks for itself, there's no place for an elder who's lifted a hand in *any* form of domestic violence, or getting his way by force.
- not pursuing dishonest gain = greed.

Capturing all these under a check-list of danger signs, because any one of them is a sign of a life not under Holy Spirit control ... because the Holy Spirit's fruit is the opposite:

- love, joy, peace,
- patience, kindness, goodness,
- faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

One last thing on this second point: did you notice that they are in the present tense? They're examining a man's life now. Before election to eldership ... or even prior to his conversion .... you may have had a past ... a past life when things might have been out of control, and this *may not necessarily* disqualify you from service now. I mean, we love the Gospel of Jesus Christ and we know that Jesus loves to turn lives around. We rejoice in changed lives.

### c) Does he love and practice good things? (vs. 8)

Here's where it's hard – we cannot know the heart of a man. The story from 1 Samuel 16 showed us that again ... read vs. 7 again.

Given that's true, that only God knows a man's heart ... but where does a man's heart show? In what he loves.

Not a new concept – God has always looked for righteousness in church leaders. Even as far back as Moses' day ... when it was suggested to Moses that he appoint helpers to assist him in leadership ... BUT not just anyone: read Exodus 18:21 ...

- capable men
- fearing God
- trustworthy
- honest

Back to eldership ... two things in particular jump out of vs. 8:

- he must be hospitable  
[Now, we tend to restrict this word, and whenever we hear it we think it means: "Come home for lunch" ... which is a wonderful thing to do and right, but we ought not restrict it to that because it means more than that. Literally, it means: "love of the stranger" It suggests someone who can share his life with another, and the "sharing" might be fellowship over a meal. But it might also be the personal contact, the visit, the phone call, befriending the newcomer and sharing life with them. Just in case someone who is less than extroverted says "But I can't cook". It actually doesn't depend on your cooking skills. It's spending time with the newcomer, opening yourself to them. You don't have to feed people to be hospitable. Will you let your guard down and invite the stranger to come closer?]
- is he a lover of good things?

- And all the things that follow – self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined = all signs of the Holy Spirit at work in your life. All are signs that you’re a believer in God’s Word, a lover of Jesus Christ and a man of prayer.

**d) Does he know and treasure gospel doctrine? (vs. 9)**

Not that the elder is called to be a preacher, but he must run deep in God’s Word and know how to teach explain and defend it.

In fact, do you notice the three aspects of this?

- holding to sound doctrine;
- encouraging others to do so also;
- recognising and refuting false teaching when it comes. Eldership in the church is a bit like a cricket team:
  - those who bat, specialists because they bat better and longer than others;
  - those who bowl, specialists because they bowl better and faster than others;
  - those who keep wickets (supreme athletes of the game!);

but they all must know how to play the game, all must catch, throw and hit the ball.

In a church session, the elders have varied gifts and do different jobs, some preach, some teach, some visit, but all must have competence in the Word, to:

- hold to sound doctrine;
- encourage others to do so also;
- recognise and refute false teaching when it comes.

Four questions to explore for church leadership ...

- a) Would you want your church to be run like this man’s home? (vs. 6)
- b) Are there any danger signs of a life out-of-control? (vs. 7)
- c) Does he love and practice good things? (vs. 8)
- d) Does he know and treasure gospel doctrine? (vs. 9)

**Take home lessons**

*a) It’s not a question of highest score*

– (best of five) or 9/10 ... all areas should be addressed

- in case someone thinks: “how does 3/4 rate?”
- it’s all, or nothing

*b) It’s more to do with character than ability or success*

Why for life? Because ordinarily we’re judging character, not performance.

No USED BY date. For life ... BUT, it doesn’t mean we have to be stuck with bad elders.

- If an elder fails morally, what then? Are we stuck with him for ever? No, the eldership brings that man under church discipline and deals with the issue.
- If an elder gets lazy, and doesn’t do what’s expected. Are we held back by his laziness for ever? No, the other elders meet with him, inquire as to why and work with him to encourage him and restore to usefulness.

*c) we’re not talking about the spiritual elite who live a special life*

... this is the regular Christian life

ask the same questions of yourself:

- a) Would you want the church to be run like your home? (vs. 6)
  - b) Are there any danger signs of your life out-of-control? (vs. 7)
  - c) Do you love and practice good things? (vs. 8)
  - d) Do you know and treasure gospel doctrine? (vs. 9)
- where we are lacking ... points us to Jesus and in prayer: “help us to grow as disciples”