

The Old Paths

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“Selecting Bishops”

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Qualifications And Considerations

If you were told to look among the membership of this church for men willing and worthy to serve, there would be certain things to consider and certain things to ignore. First, a man's prosperity or success in business is nowhere mentioned in the Bible as an indicator of what kind of elder he would be. The church is not a business and often operates in exactly the opposite way a business would. For a business, financial profit is the bottom line and the product is altered to suit the consumer. In the church, pleasing God is the bottom line and the product, the gospel, cannot be reconfigured to draw more consumers, or members.

Five English words translate three Greek words in the Bible, describing the single office we generally call “elder.” The synonymous terms include bishop, pastor, overseer and presbyter. Selecting elders is choosing men to rule over us and whose faith and example we can be confident in following (Heb. 13:7; I Pet. 5:4). Because they will be looking out for our souls, we will need to be able to submit to their rule (Heb. 13:17). They will be responsible for guarding us against wolves, false teachers and anything that would threaten even a single soul (Acts 20:25-

31). They will have to take a leading role when it comes to disciplining the church, feeding the flock, and chastening individual sheep who stray (Titus 1:9).

All these responsibilities are revealed in the qualifications given by Paul to the younger evangelists in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Any man considered for the eldership must meet every qualification. It is important to remember, that in choosing elders, we are attempting to find imperfect men to do an often difficult job. Were we to wait for a perfect man to come along, there would be no eldership. That is still no excuse for appointing a man who fails even one qualification, but allows us to realize that his aptitude may vary by degrees in certain areas from other men.

One last word of warning: the only thing worse than having no eldership is having an unqualified eldership. Then the church is doomed.

The following list is this writer's best attempt to consolidate the qualities listed in the two passages and explain how they can be met. Although it may seem a tedious exercise to some, the appointment of qualified men is important enough to warrant the effort in making certain that candidates meet the Holy Spirit's requirements for appointment.

Qualifications For The Eldership

1. Desire for the office: For an

elder must serve willingly and not by compulsion (1 Peter 5:2).

2. Blamelessness: Fully penitent of all his sins so that no accusation of ongoing iniquity or unrighted wrongs could be sustained.

3. The husband of one wife: Not a polygamist or partner in an unscriptural union (Matt. 19:9).

4. Temperate personality, not quick-tempered: Able to handle contentious issues, debates and exchanges without becoming contentious himself or losing his cool.

5. Sober-mindedness: Able to take serious matters seriously and handle all his obligations with maturity.

6. Of good behavior: Not given to activities of dubious morality or propriety.

7. Hospitable: Open heart and home to brethren and others.

8. Able to teach: Ability to instruct the ignorant and wayward in the ways of Christ.

9. Not given to wine: A teetotaler.

10. Not violent: Not given to expressing anger through physical or verbal assault.

11. Not greedy for money or covetous: Able to overlook material considerations in favor of spiritual ones.

12. Gentle: Able to show compassion to the young and those in mourning.

13. Not quarrelsome: Not one who picks or provokes fights and arguments through a contentious attitude.

14. Record of having ruled household well: One having faithful and submissive children, not accused of dissipation or insubordination.

15. Not a novice: Not a newcomer to the faith.

16. Good testimony among outsiders: Just accusations by unbelievers can also be considered.

17. Not self-willed: The will of God and needs of others must be paramount in his life.

18. Love of what is good: Rather than a lover of worldly pleasure.

19. Just: Able to make fair and impartial decisions; not one who would favor friends and family over others in the church.

20. Holy: A record of a sanctified lifestyle.

21. Self-controlled: Able to overcome temptation.

22. Holding fast the faithful word: Not one who tends to stray toward error himself, but who knows the truth solidly enough to correct others.

Conclusion

Because the evangelist is generally newer to the church than many of the other members, he is not always able to know a candidate's complete record. For instance, how well he managed his household may be unclear since his children have

been grown and gone so long. Other members with such knowledge can better vouch for his adequacy in this area and probably others.

Failing just one requirement is enough to disqualify a man. If he is perfect in every other way, but is a drunk, he cannot serve. If he is otherwise unblemished, but has not proven himself a good ruler of his house, he cannot serve.

Editor's Note:

If you are one who holds on to past bulletins, you'll probably remember that brother Smith's article was published here in October of 2003. However, seeing as these are special circumstances in which we are striving to have elders here shortly, I decided to run a large portion of his article for our study in this issue.

I hope that we will all take brother Smith's words to heart. As has been said for over two years now, there is great potential for good in this congregation. Over the last year, we have focused our attention on elders, and now have the ability to be Scripturally organized for the first time in many years. Let us rejoice and be glad that we have this opportunity! It is a blessing.

Let us not only use brother Smith's concise explanation of the elders' qualifications (and the other

one provided in the foyer) for this current selection; but let us save these definitions since we will need to be looking for more elders in the future. I believe we are in a unique position where we not only have men qualified now to be elders, but we have the potential for this office to be filled for many years to come IF we are serious about it!! Scriptural organization does not happen by accident, nor will we have men appointed as elders who are not qualified to be such. Therefore, let us resolve to conform our lives to the will of God and complete this process so we can be organized soon and for many years to come.

Think On These Things:

Psalm 15

LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

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