

A Brief Summary of the Qualifications for an Elder

by Steve Mathewson (July 2007)

Above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2) / **Blameless** (Titus 1:6) – This means no one can point to obvious inconsistencies or character flaws in an elder's life. Of course, to be blameless does not imply sinlessness.

The husband of but one wife (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6) – The expression is literally "one-woman man." The qualification has to do with sexual purity and marital faithfulness. In the Apostle Paul's culture, it may have been intended to prohibit polygamy. A contemporary concern is divorce/remarriage. I believe that a man's past divorce/remarriage may or may not disqualify him from serving as an elder. His present character is the issue.

Temperate, respectable (1 Tim. 3:2) / **Self-controlled, disciplined** (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8) – These four terms refer to orderliness of life. While 'temperate' can refer specifically to the use of alcohol, it refers here to avoiding excess, that is being free from anything that might enslave. 'Self-controlled' focuses on a person's thinking and describes one who exercises good judgment and makes thoughtful decisions. 'Disciplined' means in full control of oneself.

Hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8) – This refers to loving others by opening up one's home and resources to them.

Able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2) / **Hold firmly to the trustworthy message** (Titus 1:9) – An elder must understand the Bible's teaching and be able to communicate it. I do not believe that this requires all elders to be comfortable with preaching in a large group setting. But every elder must be able to distinguish between truth and error and then to communicate this at least in one-on-one discussions and small group settings. As Titus 1:9 points out, an elder must be able to refute false teaching. All this means an elder has a good grasp of the core ideas or doctrines of the Bible and can defend them against conflicting ideas.

Not given to drunkenness (Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7) – An elder must be free from drunkenness and addiction to alcohol.

Not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome (1 Tim. 3:3) / **Not quick-tempered, not violent** (Titus 1:7) – While an elder must contend for the faith, he must not be a disagreeable person who loves to pick a fight! He does not blow up or lash out at others. Nor does he thrive on controversy. Rather, he responds patiently.

Not a lover of money (1 Tim. 3:3) / **Not pursuing dishonest gain** (Titus 1:7) – An elder must not be driven by materialism or making money. Nor can he simply serve for a paycheck if he receives a salary from the church (see 1 Tim. 5:17). He must be completely honest in financial matters.

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect (1 Tim. 3:3) / **A man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient** (Titus 1:6) – There is evidence of loving leadership in an elder's home. The expression "believe" in Titus 1:6 is actually an adjective that means "faithful." So, the requirement is not the conversion of children but that children are under control as a result of proper parental discipline.

He must not be a recent convert (1 Tim. 3:6) – The concern is that a new Christian may be susceptible to pride if he is moved into an elder role too quickly. How long is recent? Less than a year? Less than five years? It depends on the church's circumstances. Elders should have sufficient experience following Christ before leading his church.

A good reputation with outsiders (Tim. 3:7) – The issue is what the non-Christian community – such as co-workers and neighbors – has to say about this man.

Not overbearing (Titus 1:7) – An elder does not have to get his own way, nor does he constantly push his agendas.

One who loves what is good, upright, holy (Titus 1:8) – These three qualities focus on living out godliness. An elder loves what is morally honorable and pleasing to God. An elder is just and righteous and fair. An elder is devout and seeks to please God.

Here are a few additional qualities for elders from other New Testament texts. An elder must be willing and even have the desire to serve (1 Peter 5:2; see 1 Tim. 3:1). He must be committed to the pastoring/shepherding role (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). He must use power properly and be able to lead by example (1 Peter 5:3; 1 Tim. 4:12). Finally, he must be so committed to growth in his life and teaching that his progress is observable (1 Tim. 4:12-16).