

Abilities of Elders and Their Examination

Detailed Outline

Part 7 of 9

II. Defining Pastoral Oversight by a Plurality of Qualified Elders (cont.)

B. New Testament Qualifications for Elders

4. Abilities

a) Family Management

“He must manage [lead or conduct] his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive” (1 Tim. 3:4 ESV)

“His children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination” (Titus 1:6)

- 1) The Puritans used to say the family is the little church. Managing a family is like managing a church. That’s why this is an ability you must have. You must be able to manage your family, your finances, and your home. An elder cannot be in financial disarray, and his house should not be falling apart. The children should not be trying to get out of the house as soon as they can.
- 2) When you are testing men for eldership, it is important to meet with the wife and the children. Ask them what they think about their husband/dad being an elder. You cannot do this without your family’s cooperation, because you will be putting them at risk when you commit to devoting so much time to the church.
- 3) Many marriages and families are falling apart today. As an elder, you need to be an example of a stable family. You need to be able to manage your own home.
- 4) Listen to Paul’s logic in 1 Timothy 3:5:

“If someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (ESV)

If you can’t care for the little church (your family), you won’t be able to care for the greater church!

b) Personal Life Example

“Being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3)

- 1) This is in contrast to dominating the flock, being a controlling leader, or manipulating people with guilt and fear.

- 2) Oswald Sanders said, "Leadership is influence." How do you influence people? Not by having a badge or a title. People follow lifestyles and role models. They follow your speech and your conduct.
- 3) That's why Paul used role modeling.

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." (1 Cor. 11:1)

- 4) People are looking for authentic Christian models. Who better to give them an example than the local church elders, year after year modeling the Christian life for others?
- 5) Most of us do not understand the power of example. I can think back 50 years ago shortly after I became a believer and started going to a Bible-believing church. I still remember how the men and women in that church dressed, how they spoke, how they lived godly lives, and how they knew their Bibles. These things influenced me profoundly.
- 6) Let me remind you of the power of your example. People are watching how you speak, how you act, and how you react to things. People are looking for role models.

c) Biblical Knowledge

"[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." (Titus 1:9-10)

- 1) This is not only a qualification, it tells us a lot about what an elder does. You must know this verse! This separates the pastor elder from the board elder.
- 2) An elder must have Bible knowledge and know sound doctrine. The idea here is that he clings tenaciously to apostolic, orthodox doctrine. He is not questioning whether the Bible is the Word of God or the existence of the trinity. Instead, he is thoroughly committed to these doctrines.
- 3) This is where many churches fail. We don't examine whether our pastor elders have this knowledge. We don't test this doctrine. On our website, we have several tests that you can use on elder candidates to measure their knowledge of Scripture and biblical doctrines. Does he know these truths and hold to them tenaciously?
- 4) Recently, I was talking to certain leaders in a church, and they told me one of their elders didn't believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ. I asked them, "How did he become an elder?" They said, "We never asked."
- 5) It is crucial to know what an elder candidate believes about divorce and remarriage, about spiritual gifts, about men and women's roles. You have to ask and test them! He must have knowledge of the things of God.

d) Communication Skills

*"[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."
(Titus 1:9)*

"Able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2)

- 1) An elder must have read the whole Bible and know it well.
 - (a) A man called me once and said that there was a man in their church who wanted to be an elder, but this man had not read the whole Bible. I asked, "Well, would you like that to be true of everyone in your church??"
 - (b) To be a good example to the people in the church, he must be a man of the Book. The local church is "a pillar and buttress [foundation] of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). So someone who hasn't read the Book of Truth is not qualified to become an elder!
- 2) An elder is a guardian of sound doctrine. He is a person who can defend and protect the church from false teachers. If he can't do that, he doesn't qualify to be an elder.
- 3) People say to me all the time, "Eldership doesn't work!" Well, of course it doesn't work if you don't have qualified elders! We aren't talking about board elders. We are talking about shepherds who know the Word of God and are able to communicate it.
- 4) This doesn't mean that they are an orator or a super highly gifted leader. But any mature believer should know the Bible. We are to be people of the Book. And an elder must be able to instruct, give the gospel, and communicate gospel doctrine. He needs to be able to comfort and encourage people from Scripture. Also, an elder must be able to spot false doctrine and have the courage to rebuke it. Everything we do as elders is with the Bible.
- 5) Let me remind you of this. All elders must be able to teach, instruct in sound doctrine, and stop false teachers. But some elders are gifted teachers, and they will labor and diligently serve. They will sacrifice time and hobbies to give time to devour the Word of God and prepare messages and improve their speaking. For that, they are to be rewarded and given material provision (1 Tim. 5:18).

5. Public Examination of a Candidate's Qualifications

"And let them also be tested [examined] first; then let them serve..." (1 Tim. 3:10a)

"Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands." (1 Tim. 5:22)

- a) Qualifications mean nothing if there is not examination. The examination is in a general context and so it is something done by the leaders and the church.

- 1) We are not talking about a vote here.
 - 2) I am speaking of an examination by the church and its leaders as to the fitness of a candidate for eldership. Does he meet the qualifications? This means asking lots of questions, training them, examining their lifestyle, talking to their wife and children, looking at their doctrine.
 - b) This is where many churches fail. People become elders because they get a phone call and don't have anything else to do. They never even get examined.
 - c) This is a very significant part of Biblical Eldership, that elders are thoroughly examined as to their fitness for the office and "shown to be blameless" regarding the Scriptural qualifications.
 - d) We create problems by not properly examining those whom are appointed as elders. When men who are unfit for eldership become elders, there are years of problems because of it.
6. Public Appointment or Recognition
- a) In the New Testament, elders are publicly appointed and recognized because eldership is both a work and an office (1 Tim. 5:22; Acts 6).
 - b) After a person has been examined and approved, there must be some public appointment to the office.
 - c) You can do it by laying on hands on the person, or in other ways.
 - d) However you do it, it needs to be public so that everyone in the church recognizes that this person has now entered into the office of "overship" (1 Tim. 3:1) or eldership.
7. Summary: The Four Pillars of Appointing Elders
- a) Personal desire for pastoral oversight (1 Tim. 3:1, Acts 20:28)
 - b) Meeting biblical qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4)
 - 1) Moral and spiritual qualifications
 - 2) Abilities
 - c) Public examination (1 Tim. 3:10; 5:24-25)
 - d) Public appointment (1 Tim. 5:22, Acts 6:6)

There are no detailed mechanics or instructions given within these pillars, but these four things must be met and accomplished in appointing an elder.