

Abilities of Elders and Examination

Detailed Outline
Part 7 of 9

We've looked at the moral and spiritual character of a shepherd elder. Now we want look at their abilities:

D. Abilities

1) Family Management

1 Timothy 3:4: "He must manage (or lead or conduct) his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive."

Titus 1:6: "His children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination."

The Puritans used to say, "The family is the little church."

Managing a family is not like managing the state or a business or the military. Managing a church is more like managing a family. So you prove your ability to lead a church by first leading your family.

When you are testing people for eldership, you need to meet with the wife and children. You cannot do this job of shepherding God's people without your wife's cooperation and without your children's cooperation, because you put your family at risk when you give this kind of time to helping the larger family, the household of God.

Many marriages are falling apart. Thus, an elder needs to be a good example of having a stable home.

Paul's logic is this (1 Timothy 3:5): "For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" If you can't manage your own family, how are you going to manage many families, many people?

2) Personal Life Example

Peter brings this out: "Being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). This is in contrast to "not domineering over those in your charge." That is, being a controlling leader, leading with guilt and fear.

You are to be the godly example that people want to follow. Oswald Sanders gives us a great definition of leadership. *Leadership is influence.*

How do you influence people? By having a badge that says, I'm an elder, I'm the pastor, I'm the bishop? No, people don't follow badges; they follow lifestyles. They follow role models. They follow your behavior, your speech, your conduct. That's what really influences people. Not you saying, "I have this degree or that degree or this position."

That's why Paul used role modeling to influence his converts: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). People are looking for authentic Christian role models to follow. Who can better provide godly role models—week after week, year after year, month after month, decade after decade—than the local church elders modeling the Christian life, modeling church life for others?

Most of us do not understand the power of example for influencing people for Christ.

Let me remind you that people are watching you, and people are looking for good role models of Christian living. When you act, your children are watching, your wife is watching, your friends are watching, your fellow colleagues are watching as you provide them with a good role model to follow or a disappointing role model to follow.

3) Biblical Knowledge

Titus 1:9-10:

[An elder] ... must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.

Not only is this a biblical qualification, it tells us a lot about what a biblical elder is. It separates the pastor elder from the board elder.

First of all, he must have Bible knowledge. He must know sound doctrine. He's the kind of person who clings tenaciously to apostolic, orthodox, historic doctrine. He's thoroughly committed to these doctrines.

This is where we fail again and again and again: *We don't examine whether our pastor elders meet these qualifications on whether they have this knowledge.* Churches don't test their elders' doctrine.

4) Communication Skills

Notice what the rest of the verse says: "Be able to give instruct in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9).

Paul is not talking here about board elders, temporary layman who serve for three years, advisors, policy makers. He is talking about teachers, people who know the Word of God and are able to communicate it.

This doesn't mean that an elder has to be an orator, but he should be able to communicate the gospel message. He should be able to comfort and encourage people with the Scriptures. Everything we do is with the Bible. All our work is with the Scriptures.

Also, he has to be able to spot false doctrine and to be able to rebuke it. An elder is a guardian of sound doctrine.

All elders must be able to teach, all must be able to instruct in sound doctrine and stop false teachers. But some elders – not all elders, some elders (1 Tim. 5:17, 18) – are Spirit-gifted teachers.

Now, let's close with these last points.

e) Public Examination of a Candidate's Qualification

1 Timothy 3:10: "And let them also be tested [examined] first, then let them serve." See also 1 Timothy 5:24-25 and verse 22.

The qualifications for an elder are simply empty words on a piece of paper if we do not examine the person as to the biblical requirements. This means asking a lot of questions. This means training, this means examinations of the person's lifestyle, looking at their doctrine.

A very significant part of biblical eldership is that candidates have been thoroughly examined as to their fitness for office. In fact, Paul says here in the text, "if they prove themselves blameless" as to the qualifications. Let us not neglect this important part of eldership. When unfit, unworthy, unscriptural elders become elders, they create years of problems for the church.

f) Public Appointment or Recognition

1 Timothy 5:22: "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands." See also Acts 6:6.

So there has to be, after a person has been examined and approved as to fitness for office, some public appointment.

You can do with the laying on of hands or you can do it in other ways—there's no mechanical explanation for this—but it must be public so that all recognize that this person has now entered into the office of eldership or overseer-ship.

g) Pillars for Appointing Elders

- 1) Personal Desire
- 2) Biblical Qualifications
- 3) Examination
- 4) Public Appointment