

Biblical Qualifications for Elder/Bishop/Pastor

Qualifications

1 Timothy 3:1-7

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”

“Above reproach” – someone with a reputation of integrity among believers and non-believers

“Husband of one wife” – the husband of one woman; emphasis is on marital fidelity and moral integrity.

“Sober-minded” – temperate, someone who exhibits maturity and stability

“Self-controlled” – sound in mind, discrete, sensible

“Respectable” – this word comes from the Greek word *κόσμιον* (kosmion), which is the root word in English for cosmetics. Literally, to make attractive

“Hospitable” – given to sharing one's material resources, an open home

“Able to teach” – capable of teaching others and willing to be taught by others

“Not a drunkard” – is not given to drunkenness, not known for over-indulging beverage alcohol

“Not violent, but gentle” – not a brawler; not someone who intimidates with anger and physical threats.

“Gentle” – one who is forbearing, reasonable, fair-minded

“Not quarrelsome” – one who doesn't easily resort to debate or argument

“Not a lover of money” – one who models a non-materialistic, generous attitude; not motivated by money

“Manages his household well, keeps his children submissive” – in control of one’s home and family

“Not a recent convert” – leadership requires a level of spiritual maturity not found in a new convert

“Well thought of by outsiders” – is generally respected within the non-believing community

General Observations

These qualifications are the primary gateway to pastoral office. Advanced degrees, leadership skills, communication skills, charisma are secondary to these criteria.

Few vocations use one’s marriage and family as a qualification; a pastor’s marriage and family is not essential to his ministry – it is his ministry.

Function of the Elder/Pastor/Bishop

1. Preaching/teaching biblical truth – the skillful proclamation of the whole spectrum of God’s Word – a pastor must be a skilled teacher of sound doctrine (2 Timothy 2:23-26)
2. Prayer – given to prayer on behalf of the assembly; public and private
3. Protection – discern attempts to subvert sound doctrine; keep “wolves” away from the sheep; silence false teachers (Acts 20:30-31; 2 Timothy 2:17, 18; Titus 1:11).
4. Shepherding the assembly – encouraging, admonishing, rebuking, challenging, comforting, praying, etc.
5. Equipping – helping people identify, develop and deploy their spiritual gifts
6. Managing/leading – managing the assembly on God’s behalf; planning, communicating, consulting, making decisions, speaking on behalf of the assembly

General Observations

1. Elders are said to “rule” – nowhere does the text of Scripture speak of the congregation “ruling”
2. Scripture endorses a plurality of elders/pastors/bishops in a local assembly, assuming there is a plurality of qualified and “called” men
3. The pattern of leadership in Scripture is there is always a hierarchy in leadership