

# “The Qualifications of an Elder”

The stability and success of a New Testament Church will depend in great measure upon the strength of the human leadership. This does not nullify the guiding ministry of the Holy Spirit or the operative, enabling grace of God. These truths comfort and sustain us. But the organization of the church has been established by our Lord and revealed in Scripture. And this organization requires responsible human leadership. But how does one know who should lead and who should follow? What guidelines do we have in order to insure that we are making the right choices?

Interestingly, God has revealed the kind of man who is qualified to be an elder (shepherd or overseer). The remarkable observation is that the emphasis is upon mature character, not ability or promise. It would appear that godliness is God’s standard for leadership. Whatever talents, leadership traits and abilities an elder might possess is all well and good, but the bottom-line issue remains: “What kind of Christian character does he possess?”

What follows in this brief appendix is a cursory analysis of the biblical qualifications of an elder. Two major passages give the appropriate data: 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. In this particular study, the Titus passage is considered first, and the Timothy passage is

added to the Titus data. Twenty character qualities are identified. To assist in personalizing the meaning, suggestions have been made as to how this characteristic might appear in life-situations. The “principle-in-action” merely attempts to describe (applicationally) the quality. Certainly, additional words could further describe the life-principle.

To lead God’s church requires a special man. None of us is perfect, certainly not even the leadership of the church. But the elder is characterized as a man who is making progress in these various areas of personal life. Like Paul, he would readily admit,

*“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead ...” (Phil. 3:12-13 NIV).*

May the Lord guide us in recognizing such men to lead us in the church. Let us consider the importance of the task and trust God to enable us to seek out and confirm our elders.

## The Office of “Elder” Character Qualifications

TEXT	CHARACTER QUALITY	PRINCIPLE-IN-ACTION
1. Titus 1:6 (1 Tim. 3:2) (also, Titus 1:7)	“above reproach”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person not only has a good reputation, but deserves it.</li> <li>• Man of genuine, observable integrity – thoroughly honest.</li> <li>• Unassailable Christian conduct; blameless; unbukable; spotless.</li> <li>• The sum total of a mature, distinctive Christian’s testimony.</li> </ul>
2. Titus 1:6 (1 Tim. 3:2)	“husband of one wife”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A one-woman kind of man, married and devoted to but one woman.</li> <li>• Creatively meets the needs of his wife in a special way.</li> <li>• Known for his love, fidelity and devotion to one wife.</li> <li>• Has not been through a broken marriage.</li> </ul>
3. Titus 1:6  (1 Tim. 3:4)	“having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion”  (“one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity..”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This means he manages well the affairs of the family in a Christian manner.</li> <li>• The older children (lit. “offspring”) have not rejected Christ and rebelled against the parent’s authority.</li> <li>• Describes a temperate family not characterized by riotous and improper living, but by growth unto maturity.</li> <li>• Does not describe a man who can minister to others but not his own home.</li> </ul>
4. Titus 1:7	“not self-willed”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not a self-centered, self-pleasing, arrogant person.</li> <li>• This man is flexible, open, fair; he is willing to admit his mistakes and move forward to correct them.</li> <li>• Does not dominate and crush others to one’s own way of thinking.</li> </ul>
5. Titus 1:7	“not quick-tempered”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person described has his temper under control; does not let anger flare up quickly; does not have a short fuse.</li> <li>• This one does not let his anger lead to sin (Eph. 4:16).</li> <li>• Does not jump to angry conclusions before the facts are heard.</li> </ul>

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| 6.  | Titus 1:7<br>(1 Tim. 3:3)                       | “not addicted to wine”                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person does not have a “drinking problem” but rather is moderate or temperate rather than excessive and addictive.</li> <li>• There is no excessive habit which controls this person; he is self-controlled.</li> <li>• This one does not exert his liberty and freedom in Christ to the point of excess.</li> </ul>   |
| 7.  | Titus 1:7<br>(1 Tim. 3:3)                       | “not pugnacious”   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not come to blows in anger against others; does not fight either physically, verbally or emotionally.</li> <li>• Does not use physical force against others; does not abuse physically his wife or children.</li> </ul>   |
| 8.  | Titus 1:7<br>(1 Tim. 3:3)<br>(Also 1 Peter 5:2) | “not fond of sordid gain”<br>(“free from the love of money”) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person’s life is characterized by the pursuit of God rather than dishonest gain (Matt 6:33).</li> <li>• This one is generous in material gifts, not one who hoards his wealth.</li> <li>• Does not see world riches to the exclusion of God.</li> </ul>  |
| 9.  | Titus 1:8<br>(1 Tim. 3:2)                       | “hospitable”   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This one’s home is used to entertain others in a relaxed, friendly hospitable manner.</li> <li>• Feels free to entertain both Christians and non-Christians.</li> <li>• Open to other people and their company; sees opportunities to use home for ministry (and does so).</li> </ul>  |
| 10. | Titus 1:8                                       | “loving what is good”  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated to that which is truly good or beneficial for personal or family life</li> <li>• Seeks out the good in thought, motive, and deed.</li> <li>• Known better for the good he embraces, rather than simply the evil he avoids.</li> <li>• Can discern between things and issues to know what is truly good and what is not.</li> </ul>   |
| 11. | Titus 1:8<br>(1 Tim. 3:2)                       | “sensible”   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This person lives his life in a wise, prudent manner.</li> <li>• He has balanced judgment at home, church, and at work.</li> <li>• This one makes sound, rational decisions after prayer and reflection, not rash or overly quick to action, but sound-minded.</li> </ul>  |
| 12. | Titus 1:8                                       | “just”   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His life evidences a rightness and justness in dealing with God and man.</li> <li>• Conforms his life to the standard of Scriptures; demonstrates practical righteousness.</li> <li>• Can make mature, wise, and just decisions based on biblical principles and fairness.</li> </ul>  |
| 13. | Titus 1:8                                       | “devout”   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is set apart to God by a distinctive, holy lifestyle that is in harmony with biblical standards and principles.</li> <li>• Seeks to daily walk with God in a close, intimate manner.</li> <li>• Is becoming less attached to the staining, polluting effects of sin and is becoming more and more “pure in heart” and action; he is engaged in a pursuit of God and practical holiness.</li> </ul>   |
| 14. | Titus 1:8                                       | “self-controlled”  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This one is disciplined in his personal control of desires, appetites, and felt-needs.</li> <li>• He holds in check his natural impulses; evidences the fruit of self-control.</li> <li>• Refrains from that which is not profitable, beneficial, lawful.</li> </ul>   |
| 15. | Titus 1:9<br>(also, 1 Tim. 3:2)                 | “holding fast the faithful word...”<br>(able to teach)       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He is doctrinally stable, a life-long student of the Scriptures, sound in every respect.</li> <li>• Does not believe, promote or hold to unreliable beliefs; stands without hesitation in the doctrinally true, conservative, evangelical camp.</li> <li>• He is both teachable by the Scriptures; capable of feeding himself from the Word of God.</li> <li>• Characterized as a man of the Word (see Ezra 7:10).</li> <li>• Able to exhort in sound teaching but also capable of correct rebuke on the basis of Scriptural teaching</li> </ul> |

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| 16. 1 Tim. 3:2             | “temperate”         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refers to one who is “calm, cool, and collected” in the various situations that might arise.</li> <li>• This man has sober-minded judgment; not prone to excessive bursts of uncontrolled emotion.</li> <li>• He is stable and steadfast, free from worldly thinking that would tend to cloud his thinking.</li> </ul>  |
| 17. 1 Tim. 3:2             | “respectable”       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The man is orderly and well-disciplined in personal projects; finishes tasks before him; organized.</li> <li>• Refers to a responsible, dependable individual; keeps his promise with actions as well as words.</li> </ul>  |
| 18. 1 Tim. 3:3             | “gentle”            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He demonstrates patience, forbearance, and yieldedness (deference) toward others; he is a true gentleman.</li> <li>• This one is sensitive and tender in dealings with others; he can be bold without being brash.</li> <li>• The man is sensitive and empathetic.</li> </ul>   |
| 19. 1 Tim. 3:3             | “uncontentious”     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The man is not offensively aggressive; does not insist upon his own rights to the exclusion of others.</li> <li>• He has his temper and words under control; is not quarrelsome.</li> <li>• He is agreeable, cooperative and a team-worker for the best benefit of the ministry.</li> <li>• Does not instigate disagreements, quarrels, fights, and unprofitable debates.</li> </ul>  |
| 20. 1 Tim. 3:6<br>(humble) | “not a new convert” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He has been a believer long enough to clearly demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) and spiritual qualifications for an elder.</li> <li>• He is not prideful and arrogant; does not seek the office for personal gain (whether financial, social position, prominence, or otherwise).</li> <li>• Desires to serve Christ, not self; is spiritually mature enough to distinguish the difference.</li> <li>• Has had adequate time to grow and season as a believer; he’s not simply eager and enthusiastic about Christ; he demonstrates depth and duration of commitment.</li> </ul> |

# Nature (Function) for the Office of Elder

What is the task of the elder? Fortunately, the Scripture is not silent concerning the specified functions that characterize the nature of the office of Elder. Note as well, these are shared areas of ministry functions.

**1) To oversee or rule well (I Thess. 5:12; I Tim. 3:1; I Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17)**

The first function of an elder is to direct the affairs of the church (cf. I Tim. 5:17 NIV). In a mutual-ministry approach, the shared responsibility of elder rule will minimize individual weaknesses and maximize strengths. Therefore, the proper administration of the church rests with the elders. The Board may choose to delegate their responsibilities to the church staff, but the authority for the leadership of the church lies with the overseers.

**2) To shepherd the flock of God (Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:2)**

A major function of elders is to shepherd the church. "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care ..." (I Peter 5:2a NIV). The imagery of shepherding suggests tender care, protection and feeding. These principles lie at the heart of the shepherd-minister who would serve as an elder. They form a Biblical framework for effective ministry.

**3) To be an example (I Pet. 5:3-5; Heb. 13:7)**

In emphasizing this point, the writer of Hebrews noted the function in this way. "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7 NIV). Elders cannot lead further into spiritual things than they have personally gone. Each elder within God's church must have the attitude of the Apostle Paul. "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (I Cor. 11:1).

**4) To guard right doctrine (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9)**

A critical ingredient to effective overseeing is the elder's command of Scripture. He is to be one who is "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). Doctrinal purity is a prerequisite to spiritual health and vitality. Elders are charged with the task of maintaining the church on solid, biblical ground.

**5) To confront and initiate discipline when necessary (Matt. 18:15-20; Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; see also I Thess. 5:12)**

If the tasks of careful oversight and doctrinal purity are taken seriously, then a proper administration of church discipline will naturally follow. Spiritual discipline is never easy but it is commanded. The elders must assume their responsibility for the care of the church. No wonder, then, that the local body

of believers is encouraged in the following way. "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

**6) To minister to the sick (or weak) and needy (Jas. 5:14-15; I Tim. 5:3-16; compare also God's concern for the needy in Ps. 12:5; 69:33; et al.; see also "hospitable" in I Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:8).**

A part of the elders' responsibility is to shepherd those in need. While there is debate as to whether the "sick" of James 5 are physically sick or spiritually weak, one definite principle is sure. The elders are to evidence their concern for those who are in need by faithful prayer. For certain, an elder's ministry reaches out to those in need.

**7) To appoint and commission leadership (I Tim. 5:22; I Tim. 4:14; compare with Eph. 4:11-12ff).**

As elders oversee and shepherd the church, they will, of necessity, be equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. Not only do elders care for the administrative organization of the church, but they are responsible for the raising up of new leadership as well. Such an ongoing task requires the utmost spiritual discernment and care.

**Summary:** Thus, we have seen that the office of church leadership at Fellowship is that of elder. Although the New Testament is flexible and uses interchangeably elder, overseer and shepherd, the best description of the office is elder. Therefore, Fellowship has a Board of Elders.

Additionally, we have noted the necessity for a plurality of elders. Our biblical conviction is that the Bible supports mutuality of ministry and plurality of leadership. Seven specific ministry functions were also suggested. Each was stated and briefly defined. These biblical functions instruct the elder as to the type of ministry he is to have.

**Please Note:** *The Elders of Fellowship have rewritten the church's "bylaws" (1988). A distinction between the Elder Board and Shepherding Elders was made. The Elder Board's responsibility is to set the spiritual, theological and philosophical direction of the church. Their role and function has been described in the preceding pages. Shepherding elders are men who are biblically qualified for the office, who have been recognized by the church body, and who function in the "shepherding elder ministry" as described by the Board of Elders. These men focus on the shepherding rather than overseeing function. They are extensions of the Elder Board, but do not meet to set policy or direction.*