

# 1 Timothy 3:1-6

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're in the middle of a series on eldership. We looked first week at the importance of eldership.

! I think when we look at the qualifications for elders, there's two opposite mistakes that we could make in thinking about the qualifications of an elder.

One would be to set the qualifications too high. It would be a mistake for me to preach in such a way that gives you such an idealistic and unrealistic way that no man with any degree of humility or common sense could live up to.

It would be a mistake to preach it in that way. Sometimes I'm afraid that can be done. I think when churches have had the same elders for decades, a small eldership, it can be made to look like the standards of eldership are just too high.

We are praying and seeking to train and appoint elders. Those of us who are elders here, we are sinners.

[ 1 : 31 ] We sin every day. We are men who make mistakes and we constantly need to seek God's forgiveness. There are no perfect elders.

There are no perfect candidates for eldership on this earth. There is no one, not an elder, who does not have weaknesses or inadequacies or blind spots.

There is not an elder who comes right up to the standard required in scripture. And so it would be harmful to us as a church, as well as hypocritical, to put before you an unrealistic picture of the qualifications for the eldership.

On the other hand, it would be equally harmful, and this is more the case that happens today, to set the qualifications too low.

God has taken the trouble, hasn't he, by his Holy Spirit, to list for us in several parts of the Bible the qualifications that are essential for an elder. He uses a particular word in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 2.

[ 2 : 40 ] Can you just look with me at that verse, because I think it will really help us. He says, therefore, an overseer, and here's the word. If you've got your own Bible with you, don't do it in the church Bible.

If you've got your own Bible with you, underline the word must. That word is a very strong word, must. It means what Paul is going to say to you is essential.

It is necessary. God is saying, he is not saying that the elder should have these categories or qualities. He's not saying that the elder may have some of those qualities that he's going to list.

He says, doesn't he, he must. He must have them. An elder must have these, and without them, the elder should not be appointed to office. And so while we set the scriptural standards, we want to acknowledge right off the bat that none of us as elders meet this standard perfectly.

But we also have to say there are qualifications which are essential. God requires them. They must be present to some extent in the elder.

[ 3 : 52 ] Perhaps they're only present, like the flower is present in the bud. The flower is there in the bud, isn't it? But it's not in full bloom.

The qualifications haven't yet fully developed to the state that they will develop. They are in embryo. They are there in bud. Those qualifications, they are there in bud, but they need to be brought out into the full.

They need to be increased. Those qualities, they can be underdeveloped, that's okay. They can be imperfect. They can be weak.

But the one thing they can't be is absent. They cannot be absent. No man will have all these qualities.

But a man who is without these qualities should not be appointed to office. I want to mention just a couple of things before we come to my three points. It's quite clear in the Bible that an elder should be a man.

[ 4 : 55 ] I say that unapologetically. I think it's plain on the teaching of scripture. I'm going to take another sermon at some point before we come to elect elders on talking about that. But what we've seen over the last 50 years is that in a number of denominations, women have been appointed to the eldership or church leadership role.

It's clear if you go home and read the Bible from the passages in the Bible that deal with the office of eldership, that is an unbiblical appointment. There is no warrant in the word of God for appointing women to the eldership.

We need to say, don't we, many of those women are excellent. They are gifted. Many of them are godly. They are dedicated. That was not the point.

An issue. The word of God is clear. Unashamedly, that an elder must be a man. And that's for our good. That's something we're not ashamed of here. And secondly, I don't think we should evacuate the word of its literal meaning.

An elder, it literally means someone who is older. The Bible is not saying that an elder should be an old man.

[ 6 : 02 ] But it is saying that ordinarily, an elder shouldn't be an extraordinarily young guy. The word elder has this meaning of an old man, of maturity more.

And so, we're looking for men who are not in the first flush of youth. And Paul says they mustn't be a recent convert. Or they may become conceited and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

That's saying, you put somebody who is too young and not ready for church leadership. There is the danger of conceit. And they receive the eldership too early.

It can have a real detrimental effect upon them. So, the qualifications for elder. Three points. First, the elder's character. Secondly, the elder's family. And thirdly, the elder's gifts.

So, first of all, the elder's character. And this is primary. Three, what are we interested in first of all? What we're interested in first of all is this. What sort of man is he?

[ 7 : 08 ] Is he a good man? Is he a godly man? We're looking for grace above all, first and foremost.

It should need saying, but I do need to say this, that an elder must be a Christian. And yet, that requirement has often been disregarded in Presbyterian churches, isn't it?

I go to conferences and people speak to me about elders in their churches who actually are not trusting and loving and knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. An elder is somebody who has been born again by God's Holy Spirit.

An elder must be a man who is a new creature in Christ Jesus. An elder must be a man who is a lover of the Lord Jesus Christ. But more than that, an elder should be seen to be a Christian and known to be a Christian.

It should be obvious that he's a Christian. He should demonstrate a likeness to the Lord Jesus, which is discernible. I think it can be best described from these passages, the two passages that I read, as discipline or self-control.

[ 8 : 26 ] So we think of the Lord Jesus. One of the things I love most about the Lord Jesus is he was a master of himself. He was totally dedicated to doing his father's will, wasn't he?

And so the elder should have self-control over his appetites. The apostle says he must be temperate, not given to drunkenness.

That means he's a disciplined man. He can control his appetite for food. He should not be a glutton. He should control his appetite for rest.

He should not be a lazy man. Paul speaks that he should be temperate in his use of wine, not given to too much drink.

He has control over his physical and his bodily appetites. And Paul lays great stress on his control of temper.

[ 9 : 28 ] See how much he emphasizes this. The elder is to be self-controlled, not violent, but gentle. Not quarrelsome, not quick-tempered. That's saying the elder should not be a man who flies off the handle.

The elder should not be a man who is easily provoked, who loses the mastery of himself. And says things he shouldn't say. And hurts people.

And reacts in an uncontrolled, undisciplined way. He should be able to control his temper. He should have disciplined over things, not only himself.

So Paul says, not a lover of money. Not pursuing dishonest gain. He shouldn't be a materialistic type of man. A man who lives for possessions and money and profit.

In other words, what Paul is saying in all of this is that a man must rule himself before he can rule Christ's church. And so Paul's big point in the pastoral epistles, if you can't control yourself, how can you control the people of God?

[10:38] If you can't exercise authority over yourself, what right have you got to exercise authority over anyone else? If you can't tell yourself what to do, how can you tell others what to do?

It's actually very reasonable, very sensible. It's a common sense requirement. And so people must be able to look at the elder and see that he bears the scars of battle with himself.

He bears the scars of battle with himself. They should be able to look at an elder and see this is a man who's taken himself in hand, who's fought with himself, who's mortified himself.

Who's cut off his hand, who's plucked out his eye. Who's dealt in a harsh way with himself. He's ruled himself, he's disciplined himself. And when they see that, they are willing to accept his rule and his governance.

Because at that point, the elder is not asking you to do anything that he's not done himself. He is a man under authority. And therefore, God gives him authority.

[11:53] And so, the eldership is something that is observably, visibly, under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is shown and manifested by discipline in every area of his life.

By self-control. A better language of that is by Christ control. And this character is not merely a negative thing. This disciplined man has qualities which are warm and positive.

So Paul says, listen to me, the elder must be one that loves what is good. He loves what is good.

One who is upright. One who is holy. One who is holy. There's to be something attractive about this man.

To be the sort of man that the children would go to. To be approachable. To be someone that even our children, our young people would identify with.

One in which there is a geniality, a kindness. An affection. A warmth for the things of God and the people of God.

[13:01] But who at the same time is upright and holy. Who loves God and loves God's people.

Who is holy and happy. And this character is to be seen not only within the kind of four walls of the church and on Sundays, but in the world outside.

Paul uses the phrase, doesn't he? Did you pick it up? Above reproach. Respectable. Having a good reputation with outsiders. Blameless. And that word blameless, we need to understand what that means.

You might say, well, which of us is blameless? But what Paul means by that word is that no public reproach can be brought against this man. He's got a good reputation in the community.

If you were to go to someone in his town, his village, his street, they would know he's not a perfect man, but they wouldn't be able to tell you of some moral offense that the man has committed.

[14:07] You cannot appoint a man as an elder against whom there is a charge against in the community in his workplace. Some disgrace of someone who's behaved in a dishonest way.

A man who owes money. A man who doesn't pay his bills. A man whose word cannot be trusted. A man who's not honored and respected in the community. The eldest character. That's of primary importance.

Let's come secondly, the eldest family. And Paul lays stress on this, doesn't he? In fact, he tells us in a sense that the eldest family is the entrance examination which God sets.

The eldest family is the entrance examination which God sets for the eldership. And so there may be godly men who simply do not pass the entrance examination which God has sent.

And they may be good men. They may be worthy men. They may be gifted men. But they haven't passed the examination to the eldership. Because Paul says if anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?

[15:28] Paul is saying, isn't he, God gives you a little church to manage for him. That's your family. And if you can't manage that little church, how can you manage the church of God?

If a man does not know how to manage his own family, how can he manage God's church? And so in appointing elders, the word of God says we must, and again we must, consider the elder's family

to see if he is qualified.

By his management of his family to rule God's church. What does God say about the elder's family? He says, first of all, he must be the husband of but one wife.

It's possible that that might refer to Gentiles who are converted to the Christian faith. A man might be converted to the Christian faith and he's had several wives prior to becoming a Christian.

I'm not particularly convinced by that. It obviously has references to that, doesn't it, for those on the mission field. I'm not sure that is the issue that Paul is addressing in 1 Timothy 2.

[16:44] But he's saying if you've got four wives, you cannot be an elder. But what it is saying is this. It is saying certainly that a man in his relationships with other women must be above reproach.

His relationships with other women must be above reproach. The cliché is, isn't it, that what Paul is saying is that he must be a one-woman man. Eyes for one woman only.

That he's known for his devotion to his wife. He's not a flirt. He's not a man who makes unwise friendships with other women. He knows how to be a brother, a true brother to other women.

And they know that and they understand that. He's saying, isn't it, that there cannot even be a hint of scandal, of impropriety, of immorality.

He's a husband of but one wife. There's only one woman in this guy's life and it's abundantly clear to all who know him. There's no other. And then surely also, it must mean, isn't it, that he must be a true husband to his wife.

[17:57] A real husband. A husband in fact as well as in name. Not a husband who's emotionally distant from his wife. Not a husband who only eats and sleeps in the house with his wife.

But he's in the fullest sense of the world a husband. He loves her. He cares for her. And he understands her. So that their relationship is a beautiful relationship.

And speaks to others of Christ and his church. So it must be a good marriage in every sense of the word. A real husband to his wife.

And then if he has children, not all elders do. But we're told that if they do, he must manage his own family well.

And see that his children obey him with proper respect. That is saying to you, the elder must not be a tyrant in the home. To be a tyrant in the home, that's not good management.

[19:05] The home is to be a place where all the members of the family are happy. And where they are developing their own personality. Able to make their own decisions. Not ruled over by a tyrant.

And they're able to use their gifts to the full. That's good management, isn't it? If you're a manager in a business or in sport, it's your responsibility to see that everyone in the business or the sports team is fulfilled, is playing their role, is as happy as they can be.

That people under your management know what is expected for them to do. And that they have the ability and the equipment necessary to do it. And that people under your leadership are working together in harmony.

So the good manager doesn't do everything himself. The good manager is not a tyrant, but he brings out the best in those who work for him. That is good management.

And the elder is to manage his own family, to bring out the best in the members of his family. To see that they flourish. To see that they are satisfied and are given their place.

[20:17] That they are fully developed. That their gifts are recognized and affirmed. Not crushed. That his children's personality flowers as it should. And yet in all of that, the father is in charge.

The Bible is unashamed about that. The head of the home, the leader of the home. And scripture is really clear, isn't it? His children must obey him. So those who are under his authority must obey him.

I just can't get my child to do this. My child will not listen to me. Our children, you children who are here tonight.

Are you here? Are you listening? You children are called to obey your dad and mum in the Lord. That's the Bible's word to you. And the elder must have the ability to ensure the obedience of his children with proper respect.

Not with whinging and complaining and huffing and nagging or being upset. And Paul goes on. As a result of his wise management, Paul says, A man whose children believe.

[21:37] And are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Elder's management of his family will be blessed by God. So that people will see children who are obedient and respect their

father.

And so let me look with you at that. And look with me at Titus 1, verse 6 for a moment. I'll read to you from verse 5.

Paul says, This is why I left you Titus in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town, which is interesting in itself, as I directed you. If anyone is above reproach to the husband of but one wife, and his children are believers.

Children are believers. are not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. They're not wild or disobedient. That is a very searching requirement, isn't it?

But can I just remind you what I pointed out to you in 1 Timothy chapter 2, 1 Timothy 3, the word must. The word must. And then in Titus chapter 1, verse 6, can you see whose children believe?

[ 22 : 55 ] Now if you look, there's a little footnote there. There's a little footnote, number 4. And in number 4 it says, And children are, and it gives an alternative translation, who are faithful.

And as I've looked at this again this week, and read numerous people who've done all sorts of gymnastics, to say, Well no, it doesn't really mean believe.

It means faithful. In fact, it means more respectful. I've come to the conclusion that Titus 1, verse 6, that when it says children are believers, it really does mean believers.

There are lots of commentators who will go into all sorts of reasons why that just means respectful, but neither the word itself, nor the context of what Paul is talking about, will allow that.

Whose children are believers means whose children are believers. Those who are under his authority. And the man who cannot meet that requirement cannot be an elder in the church of Christ.

[ 24 : 05 ] I think there are caveats to that. I think there are those who are no longer under the authority of their parents, who have willfully and deliberately walked away from the Lord Jesus Christ.

But for those who are under our authority, believers means believers. We're also told that the elder is hospitable. The word literally means a lover of strangers.

His home is a center of hospitality. The home has visitors and guests in his home. The home is open. The elder must be hospitable.

I can boil eggs. I can work the toaster. I can do very little else. And yet the command is not the elder's wife be hospitable, is it?

The elder is hospitable. It's in our homes to be a center of love and of ministry and of witness. So much for the elder's family. His wife, his children, and then lastly his home.

[ 25 : 17 ] His home, and then thirdly and lastly. Let's look at the elder's gifts. A man who would be an elder must have certain gifts. We read in chapter 3, verse 1, if anyone sets his heart on being an overseer.

There's two words for elder, I think, in the New Testament. One is elder, literally, and one is overseer. The elder refers, I think, to the status, to the office.

The overseer refers to the work. Paul is, I'm not saying here that the prospective elder is to be going about saying, every day I want to be an elder.

I want to be an elder. One day I want to be nominated by the elders. I think if anyone is thinking that way, it probably means that they shouldn't be elected. Sometimes I go to churches and lunch with a family and they'll complain that they weren't elected to the office of eldership.

And that complaint only shows that the elders in that church and the congregation of that church were wise in not putting someone like that into eldership. That's what Paul means. He's not talking there about the design of the office, of the status.

[ 26 : 33 ] He says, he who desires sets his heart on being an overseer. In other words, it's a burden for the work. He's got a burden for the work of caring for the church, of helping people. So he might actually never be ordained to the office of an elder.

He may never be appointed to the session, but he will be a man who is going about in the congregation doing what elders do, caring for people, shepherding people, loving people, sharing the word of God with people.

He's a man who's helping and visiting and advising and caring and praying and being a spiritual friend to people. That's the man you should look for. A man who's set his heart on the burden of the work.

And so in one way, he doesn't care if he's appointed or not. Whether he sits on the session or not. He loves Christ and he loves Christ's people.

And supernaturally, there is that in him. God has put that in him. He is acting as an elder without even thinking of what he's doing. Without realizing what he's doing. And Paul is saying, look for men like that in the church family.

[ 27 : 46 ] Look for men, as it were, who are natural shepherds. And you see that by the way they live among you, by the way they talk among you. They have a burden. They're not passengers.

They're not people who just turn up on Sunday and rush off afterwards. They're men who care for the church, who are involved in the work with people. There's a volunteering spirit, a willingness as a man to take responsibility and authority.

Who will put up their hand and say, yeah, yeah, I'll do it. I'll have a go. I'll help you in this. And so you look for someone who's active in this way.

You look for someone who's doing the work. And if anyone sets his heart on that work, on that responsibility, on that burden, well, those are the men that God is preparing for eldership. That's what you're looking for. Those whom God has been preparing and equipping.

And then Paul also says to see, the apostle says he must be able to teach. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message that he's been told. He's able to teach.

[ 28 : 54 ] He's able to correct those who oppose him gently. What does the apostle Paul mean when he means able to teach? It means that an elder is a man with firm biblical views.

It means his beliefs are stable, that they're bedded down in his own mind. He knows where he stands and why he stands there. He supports the position of the church.

Paul says he must be able to teach. That doesn't necessarily mean being able to preach. So some of the finest elders that I have known would have died a thousand deaths before they stood up to preach a sermon.

And the congregation would have probably died more. They would have been totally unable to do it. But they were brilliant at talking to someone on a one-to-one basis. They could go into someone's home and if somebody said, actually, what must I do to be saved?

They could open their Bible and say, well, this verse has helped me. They could go to someone in need and speak about how the Psalms had helped them. They could help with the difficulty. They could say, well, actually, I find that difficult myself.

[ 30 : 00 ] I can't explain it, but here is a book that's really helped me. That's teaching, isn't it?

Teaching is the communication of truth in a way that helps people. And it doesn't have to be done in public.

And it doesn't have to be done to a large congregation. It can be done one-to-one very quietly. They can sit down with someone and help them get their lives straightened out. They can have the practical wisdom as well.

They can advise them and help them. There's all sorts of teaching that goes on in this congregation that I know nothing about, thankfully. Do you remember when Philip was in the desert and the Ethiopian eunuch is reading Isaiah 53?

And the Ethiopian eunuch says, who is this and what's he on about? And Philip is able to jump into the chariot and open his Bible and explain it. And so, the elder ought to be able to explain the way of salvation.

The elder ought to be able to talk about his own Christian experience to help people. The elder should be able to help them with their difficulties, to sympathize with their battles.

[ 31 : 11 ] He should be able to know where they get help. He should be able to say, there's a really helpful part in the Westminster Confession summarizing what the Bible teaches. There's a brilliant passage in the book of Luke on this.

It's easy to minimize that teaching of the elders. Some of our elders will have the gifts to teach publicly, to speak and preach the word of God effectively and faithfully, and that's a wonderful thing. Some will be able to do that, some won't be able to do that. But the teaching will be done in any case. The elders character, the elders godliness, the elders family, the elders gifts.

This is not a complete list, is it? But I think it's quite long enough. It's interesting that nearly everything that is required of an elder, almost everything is required of all of you, of every Christian, particularly the men amongst us.

There are just one or two distinctions out there. There is, an elder should not be a recent convert, but able to teach. Apart from those two, we're all required to be those other things.

[ 32 : 44 ] To be Christ-like. To be Christ-centered. To love Christ and love Christ's people.

To model to our families what a life of godliness looks like. To help people. And so as you and I think of these requirements, we ask, don't we, the question that the Apostle Paul asked, who is equal to such a task?

Who is equal to such a task? And Paul gives an answer in 2 Corinthians 3, verse 5. Our confidence comes from God.

Let's stand to pray. Let's stand. Let's pray. Oh Lord, our God, we bow our heads before you. and we recognize that you are God. And we confess to you how great the unworthiness we feel. Every time we're reminded of your requirements for Christian character, every time we read your commandments, as we think on what is required for those who hold office, we say with the tax collector, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[ 34 : 26 ] And we are not sufficient for these things. But we do thank you that your strength is made perfect in weakness. We thank you that you use the foolish things of this world, that all the glory may be yours.

And so we do thank you that you call to office imperfect and inadequate man. We thank you that you clothe them with your adequacy.

And you work through our stumbling efforts. So we do pray, oh God, for those of us who are elders, for the elders of this church and of our denomination, that we may take very seriously the responsibility that is ours.

And that our confidence would not be in ourselves, but our confidence would come from you. And we pray that you would help us to discharge the duties that you've given to us.

As elders, we ask forgiveness for our sins. And we ask for your help and your grace. We pray for us as a church family. Direct us in our thinking.

[ 35 : 40 ] Help us to seek your face. And we pray that you would raise up another generation of elders from this congregation. We want to give you thanks for all that is past.

We give you thanks for those who have served you in the history of this church. Those who are now enjoying their eternal reward with you. And so, Heavenly Father, help us to run the race, to fight the good fight, and to serve you.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.