

Selecting Elders - 2

1 Timothy 3:1-7

Many denominations ordain women elders even though the apostle Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus clearly state that the pattern calls for men. For the "PC" crowd this is a problem. Paul also declared that serving as an elder is "work" and that a man must be desirous of doing such work. The eldership is not simply an honorary office.

I've had men tell me that they allowed themselves to be appointed as elders in response to the urgings of others, **not because they desired to do the job.** Some men are pressured into serving when they are told that if they don't, the church will be without an eldership. Others consent because their wives want to see that "honor" given to them, or for a host of other unsuitable reasons.

Only Men Are to Serve as Elders

The context of Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus make clear that **only** a man (*Eitis*) can serve as an elder. In 1 Timothy 3:1-2, Paul wrote, *"This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife."* Also, in Titus 1:6 Paul wrote, *"If a man be blameless, the husband of one wife."*

Both texts state that the person who qualifies to be an elder must be *"the husband of one wife."* Obviously, a woman can't be the husband of one wife. Further, in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, the apostle writes that the prospective elder must be, *"One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God)."*

In Ephesians 5:22-24 Paul directed wives to submit to their own husbands and that *"The husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church."*

So, common sense and Scripture combine to demonstrate that an elder learns the skills for leading a local congregation by exercising leadership in the home.

An elder's work involves exercising authority. In *Hebrews 13:17*, we are exhorted to, "**Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls ...**" The words "**obey**" "**rule,**" and "**submissive**" demonstrate that authority is inherent in this job. It is not authority as exercised by the rulers of the Gentiles (Matthew 20:25-28), and elders aren't "lords" over the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3), but it does involve the congregation's voluntary submission to their leadership.

Desire for the Work Is Absolutely Necessary

A man who doesn't desire the work will make a poor "shepherd" of the flock. It is harmful for a man to agree to be an elder when he doesn't really want to serve. It is a direct violation of God's will and demonstrates a callous disregard for what God says.

Further, it should be noted that the apostle said, "**If a man desires the office or position of a bishop, he desires a good work.**" If we look at only the English words "office" or "position," we might reach a wrong conclusion, since it is not uncommon in politics for a man or woman to be elected to an "office" and do no work. Some "offices" are created to be honorary positions. But the apostle, closed that door when he referred to the eldership as a "**work.**"

One might argue that the desire to serve as an Elder should begin as a youth, long before the boy is qualified. If more young men would focus on this desire, they would consider: the woman they choose to marry; how they will raise their children; how they will live their own life. Imagine if we could instill in our young men this desire how many more we would have to choose from when the time comes to find Elders. As all the other qualifications also suggest, the desire to be an elder must be rooted in a desire to do the Lord's will, see the kingdom grow, and help others attain eternal life. Today we'll look at just one of the qualifications.

An Elder Must Be Blameless

The requirement for an elder to be blameless is found in both 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6. But some teach that this qualification means above sin, therefore, no man is qualified to serve as an elder. Blameless cannot mean sinless! Romans 3:23, declares, ***"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** However, the words used by Paul mean:

- One against whom no evil charge can be sustained.
- Not open to accusation.
- One who cannot be called to account.

When a person obeys the gospel, his sins are forgiven, and remembered no more. If a man's life as a Christian is marked by a high degree of obedience to God and a willingness to repent anytime he finds sin or error in his life, then he will be blameless. When a man repents of sin, and God forgives him, that sin can't be held to his account.

The idea is like what is taught in 1 John 1:5-10, where John referred to, ***"walking in the light."*** It is necessary to walk in the light; yet, John declared that if a man says he has no sin or never sins, he is a liar. But, ***"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."***

What we must look for in an elder is a man of maturity, who if they sin they show immediate repentance. That's the example and pattern that needs to be shown to the entire congregation.

What we forget is that all Christians are called upon to be blameless. Paul wrote to the divided, and often sinful church at Corinth, ***"That you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."*** 1 Cor 1:8. The context shows that such blamelessness will not be attained by personal perfection, but through the working of Christ. Christ's death on the cross provided forgiveness of all sins committed before we obey the gospel and of sins committed after we become Christians.

What is illogical is when we insist that blamelessness has a narrower meaning to elders than to others.

- Deacons also must be blameless 1 Timothy 3:10.
- Widows supported by the church must be blameless 1 Tim 5:5-7.
- Preachers must be blameless 1 Timothy 6:14.

It should be the objective of **every** Christian to live a life holy and free of sin. The qualification, regarding a potential elder, calls for selection of a man whose character and behavior reflect having achieved this to a high degree. Again, absolute perfection is not in view, but a life of walking in the light. This includes readiness to avail oneself of the pardon available through repentance.

Finally, as proof that "blamelessness" refers to a life lived in righteousness and a willingness to repent when occasional sin occurs, readers are pointed to the example of the apostle Peter.

Peter was the once-impulsive disciple who vowed that though others might stumble, he never would. Yet, as Jesus was being tried before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:33-35,69-75), Peter denied Him three times. This same Peter, after the Lord's ascension, after he had first preached the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles, was rebuked by the apostle Paul for hypocrisy because he followed the lead of Judaizing teachers and refused to eat with some Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14).

Consider that Peter was an elder, as well as an apostle, and therefore subject to the qualification of blamelessness (1 Peter 5:1). If blamelessness means a man has never sinned or erred during his time as a Christian, Peter would **not have been qualified to be an elder.**

Conclusion

What we've considered this morning shows that the Lord is looking for men experienced in successful leadership in their homes, who have a great desire and eagerness to lead Christians, as they have their family members, toward righteous, godly living.

What we are looking for is a man whose life is characterized by righteousness, which includes a humble spirit willing to repent when sin is discovered in his life.

When repentant and forgiven, he is above blame or rebuke in the sight of God and men. When sins are blotted out from the record, there is no basis for charging a man with sin (Acts 3:19). *"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."* {Hebrews 8:12}

This qualification like others we will examine, points to a man who is mature in the faith. He is the man the Lord wills to lead the local church.