

Eldership: Good Work for Godly Men
Jed N Snyder 1 Timothy 3:1-7

To teach that God prepares and honors godly men to serve as Elders in the local assembly so that my people may honor those who serve, and so that those who are called of God to serve will be willing to sacrifice for this good work.

Introduction:

As a Pastor/Elder it is not always easy to speak of the qualifications that the Scripture stresses for myself lest there be an appearance of boastfulness or perception that I point my finger at the qualifications for others and not live up to the same things myself. May neither of these attitudes be present even in the slightest way in this presentation.

- I. The Office of the Elder 3:1
- II. The Person of the Elder 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-8
- III. The Work of the Elder 3:1, 1 Peter 5:1-4; Titus 1:9; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17

-
- I. The Office of the Elder 3:1
The terms that are used: Overseer (episkopos) See 1 Timothy 3:1; Elder (prebuteros) See 1 Peter 5:1; Pastor, Shepherd (poimen) See Acts 20:28.

"Overseer"=bishop (episkopos) - Thayer says, "a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian, superintendent." Wuest says,¹ "The word was taken up by the Church, and designated an overseer of any Christian church. The responsibilities of this office have to do with the oversight and direction of the spiritual life of the local church."

It is the same office as elder. The term 'overseer' or 'bishop' has more to do with function, the term 'elder' or 'pastor' has more to do with character and dignity of the person in the office. Since elder is a more commonly used word in our church we will use that word.

"sets his heart on" or "desires" used here is a strong word implying much more than wanting, but more along the idea of earnestly seeking after or actively pursuing.

"noble task" or "a good work" implies that the office has the blessing of God upon it and is one of work (not just dignity or prestige) and should be thought of as an office of service. (We will speak a bit more of this later.)

Throughout the NT this office is one that is held in high esteem...
(Acts 20:17 NIV) From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.
Miletus was about 37 miles from Ephesus and was a seaport at the time.

(Acts 20:28 NIV) Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

(1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 NIV) Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. {13} Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

(Hebrews 13:7 NIV) Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

¹. Wuest, Kenneth S., Wuest's Word Studies, Vol. 2, The Pastoral Epistles, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973, p. 52.

(Hebrews 13:17 NIV) Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Throughout the NT in both Acts and the Epistles the office of elder, presbyter, bishop, overseer is filled by a plurality of men in each congregation. There is wisdom in maintaining this plurality due to the work that the elders are called upon to do.

This plurality if understood in its servant quality is a great asset to the body. The group of men who are elders together have more gifts of the Holy Spirit. Where one may be weak or inexperienced another is likely to be stronger. Together they model what mutual servant-hood is. They serve the Lord, each other and the congregation. They bear each other's burdens, seek each other's counsel, help each other grow, teach each other and learn from each other, correct each other and if necessary discipline each other, pray for each other and minister together. They seek to extend the work of the church together. These mutual and shared aspects of the elders give a full and healthy quality to the ministry of the local fellowship. When the elders do their work well their office is held in high esteem. Others seek to become elders because of the model that is set before them and other fellowships can be started with a good pattern set before them.

II. The Person of the Elder 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-8

In general the qualifications that God expects of elders are good for the average person in the church. They are required of elders because of their leadership role, especially by example. It is Biblical for Pastors and Elders to feel as Paul did, (Eph 5:1) "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children" and (1 Cor 11:1) "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

Consequently, the personal qualifications of the men who we believe God is placing in the office of Pastor or Elder should be considered soberly and meticulously.

A. General statements:

1. "Above reproach"="blameless" - not open to censure or rebuke among the body of Christ
v. 2
2. "a good reputation"="of good report" - not open to censure among the community at large
v. 7 If he falls in the reputation of the community, he will be disgraced and fall into the trap of the devil.

B. Specific statements:

1. (In marital relationships) Husband of but one wife= one living wife: the implications of this teaching are that a married man is better qualified to lead the congregation though I do not believe that marriage is a requirement for service in the office of elder or pastor. It probably means that a divorced man would be excluded, but more on the grounds of the reproach and reputation issue than on the Greek words in this phrase. Widowed and single men probably can serve if all else is right for service. Example...Peter.

2. (In mode of living [tastes and habits]) Temperate= Hendriksen says,² "sober (not, however, somber or sad), circumspect. Such a person lives deeply. His pleasures are not primarily those of the senses, like the pleasures of a drunkard for instance, but those of the soul. He is filled with spiritual and moral earnestness." Example...Luke.

3. (In manner of judging and of acting on these judgments) Self-controlled=calm unimpassioned, collected or composed, especially under times of stress. "He is a sensible man, discreet,

². Hendriksen, William, New Testament Commentary, Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus, Baker Book House, 1979, Pastoral Epistles, p. 122.

sane. The sensible man is ready and willing to learn...Example...Apollos"³.

4. (In morals in general) Respectable=virtuous. "The overseer must be a man 'of inner moral excellency and of outward orderly behavior."⁴ The root meaning of the related noun is order...Example...Ruth."

5. (In hospitality) Hospitable=a friend to strangers. "We can well imagine how deeply appreciated was such hospitality in a day when organized social welfare on any large scale was virtually non-existent; when widows and orphans were dependent on the kindness of relatives and friends; when persecutions with their imprisonments raged fiercely; when poverty and hunger were far more in evidence than they are today in the countries of the West; when messages from one section of Christendom to another were delivered by personal messenger, necessitating a great deal of travel; when lodging with unbelievers was less than desirable. Hence, if hospitality was a requirement for every Christian according to his ability and opportunity to furnish it, it was all the more a requirement for the overseer...Example...Onesiphorus (2 Tim 1:16 May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.)"⁵

6. (In ability to teach) Able to teach=seasoned in the good things of God and able to communicate doctrine and practical application of this doctrine to the congregation...Example...Ezra (Neh 8:9 Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God...")

7. (In evil habits unentangled) Not given to drunkenness (wine) - (NASV=not addicted to wine). In today's society the only security against not over-indulging is to not indulge. Nabal (1 Sam. 25:36) was a bad example. Noah (Gen.9) and Lot (Gen 19) both got into trouble because of wine.

8. (In inter-personal relationships) Not violent= kind compassionate. This is quick-tempered and daring others to cross him. "Chip on the shoulder" type of thought pattern. This often is closely related to the one given to wine. Prov 23:29-30 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? {30} Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Jacob speaks of Simeon and Levi (Gen 49:4-5 Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it. {5} "Simeon and Levi are brothers-- their swords are weapons of violence.")

9. (In inter-personal relationships) Gentle=genial. A person willing to yield his own preferences and even rights in areas where there is no compromise of the truth. He is conciliatory, considerate and fair-minded... Example...Barnabas. (Acts 4:36.37; 9:27; 11:24).

10. (In conversation) Not quarrelsome=not contentious. He is a peaceable person...Example... 1 Cor 1:12 What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas "; still another, "I follow Christ."

11. (In matters of finances) Not a lover of money= cannot make the making of money or gathering of earthly treasure his chief goal in life...Negative example...The Rich Young Fool (Luke 12:20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'"

12. (In family matters) Manage his own family well evidenced by having his children obey him with proper respect. He is to lead his family (stand before them) with care and diligence...Example ...Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:9 "He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.")

13. (In maturity) Not a recent convert=novice. It means the opposite of one that has sprung up recently. It means one has been seasoned in the Word and in Christian living long enough not to be conceited or easily swayed by doctrinal error.

Titus 1:8-9 gives several additional concepts: a lover of the good, just, fair, holy (devout), of good

³. IBID, p. 123.

⁴. IBID. p. 123. Also see NTC on John, Vol. 1. p. 79, footnote 26.

⁵. IBID., p. 123.

doctrine, and one who is able to face opponents.

III. The Work of the Elder/s 3:1,4; 5:17; 1 Pet 5:2,3; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17

A. Take the Oversight

1 Pet 5:2-3 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; {3} not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

1. Not by constraint
2. Not for money
3. Not as tyrants or lords
4. By Example

B. Feed the Flock

1 Tim 5:17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

C. Guard Against Perversion

Titus 1:9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Titus 1:13 This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith

2 Tim 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, {17} so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

D. Rule

1 Tim 3:4-5 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. {5} (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)

Heb 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Conclusion:

The office, person, and work of the elder is an example to the church. It in no way diminishes the believer's individual privilege and responsibility to function as a surrendered, holy servant/disciple.