

# Qualifications of Elders

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 24 March 2019

Preacher: Jason Webb

[ 0 : 00 ] So we're turning to Titus again this evening and seeing his will for his local churches there on the aisle.

! Titus 1 and we're going to read verses 5 through 9.!

An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

[ 1 : 09 ] 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.

Let's hear the word of God preached, Pastor Jason. Well, on Stephanie and I's first trip to Ethiopia, one of the highlights was going to an outdoor bazaar, an outdoor shopping area.

And I don't know what we would have done without our guides, if we didn't have our guide with us. We were in over our heads completely.

We're not talking about Walmart, where the price is, whatever the price is, and no haggling. You're expected to haggle, and you're supposed to do that little dance of, oh, I'm not interested in that, and that price is way too high.

And you come back, and you complain about the product, and you act disinterested, and to give them some sort of low-ball offer. And the whole skill of haggling, you might have it.

[ 2 : 24 ] I really don't have it. I'm not good at that sort of thing. And so to complicate things, everything was in burr, which is the Ethiopian currency. And it's not like there was 10 burr to a dollar.

There were 6 burr to a dollar. And so you're multiplying and dividing by 6, trying to talk to someone who only knows a smidgen of English.

And it was complicated. There were beggars. There were women nursing babies. There were children running everywhere. And it got to the point near the end when it got really bad.

One of the ladies in our group decided to be kind, and she handed out some food out the window of the van. And instantly, faster than I didn't think humanly possible, faster, the van is completely surrounded with women and children sticking their hands in.

And our driver starts blaring the horn, and he guns it, nearly running people over. And again, I don't know what we would have done if we didn't have our guides. Because more than once, they stepped in in those little haggling situations and looked the guy in the eye and said, you have to be crazy.

[ 3 : 38 ] We're not paying that. They got us through. They kept us from being taken advantage of. And so when you're with someone, and you need them, and they're guiding you in a strange and foreign place, and they do a really good job, we really fell in love with them.

Because they weren't just looking after themselves. They were looking after us. And no matter how inconvenient we were to them sometimes, they never ever said, that's it, you guys are on your own. They never ever left us on our own. That is the kind of leadership that Paul is talking to Titus about when he says, appoint elders in every town.

Appoint men who can get you from where you're at to the celestial city in a strange and somewhat frightening place. Now, you remember the church in Crete was a mess.

Not because they had intentionally made it so. It was a half-built building, so to speak. The roof wasn't quite on, and it was raining in Crete.

[ 4 : 44 ] And so what do you need to do when the church is in a mess? Well, we saw in the first three verses, you need to think great thoughts. It all begins there. That's where the church gets its guide.

That's where we get our direction. We think these great, high gospel thoughts. And this is one of the first three verses is one of the big doctrinal sections of Titus.

And as soon as he gets done with that and giving the greeting, he now goes into the second most important thing, and that is you need to get the right men into leadership.

Think great thoughts and get the right men in leadership. And that is the first two steps of getting a church going the right direction, keeping them safe in a dangerous place.

So that's what we've been looking at for the last couple of weeks, this getting the right men into leadership. We talked about a pastor as an elder. He leads with wisdom, God-given wisdom.

[ 5 : 50 ] And then last week we saw he's an overseer. He's a manager, a household steward. He doesn't own the house.

This isn't his. It's God's. Jesus is the Lord. The pastor is the steward and the manager and the overseer of the family.

And so those are his titles, and that's his work. But the majority of this section is now who's qualified? Who should be in those positions?

Who should be given the job, the work of overseer or elder? Who should be these leaders? What kind of men should they be? And I just want you to notice we're going to have just three very brief points today.

This sermon could have been really way long or not as long as usual, and I chose the not as long as usual. And so three brief points.

[ 6 : 50 ] And first I want you to notice that some of the things they don't have to be. These elders, these pastors, I just want you to, this isn't in the text, but I just want you to notice what's not there and what sometimes people look for when they look for pastors, and that's really not on the list.

You notice they don't have to be rich or successful in the world. Nothing wrong with that if they are, but an elder doesn't have to be successful in the eyes of the world.

And the reason I bring that up is there are some churches that put all the prominent high businessmen on the board, so to speak, on the eldership, thinking that because they are good out there in the world at business that they'll be good at the church.

And that's not necessarily the case. Paul doesn't talk about that. In the church, a poor man can be an elder over a whole lot of wealthy men.

They don't have to go to seminary. There is. They have to hold to the trustworthy message as it's been taught, but it doesn't say anything about seminary degree.

[ 8 : 02 ] It doesn't say anything about a Ph.D. or M.D. or something like that. Again, nothing wrong with that. But not some great educational attainment is necessary.

You don't have to be a successful networker or charismatic CEO. And sometimes that's what people look for in pastors.

You don't have to read the really bad pastoral ads to find that a lot of churches are really barking up the wrong tree.

I could have found, and I did find a couple of really obviously bad ones. But then I just turned up just sort of ordinary pastoral search.

You go on the Internet and they have websites for this sort of thing, all kinds of churches. And I just want you to see some of the things that people are looking for.

[ 9 : 01 ] Again, nothing wrong with being spiritually mature. I'm not sure what being young at heart, what that even means sometimes.

One had a list of five qualifications, and the fifth being having a good sense of business. Again, nothing wrong with that. Another one of this, and I'm not even sure what this means.

Not sure. Another required that the man be married, and his children had to go to the local public school.

And then they said this, Because of the importance of sports in our community, especially at the school, it is desirable, but not required, that the candidate have a love for sports. And under duties, must be willing to attend many school events, such as home games and concerts, in order to support the school and the students.

Now, I don't know what's going on there. I kind of get what they're saying. But loving sports is not on my list. Attending all the school events in town is not on my list.

[10:20] Having a good sense of business, not necessarily on my list there. Being young at heart is not on my list. I can just imagine some pastors are not young at heart anymore.

That doesn't mean they're not good pastors. Those weren't important to Paul. And therefore, they were not important to our Lord Jesus either.

And so what does Jesus say is important? He has his own list of requirements. The things that he puts his finger on and says, Now this is the kind of men that I want in leadership.

And only these kind of men. We start in verse 6. And Paul says this twice. He must be blameless. Twice.

Verse 6 and then in verse 7. He must be blameless. Before a man can be an elder, he must be. He must be.

[11:18] And notice, I'm not going to read them all, but you can notice all the must-bes in this passage. These aren't options.

It would be nice if. They must be. This isn't like that. Well, it's good if you like sports. That's a desirable thing. It's not about being desirable, but not necessary.

All of the things that Paul lists here are necessary. These are the non-negotiables. This isn't going to go buy a car, and you're looking for one that's blue and has a sunroof, but you might settle for something otherwise.

No, this is the engine. There's no go without this. Without these. And so what is the first? It's given twice. They must be blameless.

Not sinless, but blameless. And I think the best way to understand this term is this is sort of an umbrella term. It's a catch-all.

[12:23] This is a general statement. There can be nothing that disqualifies him. There can't be anything where people can say, yeah, but he is blank.

Or yeah, but what about that? And that is something significant. Nothing in his character or in his record that people can put a finger on and hold him and say, that's bad.

And say, well, look at that. It's obvious. He shouldn't be a pastor. And so looking at the whole list that follows, is he blameless in these?

And he's going to give about 12 or 13 things. Is he blameless? Is he blameless? In all of these areas, can anyone put a finger on him and say, you know what?

He does not meet that requirement. And it's not 90% of the qualifications. He must be blameless. Nothing in his character or in his record that people can put a finger on.

[13:27] Now, there might be all sorts of scenarios where we can think about, well, do we want to think about it one way or another? For example, there is some debate in our day and age about whether a pastor who has fallen into adultery can be put back into the ministry.

And there are some churches that do that. And I think that's an egregious rung. And I think the biblical answer is that that is definitely not. It's not that I don't believe in repentance.

It's not that I don't believe in grace. But I do believe that above reproach, being blameless, it means something. It means the past matters.

Your record matters. Your character matters. You're leading God's people. You're speaking on Jesus' behalf. And that means you shouldn't have any significant handles that people can grab a hold of and bring you and the church that you are leading and Jesus into disrepute.

You should be a good representative, someone that the church can say, now let's look at him and follow him. Now, that's sort of the idea of blameless.

[14:45] And you can see Paul puts this emphasis on it. He makes it two times, and he expels out what it actually looks like. There's something else very important about this idea of blameless.

And I want you to think with me. And I want you to just, and I want to put it like this. What is he talking about when it says this man needs to be blameless?

What is this talking about? Is this talking about what this man thinks of himself or what people think of him? Is it what he thinks of himself or is it what other people think of him?

And I think the answer is it's what other people think of him. That's the clear answer. Because the idea of blameless is the idea of people are now looking at you, evaluating you, accusing or defending you.

It has everything to do with what other people are saying and thinking and evaluating. It's not his evaluation. It's their evaluation.

[15:53] So Brian Chappelle, in his commentary, writes this. Paul's above reproach standard, the standard that he says they have to be blameless, is based upon what others in the church see and observe.

It is not so much a standard for one's own internal assessment. It's not for what I'm looking at myself, but rather reflects the external, the outside community's observation.

In this passage, the way a man is regarded by those in the church is Paul's primary concern. How men observe, regard this man as Paul's primary concern.

So there, we like to talk about it like this. There's an internal call, a desire to preach, where a man feels and he has a desire to do this work.

He feels like God wants him or is leading him to do that. But, that is not enough and that is not decisive in this passage. It's not even primary.

[17:05] Paul says in 1 Timothy, if anyone says it's hard on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. And he doesn't say, full stop, that's enough. But he says, now, the overseer must be above reproach.

And then in Timothy, he gives his list there. It's good. It's noble. It's right to want to be a pastor, but it is not decisive.

The church's collective assessment, is he blameless? As you look on him, that is the decisive key that Paul is bringing up here. The church's collective evaluation decides and truly recognizes who Christ is calling.

And so you want it, but who agrees with you? You see it in yourself, but do others. Now, Paul puts his emphasis not on self-evaluation, although that is definitely good, but in this case of actually installing elders, he puts it on the church-wide evaluation.

Is he blameless? And so there's a process. It takes time. It's a process that can't be cut off or abbreviated because he must be.

[18:24] It's not he might be or I think he might be, but he definitely is. There's certainty here. We know it. And so if a deacon needs tested before he becomes a deacon, then certainly an elder needs to be tested and evaluated and passed this test of the collective church-looking as he blameless.

And Chabal brings this up, but some men don't want that. So he says this, such accountability grates against our independent spirit.

Why should I have to worry about what others observe and think, we question. The answer is that Christian leaders should always be concerned for the testimony of the gospel because we are responsible for the spiritual welfare of others as well as as ourselves.

We should seek to make the gospel credible to others by our example. A Christian leader's readiness to accept spiritual responsibility for others becomes evident.

Now, is he ready to accept spiritual responsibility for others? It becomes evident. It becomes clear that he is ready when he passes that first measure of blamelessness.

[19:45] When they are ready to follow him, he is now ready to lead them. So, we've talked about some things that an elder doesn't have to be.

We've also talked about some things that, one thing that he has to be, he has to be blameless. And now, our third point is this, he must be a proven family leader.

He must be a proven family leader. The husband of but one wife, and that means a one-woman man is how it is literally.

He's a one-woman man. Eyes, heart, only for this one woman, his wife. The husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

So, we need to, like we did before, we need to clear the road here. We need to get some things out of the way first. Does that mean that an elder has to be married?

[20:54] I suppose there's a certain kind of reading where you would say, if you just look at it, well, if he's an elder, he has to be married. Well, I don't think it's saying that. Paul himself wasn't married.

And there's no evidence that Titus was married either. Paul himself says, I wish that all men were like I am. And he's talking about his singleness. Singleness doesn't disqualify you from the eldership.

Singleness doesn't disqualify you from serving the Lord. Singleness, in Paul's mind, uniquely gives you an opportunity to serve the Lord. So, that's what he says in 1 Corinthians.

And I'm sure he's not contradicting himself here. And this matter of singleness, I think, is something that we have the tendency to forget.

Singleness is a gift of God. A husband, a wife is a gift of God. Singleness, too, is a gift from God. And in many situations, it is to be preferred.

[ 21 : 59 ] And I didn't say that. Paul said that. And let me just give a little, I always feel a tinge of something's not quite all right there when I hear someone that says, this man needs to get a wife, or let's pray that they have a spouse.

And I totally agree that there is lots of times to pray that way. But I think Paul would rather have us pray, Lord, make that person holy and useful, whether he's single or whether that he's married. Give a spouse if that's your will. And if it's not, then give them that gift of singleness and help that person to work.

And so, I guess all that to say is, no, he doesn't have to be married. So therefore, he doesn't have to have children either. And then when it says that he has to have children and those children, does this, when it says they believe, does that mean they need to be saved?

They have to believe. Is that saving faith? Again, I hope you can see why that's probably not what Paul is talking about.

[ 23 : 21 ] I don't really think it is at all. It just can't be. I'm not in charge of election. faith is a gift from God.

It cannot be manufactured by even the most perfect parents. And I'm sure with many of you, you'd say, I would die to give my children a saving interest in Jesus.

I would give up my life if they could know him. But, again, I can't regenerate, and I can't give them repentance.

I can't join them to Jesus Christ. That's something that God himself does. And so, I don't think this means, when he says that they believe, it's talking about saving faith.

The word can mean saving faith, in some contexts it does, but sometimes it can just mean faithful. And I think that's what we have here. And the question is, are these children, not that they're guaranteed every single one of them saved, but are these children being brought up in the faith?

[ 24 : 37 ] You remember what life is like. This is first generation in Crete, the church is there, and the question is, are these men now bringing up their children in the gospel, in Christianity?

or are the children just doing whatever and living the old kind of life? And so the question is, do they show in age-appropriate ways that their mom and dad are raising them up in the instruction of the Lord?

And again, this is not a technical check-off-the-box requirement. It's really asking that, this whole, this verse is asking that blameless question. does he love his wife?

Is he faithful to her? Is he devoted to her? Does he show godly leadership in his family? Does he show servant-hearted leadership with his wife and with his children?

Or is she a wreck and the children are a wreck? And he's saying, I want to be an elder. father. If a man, Paul says it himself, if a man can't manage his own family, how in the world, why in the world could he ever manage God's family?

[ 26 : 00 ] If you can't handle five people, how in the world can you handle 50? If your family won't follow you, and you have no proven record of bringing them along, then whatever would make you think that you could do that for others?

And so this man, does he love his bride? Is he a one-woman man? Does his marriage reflect Christ and the church? And so that people can say, yeah, maybe not perfectly, but that's what a Christian marriage is supposed to look like.

That's what it sort of looks like between Christ and his church, where he's lovingly laying down his life for her, and she's gladly submitting to his kind rule over her.

Does he know about loving servant leadership? Has she found it a joy to submit to him because his ways are good and his ways are wise and he is a kind man?

And again, why should he ever love Christ's bride if he hasn't learned to love his own? Because there's flaws in both. and his children and his parenting.

[ 27 : 19 ] Patterns of unruliness, patterns of disbelief, patterns of foolishness, wildness, disobedience in his own family is disqualifying, at least for now, until things change.

Now, none of this means that there are never problems, never disobedience, or never any difficulties. Some commentators have noticed that he is using the word plural when he talks about children, because sometimes three of the children are brought up and one just goes way out and it's the exception.

it's not the rule. And I think we need to take that into consideration. And so, it doesn't mean that there's never any problems, never any disobedience. The question is, how does he handle them? Does he handle them with leadership, with godly leadership, with servant leadership? Does he handle them with wisdom? Does he handle them with grace? In that case, those problems don't disqualify him, and the way he handles them eminently qualifies him, shows him he's ready. He's ready. He knows how to handle a problem. He knows how to handle difficulties. In other words, is this man a good example? And we've already talked about what life is like in Crete. Well, what does godliness look like on the ground level when godlessness is everywhere?

[ 28 : 55 ] Well, a godly marriage is a unique and rare and beautiful thing, and the elders should have that if they are married. So the Cretan Christians, they needed leaders showing them how to do family.

They needed them. They needed leaders with practical know-how, with practical on the street how to handle given situations. Like I was just talking about at the very beginning, when we were in that place and we didn't know how to handle a situation, it was so good to have someone come in and say, I know how to handle this and you just follow me.

So it's not holiness, it's not godliness in theory, but it's at street level in action. It's in deed. And so people can look at them and say, that's how to do it.

Or when they have questions or problems in their own life, they can come and say, well, how do you do that? Tell me. And they're ready to teach them. And so I hope you can see the wisdom and the necessity of what Paul is talking about.

Christianity begins in the home. Holiness begins in the home. That's the place where you really see the fruit of the spirit of love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control.

[ 30 : 19 ] That's where you see those things coming out, not when people are all looking, but when the rubber meets the road. God. And so holiness begins in the home.

And what Paul is saying here is leadership does too. Leadership begins in the home. So pray for us.

This is the practical application. I hope you can gather the other practical applications like when we're looking for men, these are the kind of men we should be looking for and the kind of things that we don't need to be looking for, but just most most necessary, most in this moment.

Pray for us. Pray especially for me. I'm in the throes. We are in the throes of raising our children. We need wisdom and we need grace and we need Jesus Christ and we need the Holy Spirit's wisdom and his life.

we need his fruit coming into our lives. And so pray for us. Pray for me. Satan wants to attack the church. He wants to attack my house.

[ 31 : 36 ] He wants to attack Pastor John's house. House is a good ground for him to attack. And so men have ruined their families. Pastors have ruined their families and ruined their churches.

And just this area. pray for us. We have feet of clay. We need grace. And I'm just going to end with this. A couple of years ago I was at the Pastors Fraternal in Grand Rapids.

So it was March three or four years ago. And it was in the break and the main speaker was sitting in the sofa and I was sitting in the same area and no one else was around.

And he's been in the ministry for 30, probably almost 40 years now. And so I asked him, what's one thing you would tell me? I'm a newish pastor.

What's one thing you'd tell me? And he said this, remember what qualified you in the first place. Remember what qualified you in the first place. Never forget what qualified you to begin with.

[ 32 : 45 ] Love your wife. Love your children. And that's good. And I just want to say thank you to you and I'm so glad that you let us do that here.

There are some churches that have put a hundred tons of demands on the pastors. And those demands kill that man, kill his family, kill the marriage.

And you don't demand and demand so our wives and our children die on the vine. You let us be exemplary family men.

And you let us take care of our own. And I hope that you see that in doing that, you keep us qualified. You keep us in the ministry. You keep us able to lead. And so thank you and keep going in that. Well, let's pray. God, you are so full of wisdom and goodness.

[ 33 : 54 ] We just see your goodness and your wisdom on the page here and in the requirements that you have for the eldership. And we want to be a church that doesn't get sidetracked into lesser things, but holds the main things and makes the main things the main things.

We want to be a church that has genuine, humble godliness that begins in the home, begins in the marriage, that begins in the parent-child relationships.

So, continue to bless us in this area. Thank you for how you have led us so far. Continue to lead us, continue to perfect us, and give us leaders like this, proven, blameless men.

We pray this in Jesus' name for his sake. Amen.