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WHO QUALIFIES TO BE A CHURCH LEADER?

Can we afford to be selective? Don't we create a lot of problems for ourselves if we insist on "blameless" leaders? Or are our self-inflicted wounds far worse when our churches are left in the hands of the wrong men? How much disappointment, discouragement, bad will, and loss of spiritual effectiveness occur when unqualified leaders make decisions and set the pace for the people of God?

To help us avoid such pitfalls, Dan Vander Lugt and Kurt De Haan have written this booklet to focus our attention on the biblical qualifications for church leadership. They will show us why this is an issue that concerns all of us.

Martin R. De Haan II

LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD MEN

Recruiters for the U.S. Marine Corps tell us that they are “looking for a few good men.” Not everyone qualifies for this highly disciplined and well-respected company of soldiers who have often led the way into battle. Recruits must survive a series of grueling physical and mental tests before they become full-fledged Marines.

Christ is looking for a few good men to lead His church and to model the godly attitudes and actions that should mark all mature Christians. He’s selective about who should guide His troops into spiritual battle and who should care for and nurture His people. The qualifications are extensive and essential to the spiritual health of a congregation. To

compromise on the standards is to risk crises of character and morale within the body and a diminished testimony in the world. Many of our churches are experiencing a lack of godliness and effectiveness because of a failure to train and select qualified leaders.

These few good men are to model godly attitudes and actions for all.

What are the leadership positions that Christ wants filled? Two types of church leaders are given special attention in the New Testament: elders and deacons. In the apostle Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus, he outlined the qualifications for those who would lead by teaching, ruling, equipping,

counseling, modeling, rebuking, encouraging, protecting, loving, and sacrificially serving. Before describing the character qualifications of elders and deacons, we should first examine the specific role each type of leader is to play in the life of a local church.

What is an elder?

An elder, in Old Testament times, was an older man who held a position of leadership over a family or tribe. Moses, for example, was assisted by elders (Ex. 3:16,18; 24:1). These men, by virtue of their age and experience, were respected leaders.

In early New Testament times, during the beginnings of the church, a person's age was also a consideration. Although Bible scholars are not in agreement about the minimum age when a person could be called an elder, some have suggested the age of 30. Jesus was 30

years old when he began His public ministry (Lk. 3:23). And New Testament scholar Merrill C. Tenney has noted that members of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, had to be at least 30 years old. In addition, several of the character qualities listed in 1 Timothy and Titus can be evident only in a man with years of proven character and maturity.

Age alone, however, does not guarantee maturity or spirituality. A relatively young man could qualify. When Paul told Timothy, "Let no one despise your youth" (1 Tim. 4:12), Timothy was probably in his mid-thirties and he held a position of authority over churches in the area of Ephesus. Timothy was to show by his godly life that he should be followed. Young men who are in positions of leadership in our churches today must

likewise demonstrate by their life that although they may not be senior citizens, they are spiritually wise and mature.

What is an elder to do? Some churches consider the term *elder* to be synonymous with pastor. Other churches choose a group of men to serve as elders, often with a head elder or pastor assuming the role of leading in the teaching and preaching of God's Word (1 Tim. 5:1).

Elder, pastor (or *shepherd*), and *overseer* (also translated *bishop* or *presbyter*) are terms used to describe different aspects of the same office (see Acts 20:17,28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1; 5:17; Ti. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-2). An elder is to:

- “Rule” the church with a servant attitude (1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-3).
- “Equip the saints” by teaching the Scriptures

(Eph. 4:11-12;
1 Tim. 4:6,11,13,16;
2 Tim. 4:2-4).

- Protect the flock from false or distorted doctrine (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; Ti. 1:10-16).
- Shield the church from the work of unruly and divisive individuals (2 Tim. 2:14-18,23-26; Ti. 3:9-11).

The apostle Paul said, “If a man desires the position of a bishop [or elder], he desires a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1).

Individuals should be encouraged to demonstrate Christian character and to develop their leadership abilities. But the apostle also went on to say, “A bishop then *must* be” It is great to desire to be a leader, but a person *must* meet the qualifications. The list does not require sinless perfection, but it does

require a high level of Christian character and a mature faith in Christ.

What is a deacon's role? The term *deacon* comes from a Greek word meaning “one who serves.”

—●—
For Paul, the high standards for leadership were not optional.
—●—

The seven men mentioned in Acts 6:1-6 functioned as deacons in a limited sense as they assisted in the distribution of food to needy widows. From what we see happening in Acts 6 and what is described elsewhere in the New Testament, as local churches were established and grew, the official role of deacon was to assist the elders so that they could give themselves to teaching and prayer. Philippians 1:1

and 1 Timothy 3:8-13 closely tie the role of deacon to the work of the elders, and we may assume that deacons were administrators of the many details in the life of the church. That's why many churches today assign to the deacons the very important matters of the church's financial and physical needs. (Some churches have “trustees” who fill this role.)

What should set these individuals apart from others in the church? The biblical standards for church leadership are personal character qualities, not college or seminary degrees, business administrative skills, or personal charisma. We may tend to select our leaders on the basis of personal success or social standing. But Paul said to search deeper, to look for character qualities that

reveal a deep-seated faith reflecting integrity, maturity, and stability.

The standards for elders are high because they are to be “examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3). And because deacons also are in positions of responsibility, they are to be good examples of what it means to grow in Christlikeness.

How do these qualifications apply to everyone? The qualifications for church leaders are, for the most part, characteristics of a person who is taking his faith in Christ seriously, growing in his knowledge of God, and maturing in his Christian life. Therefore, this study should help us examine our lives to see if we are becoming Christlike in word and action. Even though we may not hold the office of elder or deacon, we should be maturing and be able to be an example to

others. Like the apostle Paul, we too should be able to say, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

The qualifications for church leaders are characteristics of a person who is taking his faith seriously, growing in his knowledge of God, and maturing in his Christian life.

In the following pages we will examine the qualities outlined by the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. As you study these qualifications, examine yourself to see if you measure up. Then, evaluate your church leaders and your church’s selection process to make sure that the right people are leading your church.

WHO QUALIFIES TO BE A CHURCH LEADER?

During local, state, and national election campaigns, voters are barraged by the claims of candidates who attempt to convince the electorate that they are the most qualified to be president, senator, legislator, governor, mayor, councilman, or some other public official. Campaign rhetoric can be brutal. Unfortunately, the winner isn't always the most qualified person. The advantage often goes to the one with the best "media image."

The scene should be very different in a fellowship of believers who are selecting church leaders. Politicking, boasting, power games, and popularity contests have no

place in the church. Personal character and spiritual maturity should be the key issues for the selection of leaders.

Both elders and deacons have a direct influence on the spiritual well-being of the congregation. It is not surprising, then, that the Scriptures list a number of specific spiritual qualifications.

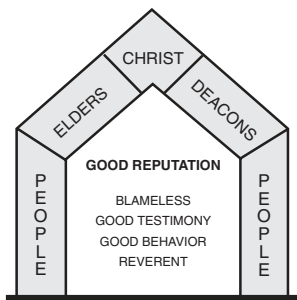
“Too often the important thing is personality, not spirituality.”
—Warren W. Wiersbe

The most extensive list of qualifications for leaders is found in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9. Although the requirements are more extensive for elders than for deacons, the similarities between the character qualities are great (see page

31 for a separate listing). Both elders and deacons are to be “blameless” in character (1 Tim. 3:2,10). The main difference in qualifications is that elders are to be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2) and able “to exhort and convict” (Ti. 1:9). Some qualifications for elders deal more particularly with their ability to relate well with people, both in communicating the truth and in handling disagreements. In this booklet we will combine the lists of qualifications and point out significant differences between the requirements for the two types of church leaders.

To highlight the character qualities, we have grouped them into seven categories. A person who qualifies for church leadership *must* possess: (1) a good reputation, (2) self-control, (3) godly values (4) a loving heart, (5) a healthy home,

- (6) a mature faith, and
- (7) a teachable mind.



A GOOD REPUTATION

An old maxim states, “A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.” That certainly is true when applied to the reputation of church leaders. A man may have great talents and an extensive knowledge of the truths of the Bible, but if his life has a “weak link” his reputation will suffer great damage and his ministry will be diminished, if not destroyed completely. That is why this first group of qualifications is so vital to leadership. Let’s examine each one briefly.

Blameless (elders and deacons—1 Tim. 3:2,10; Ti. 1:6-7). This is an all-inclusive quality relating to all areas of life. It is important that an elder or deacon be above reproach in any of the important areas of personal character listed in 1 Timothy 3 or Titus 1. When tested, they must be found “blameless” in the sight of the people they will be ministering to.

Does this mean that a man has to be perfect to be a church leader? Obviously not, since no one is perfect. But the characteristic pattern of his life must be in line with the biblical standards of leadership. Any leader who violates any one of these high standards must be dealt with speedily and biblically (Mt. 18:15-17; 1 Tim. 5:19-20). When considering a candidate, it should be asked if there are any verifiable, unresolved charges of wrongdoing that

could be brought against him.

A Good Testimony Among Those Outside (elders—1 Tim. 3:7).

Those “outside” are non-Christians who observe the testimony of church leaders. An elder cannot function effectively as a leader and witness in the community if a cloud of disgrace hangs over him because of questionable or clearly sinful activity. The witness of the entire church in the community and the authority of such a leader within the church itself would be seriously damaged by a bad reputation.

If a leader’s character is in question, it’s not only bad for the church but also dangerous for the individual. First Timothy 3:7 states that if an elder does not have a good reputation he will fall into “the snare of the devil.” Satan is working to discredit Christian leaders

and to stifle the church's witness.

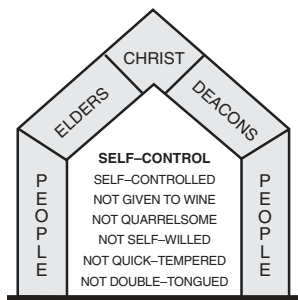
Of Good Behavior (elders—1 Tim. 3:2). The word translated “of good behavior” can also be translated “respectable” or “honorable.” It comes from the Greek word for “orderly” or “well-arranged.” A man who lives an orderly life is conducting himself in an honorable manner, thus earning the respect of those around him.

A church leader, then, should not be someone who runs from crisis to crisis because of his own disorganization. Any candidate for church office should be observed and questioned to determine if his life reflects consistency and order.

Reverent (deacons—1 Tim. 3:8). A person who serves in an official role in the church is to be respectable and dignified. Such an individual is to

take his role seriously.

Does the person have a frivolous attitude toward spiritual issues? Like the preceding characteristic, “of good behavior,” would an observer, whether in or out of the church, respect the person and his official role?



SELF-CONTROL

An addict is a person who has lost control of his life. The controlling factor may be cocaine, alcohol, food, sex, TV, anger, money, power, work, or an all-consuming hobby. In each case, the person is controlled instead of being the controller. In contrast, a church leader is to exhibit

self-control. But what does it mean to be self-controlled? Paul's list of qualifications specifically mentions self-control and several other related items.

Self-Controlled

(elders—Ti. 1:8). A leader is to exhibit a disciplined life. He must demonstrate a growing Christlikeness and be in control of his passions and appetites (Gal. 5:16-26). This self-control is not merely self-effort; it is cooperating with the indwelling Spirit to make wise choices and to live in dependence on Him.

A self-controlled person chooses to live for God instead of self. His life is in order. He is not in bondage to sinful impulses. The following characteristics are a good indicator of a person's degree of self-control.

Not Given To Wine

(elders and deacons—1 Tim. 3:3,8; Ti. 1:7). The Greek word used

in 1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7 refers to a habit of overdrinking. In classical and Hellenistic Greek times, the term had the meaning of being “tipsy” or “rowdy.” The Greek word used in 1 Timothy 3:8 meant “to be attached to” or “addicted to” wine.

Paul warns against the overindulgence of wine—of becoming known as someone who gets drunk or spends too much time drinking. Such a person would not be a worthy example, for he would fall into the danger of being controlled by wine instead of by the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

A person being considered for leadership should be evaluated by these questions: Is his testimony diminished by a use of alcohol? Does he have a personal dependency on alcohol or drugs? Does he have any kind of addiction?

Not Quarrelsome

(elders—1 Tim. 3:3). An elder should not be a person commonly given to argument, disputation, controversy, and rivalry. A mature person should be able to compromise on nonessential matters.

An elder should be able to compromise on nonessential matters.

When considering a candidate, ask these kinds of questions: Does the person find it difficult to participate in a dialogue if his point of view is not prevailing? Does he stubbornly maintain his viewpoint in the face of reasonable and unanswered objections?

Not Self-Willed

(elders—Ti. 1:7). A person who is overbearing and inconsiderate is not qualified

for leadership. Neither is someone who consistently displays an insensitive desire to have his way regardless of facts, circumstances, and the needs or feelings of people (1 Cor. 13:5).

The questions to ask, then, are these: Does the person insist on always “being right”? Is he rude in his behavior when someone challenges his viewpoint? Does he resist worthy causes merely because he did not originate the ideas?

Not Quick-

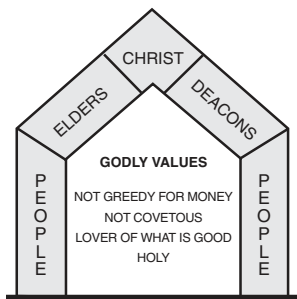
Tempered (elders—Ti. 1:7) A quick-tempered man becomes angry and belligerent very easily. Does the person being considered for leadership typically become so filled with emotion when facing opposition that he expresses himself in an angry, intimidating manner? Does he shake his fist, jump to his feet, and hit the tabletop? Does he resort to

personal attacks that are completely unrelated to issues being discussed? If the answer is yes to the preceding questions, the candidate is unqualified.

The Bible commands us, “Be angry, and do not sin” (Eph. 4:26). Proper anger is controlled and directed at what God is angry about.

Not Double-Tongued (deacons— 1 Tim. 3:8). A church officer should be a person whose word can be trusted. He cannot be inconsistent or insincere in what he says. He cannot say one thing to one person and something contradictory to another. His yes means yes and his no means no.

Is the man who is being considered for church office one who keeps his promises? Or is he hypocritical in speech? Does he alter the truth to serve his own best interests? Does he slander people behind their backs?



GODLY VALUES

Would you be devastated if a thief stole your DVD player, your VCR, and your TV? How would you react if your life savings vanished with an investment broker? Do you spend more time waxing your car than talking with your family? Does your occupation consume all your thoughts and energy? Do you take time to pray and read the Bible? What does your checkbook or your credit-card statement say about your values? These are the kinds of questions that reveal what we treasure most in life. Church leaders

are to show us what God values by what they value.

Not Greedy For Money (elders and deacons—1 Tim. 3:3,8; Ti. 1:7). The priorities of a leader must not be centered on the accumulation of worldly wealth. He must be a good illustration of one who, though he may be wealthy, places his greatest priority on laying up treasures in heaven (Mt. 6:19-24). No one should be able to accuse a leader of using his position for personal financial gain (1 Th. 2:3-9). In his financial dealings, whether personal or business, he cannot be one who uses unethical or questionable tactics to make money.

Not Covetous (elders—1 Tim. 3:3). This characteristic is closely related to “not greedy for money.” A leader cannot be preoccupied with material wealth. The love of money

leads a person away from the faith (1 Tim. 6:10).

Several questions will help to discover if the candidate for leadership is greedy or covetous. Does he give more attention to things or to people? If he is wealthy (which is not wrong in itself), does he have a variety of friends, including some who have little of the world’s goods? Is too much of his time involved in acquiring or maintaining material possessions?

A Lover Of What Is Good (elders—Ti. 1:8). In his commentary on Titus, William Hendriksen states that “a lover of what is good” means, “loving goodness, virtuous, ready to do what is beneficial to others.” Gene Getz explains that it refers to a person who “desires to do good, not evil.” In Galatians 6:10 the apostle Paul stated, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good

to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

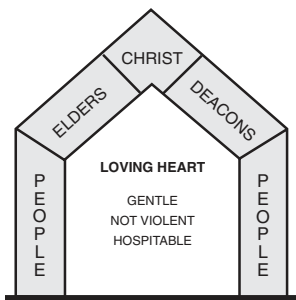
A “lover of what is good,” then, means that such a person shows by his actions that he desires to reflect God’s goodness in all that he does and in all of his relationships. He has the best interests of others in mind.

Holy (elders—Ti. 1:8).

A leader must have an earnest desire to be pleasing to God. His attitude and actions must reflect a devoutness—a devotion to God. He must place a high priority on spiritual reality in his own life. His life should demonstrate that his heart is centered on God and His kingdom, not on worldly things.

This characteristic may seem to be somewhat difficult to measure, but answering the following questions should help. Does the person’s way of life and

his conversation show that he takes God and His Word seriously? Does the person set aside time for the study of Scripture and prayer?



A LOVING HEART

In the great love chapter of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul extolled the supremacy that love should have as a characteristic of our lives. It is no wonder, then, that Paul included several requirements that are indicative of a candidate’s love for others. It is not enough for an elder or deacon to have a good knowledge of Scripture, be an effective teacher, give

large sums of money to the church, or even profess great faith. Without love, it all adds up to nothing. The following qualifications are various aspects of how a leader is to express love.

Gentle (elders—1 Tim. 3:3). The exact meaning of this term is much broader than that which can be expressed with one word. All of the following terms approximate the meaning of the original Greek word: *gracious, kind, forbearing, considerate, magnanimous, and genial*.

If a man is short-tempered, inconsiderate, rude, or cruel, he would not be qualified for leadership.

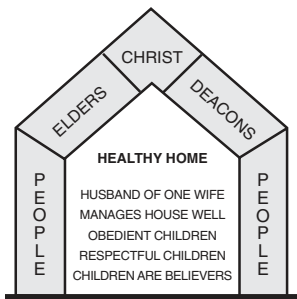
Not Violent (elders—1 Tim. 3:3). Literally the Greek word means “not a striker.” An elder cannot be one who resorts to displays of temper or intimidation in order to control others. Nor does he walk around with “a chip on his shoulder,”

looking for someone to knock it off. He doesn’t seek to settle his differences of opinion with violent words or actions. Church leaders must not be people who would make the board room a place for vicious verbal combat. In examining the qualifications of a man for leadership, a careful look must be taken at how he settles his differences with others.

Hospitable (elders—1 Tim. 3:2; Ti. 1:8). This term literally means “loving strangers.” In New Testament times this quality referred to the action of befriending and giving lodging to fellow believers who were traveling or were fleeing persecution because of their faith in Christ. In a broader sense, to be hospitable refers to friendliness and a willingness to help others who need assistance.

Does the candidate for

church office welcome newcomers into the church? Does he entertain believers in his home? Does he show hospitality to missionaries and traveling Christian workers?



A HEALTHY HOME

Would you hire an auto mechanic who drives a sputtering, smoking pile of rusting junk? Or would you ask a dental hygienist with decayed teeth to instruct you on how to keep your teeth in good condition? Would you want a person who has been in five auto accidents in the last year to give you some driving tips?

We expect the person

with whom we entrust our possessions and our lives to have some proven expertise, to know what he's talking about. The same is true of church leaders. They must practice what they preach and be good examples to the believers they are guiding and serving. A person's home life is the most revealing aspect of his character and leadership ability. That is why Paul, in the lists he presents in 1 Timothy and in Titus, gives four qualifications that deal with the spiritual health of the leader's home.

He Is The Husband Of One Wife (elders and deacons—1 Tim. 3:2,12; Ti. 1:6). Good Bible scholars offer differing explanations of this requirement. Some say an elder or deacon can be married only once during his entire life. Others say it means only that a leader must be married to one

woman at a time. Another view is that an elder or deacon must be faithful to his wife, “a one-woman kind of man.” And still others say that this implies a church leader must be married.

At the very least, this qualification requires that if a church leader is married he must be faithfully devoted to his wife. Is the candidate a man who is dedicated to only one woman? An adulterer, a man who keeps a mistress, or a flirtatious person clearly would not be qualified as a leader.

He Manages His House Well (elders and deacons—1 Tim. 3:4,12). Paul made the observation that a man who cannot govern his own household can hardly be trusted to govern the church. His children should be properly trained, and he must have a good relationship with his

wife. This qualification may also include financial management. As the head of the family, a man must demonstrate the characteristics that will make him a fitting leader for a congregation.

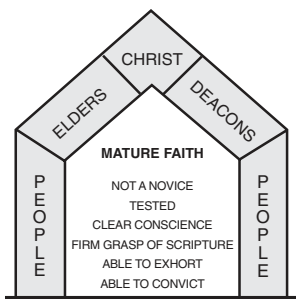
This does not mean, of course, that a leader is a perfect home manager, but it does require an affirmative answer to the question: Does he do a good job of managing his own household?

His Children Are Obedient And Respectful (elders—

1 Tim. 3:4; Ti. 1:6). This is a more specific statement of how a church leader is supposed to manage his own house. His children are to show evidence that their father is a respected leader at home and that he knows how to instruct and discipline them. No father has perfect children, so we shouldn't expect perfection

from the children of leaders. But, as Titus 1:6 states, the children should behave in such a way that no one can accuse them of being wild or insubordinate.

His Children Are Believers (elders—Ti. 1:6). This qualification (lit. “children having faith”) is specifically required of elders because of their responsibility for the spiritual welfare of their congregation. It may well be argued that if a father cannot disciple his own children, can he be expected to be effective in leading others to faith and maturity in Christ? This qualification does not demand that the leader’s children act like little angels all the time, but it does mean that they have put their faith in Christ.



A MATURE FAITH

If you wanted to learn how to fly an airplane, what kind of teacher would you prefer: a 9-year-old who builds model airplanes, or a licensed and tested flight instructor with thousands of hours of actual flying time?

Who should be leading our local churches and instructing believers in how to live the Christian life? For obvious reasons, we would prefer to have leaders who have a proven and steady faith—a faith that is experienced and mature.

Not A Novice

(elders—1 Tim. 3:6). A candidate for a position of

church leadership is not to be a new convert. A new believer has not earned a good reputation as a Christian. He is not known well enough in the Christian community. The apostle Paul warned that if an immature believer were quickly elevated to a position of leadership, he would be in danger of becoming proud and “fall into the same condemnation as the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6); that is, he would be filled with the same kind of pride that led to Satan’s fall and be subject to God’s judgment. Advancing a new Christian too rapidly could lead to his having an inflated, unrealistic assessment of his spiritual condition.

Even though a candidate may fulfill many of the other qualifications, it is very important to investigate whether he has enough Christian experience to be humble if he would be

elevated to the position of elder.

Tested (deacons—1 Tim. 3:10). Just as an elder should not be a novice, so a deacon must be a person of maturity in faith and character. He must have shown by his faithfulness that he is qualified for official service.

Has the individual demonstrated his ability to function as an example to others? Is his life in harmony with the scriptural qualifications?

Hold The Mystery Of The Faith With A Clear Conscience

(deacons—1 Tim. 3:9).

A deacon cannot be a hypocrite. His faith cannot be merely intellectual, contradicting his day-to-day pattern of living. He must display a sincerity of faith and a firm conviction of the truth of God’s Word.

Holding Fast The Faithful Word (elders—

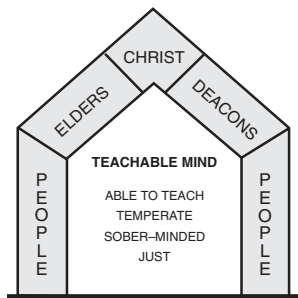
Ti. 1:9). Like the preceding qualification for deacons, elders are likewise required to be men who have a firm grounding in sound doctrine. They must be convinced of its truthfulness and be willing and able to defend it.

When considering a person for leadership, ask these questions: Does the person base his lifestyle and decisions on the written Word of God? Does he respect the Scriptures as the final word of authority in all matters of faith, life, and practice? Or does he exhibit a tendency to ignore or bypass biblical absolutes?

Able To Exhort And Convict (elders—Ti. 1:9). As stated in the qualification that an elder be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2), he should be a man who knows the Bible well. He should have a firm handle on the truth and be able to explain convincingly

the demands of Scripture on our lives.

When confronted by a person who is wrapped up in false doctrine, would he be able to recognize the error? Would he also be able to discuss appropriate Scripture passages that speak to the issue?



A TEACHABLE MIND

Some people can be as stubborn as a mule. No matter how you reason with them, they refuse to listen. Once they make up their mind, they don't want to be confused with the facts. When such a person is appointed to a leadership

position in the church, trouble is soon to follow. A leader must be able to discuss conflicting ideas and come to wise decisions. That is why the apostle Paul listed several characteristics of a qualified leader that reflect the ability to think objectively.

All of the qualities in this section are required character traits for elders, and for good reason. The elders are to be the key decision-makers in the church. They have the primary responsibility for proclaiming and protecting the truth as well as dealing with the many details of church life.

Able To Teach

(elders—1 Tim. 3:2). This is a key qualification with two shades of meaning. First, it may mean that a leader must be able to instruct others regarding biblical truth. But the Greek word can also mean “teachable.”

Most likely, there is more implied here than just the ability to teach. In the context, therefore, this quality seems to refer to an ability to communicate the truth without arrogance. A leader should be willing to be corrected. The best teachers are those who see themselves as communicators of truth, not the originators of it. An openminded, reasonable spirit is an essential quality of leadership, as is a recognition of the importance of dialogue.

The following questions will help to evaluate a candidate. Does he have a firm grasp of biblical truth? Is he able to explain that truth to others? Does he have a mind that is open to new information, even if it runs contrary to his current views? Does he possess the ability to discuss any issue in an objective and patient manner? (2 Tim. 2:24.)

Temperate (elders—1 Tim. 3:2). This word means more than just moderation in eating or drinking. Gene Getz states that “a man who is temperate does not lose his physical, psychological, and spiritual orientation. He remains stable and steadfast, and his thinking is clear.” He is balanced in his living, not prone to destructive extremes.

When considering a person for church leadership, we should ask if the individual shows a reliable sense of balance in his judgment. Does he exhibit any tendency toward fanaticism or legalism, which could interfere with the effectiveness of his overall judgment and ministry?

Sober-minded (elders—1 Tim. 3:2; Ti. 1:8). The meaning of this word is very closely related to the previous term, temperate.

A church leader must be sensible in his thinking and actions. He cannot be someone who is prone to act on impulse or make rash and irrational decisions. He must be self-controlled and prudent in his actions. A person who is qualified as a church leader avoids quick decisions based on inadequate information, and he generally exhibits sound judgment.

Just (elders—Ti. 1:8). A person who exercises authority in the church must be concerned with justice in all his dealings. He must do what is right and be fair in all situations.

An elder, therefore, must have the courage to seek truth even when it is inconvenient or controversial. He always seeks to be fair and impartial. And he must seek to make decisions on the basis of principle, not personalities.

CASE STUDIES

We have attempted to outline the biblical qualifications for elders and deacons in a simple, concrete fashion. Even so, some examples are valuable in demonstrating how the biblical qualifications should be applied.

EXAMPLE ONE: George P.

George is a longtime church member, quite wealthy, and generous in his financial support. He is extremely opinionated, however, and fellow believers are often surprised at the vehemence of his feelings in regard to what usually appear to them to be minor issues. He tends to be bitterly critical of other members of the congregation.

George seems to dislike participating in group situations. If he does

participate in a discussion about something in which he has taken an interest, he disrupts the free discussion of the group with his harsh remarks and emotional outbursts. He displays no interest in doctrinal study and seems to be unaware of the inappropriateness of his displays of temper.

George is clearly not ready to serve as an elder or a deacon. Leaders are expected to be uncontentious (1 Tim. 3:3), able to teach (or teachable, 1 Tim. 3:2), not violent but gentle (1 Tim. 3:3), not quick-tempered (Ti. 1:7), and self-controlled (Ti. 1:8).

EXAMPLE TWO: John (“Pop”) W.

John has a warm, outgoing manner, is a regular church attender (has been since 1940), and is still active in the work of the church. Unfortunately, he has a reputation for doggedly

defending odd theological viewpoints on minor issues (sometimes taking the pastor to task in public meetings). He is also sharply and unreasonably critical on occasion. He gossips and often does so in such a loud voice that his accomplices are embarrassed by the attention that he draws to their “huddle.”

“Pop” may be a valuable and loved member of the congregation, but he is not qualified to be a church leader. He lacks prudence and temperance (1 Tim. 3:2); he is contentious (1 Tim. 3:3); and he lacks the essential quality of being able to teach.

EXAMPLE THREE: Christopher H.

Chris has been a member of a local church for 3 years and is a successful entrepreneur with great personal charm. He has been a generous financial supporter of the church, and

he appears to have sincere spiritual concerns. He is still not well-known in the community, however, and several reports have come to the attention of church members, implying that he has demonstrated a serious lack of discretion in some of his business dealings.

Since Chris has been in the church only 3 years, it would probably be unwise to consider him as a candidate. If he has demonstrated such remarkable qualities that it seems necessary to consider him as a candidate, however, he must be cleared of all charges of alleged wrongful business practices.

A church leader is expected to be: blameless (1 Tim. 3:2,10; Ti. 1:6-7), of good behavior (1 Tim. 3:2), respected by unbelievers (1 Tim. 3:7), not greedy for money (1 Tim. 3:3,8; Ti. 1:7), not covetous (1 Tim. 3:3), tested (1 Tim. 3:10), and not a novice (1 Tim. 3:6).

EXAMPLE FOUR: Harold H.

Harry joined the church about 5 years ago. A successful executive who has worked his way to the top rank of an important corporation, he is a natural leader who displays self-confidence and a mastery of the social graces. He has few close friends, however. He and his wife have devoted a great deal of their time and energy to the accumulation of material status symbols, and they limit their social relationships to other couples who share their own preoccupation with possessions.

A number of people have noted Harry's lack of interest in discussions that he isn't leading or dominating. Harry has been "too busy" to make a significant contribution of his time to the work of the church, and he openly declares that

there is little time in his busy lifestyle for meditation, study, or reading.

Harry represents a serious challenge to the church leadership. Although disciplined in some respects, he is not suited for church office. Harry is only selectively hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2; Ti. 1:8), and he may be vulnerable to the charge of being a lover of money (1 Tim. 3:3,8; Ti. 1:7). Although shrewd, cunning, and clever, he is not sober-minded (1 Tim. 3:2; Ti. 1:8), temperate (1 Tim. 3:2), and just (Ti. 1:8). He is not able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; Ti. 1:9). He has proven himself to be quarrelsome (1 Tim. 3:3), he has not been active and therefore has not been adequately tested (1 Tim. 3:10), and his disdain for study and high spiritual ideals shows that he is not "holding fast the faithful word" (Ti. 1:9).

EXAMPLE FIVE: Allen M.

A middle-level supervisor in a local factory, Allen has a burning desire to be a top-level leader in his church. Having an authoritarian personality, he often is domineering and arrogant.

—*“You don’t lead
by hitting people
over the head.
That’s assault,
not leadership.”*
—Dwight Eisenhower

Because of his obsession with power, Allen has learned to think in terms of political, theological, and ideological labels. He has somehow concluded that the ability to label people and organizations is a sign of spiritual authority.

Allen has a profound dislike for open-minded

discussion because he is afraid of being exposed to any facts that might break down his simplistic view of reality. He avoids people or circumstances that might educate him.

Although Allen has a strong desire to be a church officer, he represents a grave danger to the spiritual life of the church. He is seriously deficient in many areas. He is not able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; Ti. 1:9); he is not sober-minded (1 Tim. 3:2), just (Ti. 1:8), and temperate (1 Tim. 3:2); he is self-willed (Ti. 1:7); he may become quarrelsome (1 Tim. 3:3); and he is not “holding fast the faithful word” (Ti. 1:9).

PROBLEMS AND PRINCIPLES

Stating the qualifications for leadership is relatively easy. Finding, enlisting, and evaluating leaders can be difficult. This section will address some of the practical problems you may encounter.

Shortage of qualified candidates. Don't lower the standards. Only qualified individuals should lead. Revise the church constitution if necessary so that it does not require a difficult-to-fulfill minimum number of elders or deacons. Develop leadership through active discipleship training (2 Tim. 2:2). The biblical issue is not how many but who will lead.

Qualified men are not willing to be leaders. In order to encourage qualified men to accept leadership positions,

emphasize the truth that a person who desires the role of church leader “desires a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1). Extol the rewards both now and in eternity of serving the Lord and laying up treasures in heaven (Mt. 6:19-21; 1 Tim. 3:13; 1 Pet. 5:4).

Deacons who function as elders.

If deacons in a church are functioning as elders in teaching, spiritual oversight, and decision-making, make sure that they measure up to the qualifications of elders. Study the biblical pattern of leadership: Deacons are to assist the elders to free them for prayer and the teaching of God's Word (Acts 6:3-4). Deacons can serve in a wide variety of ways—but it is to be service that assists the elders.

Current leaders who aren't qualified.

If after studying the biblical qualifications for leaders,

you conclude that one or more of the current leaders in your church fail to pass the test, apply the principles of Matthew 18:15-17, Galatians 6:1, and 1 Timothy 5:19-20. Do the courageous and loving thing—go to the person privately first and discuss the biblical standards with him. Make sure you have the right attitude and accurate facts before you approach him.

If a person does not express a willingness to deal with his sin, find another church leader who will go with you again to the individual. If that fails, then present the case to the entire church leadership for their investigation. An unrepentant person or someone who has destroyed his reputation should be removed from leadership.

Leaders who want to rule but not serve. During the teaching and

training of leadership, emphasize the principles of being an example and being a servant (Mt. 20:20-28; 23:8-12; Jn. 13; Acts 6:1-4; 1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Pet. 5:3). A deacon or an elder should be assigned a clearly defined area of responsibility in the church. Effective leadership is involved leadership.

How do you know that a man is qualified? If your church allows nominations from the congregation, a candidate should be suggested for consideration by someone who knows the person well and genuinely believes that the nominee is qualified according to the standards of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

In order to protect nominees from possible embarrassment and to prevent potential discord, it would be wise first to suggest candidates in strict confidentiality to current church leaders. Because

elders have the responsibility to oversee church doctrine and practice (1 Tim. 3:1-5; 1 Pet. 5:1-4) and are usually aware of matters not known to the congregation at large, they should play an important role in the nominating process.

In addition, it would seem wise to ask the candidate to examine himself according to biblical qualifications prior to any public announcement. He should withdraw from consideration if in good conscience he does not feel he is qualified. And in the case of nominations for elders, thorough interviews would be appropriate.

If when a candidate's name is announced, members of the congregation know of any concrete, verifiable facts that could disqualify him on the basis of the scriptural

requirements for the office of elder or deacon, they should seek him out in accordance with the pattern set forth in Matthew 18:15-17. The body of Christ is responsible to maintain internal discipline and to keep unqualified individuals from being elected.

What if strong disagreement arises about an individual's qualifications?

Determine if the disagreement is based on the biblical criteria or if it is a personality issue. Any serious accusations should be carefully examined by church leaders to determine whether or not the nominee is qualified, and to protect him from subjective and unfair charges. (If an accuser is unreasonable or bears a personal grudge, he should be confronted.)

STANDARDS FOR LEADERSHIP

ELDERS

1 Timothy 3:1-7 (●)
and Titus 1:6-9 (▲)

1. blameless ●▲
2. one wife ●▲
3. temperate ●
4. sober-minded ●▲
5. good behavior ●
6. hospitable ●▲
7. able to teach ●
8. not a drinker ●▲
9. not violent ●▲
10. not greedy ●▲
11. gentle ●
12. not quarrelsome ●
13. not covetous ●
14. rules house well ●
15. children subject ●
16. not a novice ●
17. good testimony ●
18. believing children ▲
19. not self-willed ▲
20. not quick-tempered ▲
21. lover of good ▲
22. just ▲
23. holy ▲

24. self-controlled ▲
25. hold fast the Word ▲
26. able to exhort ▲

DEACONS

1 Timothy 3:8-12

1. reverent
2. not double-tongued
3. not given to much wine
4. not greedy for money
5. holding the faith with a clear conscience
6. tested
7. found blameless
8. husband of one wife
9. rule children and household well

DO YOU QUALIFY?

Would you qualify for a position of leadership in your church? Why, or why not? If not, what needs to change, and what is preventing you from making those changes?

Have you taken the first step toward qualifying for leadership? Do you know the Leader, the Head of the church, Jesus Christ, in a personal way? Have you recognized that the right kind of church is made up of people who have accepted His free gift of forgiveness of sin and who now have assurance of heaven in the life to come? (Jn. 14:1-6; Eph. 2:8-9). If you have never put your personal trust in Christ for your salvation, there's no better time than right now. Then determine to grow in knowledge of God and in

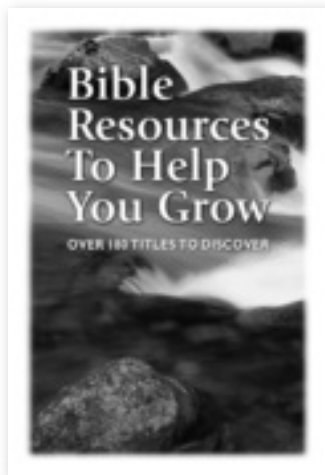
Christlikeness in your daily life.

Perhaps you've been a believer for some time but you know you wouldn't qualify for leadership because of some sin in your life or because you have failed to mature as a believer. Remember that God wants you to live a godly life, even if you're not a leader (1 Pet. 1:13-2:12). Choose right now to follow Christ and be a person worth following.

Or perhaps you are a leader in your church. Are you qualified? If not, are you willing to change or to step down from your position? Are you and your church willing to rewrite the church constitution to make it biblical regarding the selection of church leaders?

A congregation will follow its leaders. Are your leaders following Christ? Are you willing to follow Him and to show others the way?

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