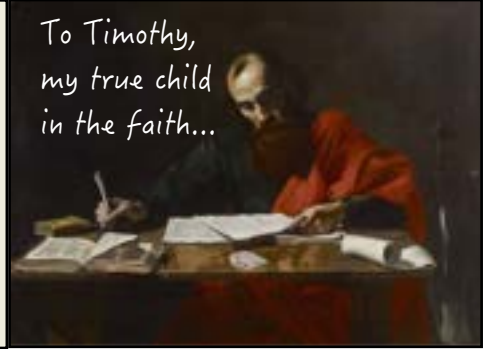


1 Timothy

A Call to Faithful Service

Lesson 5

To Timothy,
my true child
in the faith...



In chapter 2, Paul wrote to Timothy about the men who were angry and quarreling followed by instructions about the role of women in the meetings of church. Now Paul instructs on those who will lead in the church; namely the elders and deacons. In this lesson we will look only at what he writes about the elders. We can easily see that the office of elder is a male leadership position as the pronouns “he” and “his” are used throughout the section as well as the fact that the elder must be “the husband of one wife.”

The Qualifications of Elders (3:1-7)

“*The saying is trustworthy*” indicates that by this time a proverb had developed about men aspiring to become elders. In the ESV we find the word “*aspires*” along with “*desires*” to describe how a man might view the office of elder. These words show that a man should not be forced into serving as an elder reluctantly and that looking forward to the opportunity to serve in this capacity is a worthy goal. The descriptions of the qualified elder show his aspirations come from a desire to serve and not a quest for power or prestige.

New Testament Words for the Office of Elder

| Greek Word | Literal English Translation | Common English Bible Translations | Main Emphasis | Scripture References (Not Exhaustive) |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| <u>Presbyteros</u> | An older man | Elder or Presbyter | Age, wisdom, and experience | Acts 20:17; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1 |
| <u>Episkopos</u> | Overseer | Overseer or Bishop | Guardian, responsible watching with care | Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; <u>1 Timothy 3:2</u> ; Titus 1:7 |
| <u>Poimen</u> | Shepherd | Shepherd or Pastor | Protection | Ephesians 4:11; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2 |

In the New Testament, *presbyteros*, *episkopos*, and *poimen* are used interchangeably. Paul sent to Ephesus (Acts 20:17) and called the “elders” (*presbyteros*) and in Acts 20:28 these men are referred to as “overseers” (*episkopos*) who are to “care for” or “shepherd” the flock (*poimen*). In 1 Peter

5:1,2, Peter exhorts the “elders” (*presbyteros*) to “shepherd” (*poimen*) the flock, exercising “oversight” (*episkopos*). Paul said that the evangelist Titus (Titus 1:5,7) was to appoint “elders” (*presbyteros*) and then gives qualifications for these “overseers” (*episkopos*).

From these passages and others we can conclude that elders, overseers/bishops, and shepherds/pastors are the same position as these words are used interchangeably. This means there is no distinction in the church between elders/pastors/overseers/bishops/shepherds. One part of restoring the Church to the pattern found in the New Testament, and providing a Scriptural foundation for what we do, is to use the terminology of the Bible.

1. Why is it important to understand the vocabulary of the Bible?

The qualifications of elders are recorded in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; and 1 Peter 5:1-3. The lists are complimentary, but not identical so we see these qualifications as descriptive of the type person who is qualified to serve as an elder.¹



Each list describes a man who desires to serve, who is mature in the faith, self-controlled in his lifestyle, and of good reputation. These qualifications are numerous and stringent because these man will be responsible to guard the flock against false teaching (as was happening in Ephesus) and to provide sound Biblical teaching within the church.

2. Define the following positive attributes that an elder is to possess:

- a. Above reproach
- b. Sober-minded
- c. Self-controlled
- d. Respectable
- e. Hospitable
- f. Able to teach
- g. Gentle



The “*husband of one wife*” is probably the most debated of listed qualifications. Some of the controversies are whether or not this means that a man must be married; if widowers are still qualified; if men who have been remarried after the death of a spouse or divorce are qualified. If men’s whose wives have deserted them (through no fault of their own) are

¹ For a more thorough study of this subject see: Newman, Jim, *Shepherding the Flock* a 10 lesson series on eldership available to download at: <http://scbi.com.au/bible-study/shepherding-the-flock/>.

still qualified. Some believe Paul lists this qualification to exclude polygamists from serving as elders.

The literal Greek phrase is that the elder be a “*one woman man*.” For this lesson let it suffice to say that Paul expects an elder to be faithful to his wife. A man who has been divorced at some time in his past may be disqualified by the need to be above reproach and at least in some instances it may also show a lack of self-control.

3. Why would marital unfaithfulness disqualify a man from the eldership?

One of the key responsibilities of the elder is to be able to teach. To teach an elder must know and understand the Scripture and be able to share his faith with those in the church. The elder does not necessarily need to be able to stand before a large group to present a lesson or sermon. His teaching might take place through one-on-one mentoring, wise counseling, or sharing in small groups. The key is that the elder knows the Bible and can communicate its truth in a way that is understandable and profitable.

4. Define the following negative attributes that an elder is not to possess:

a. Not a drunkard

b. Not violent

c. Not quarrelsome

d. Not a lover of money

It is important here to say a few words about the phrase “not a drunkard” in the ESV or “not addicted to wine” in the NASB. Both translations have taken liberty in assigning a meaning instead of a literal translation. This phrase has been translated from two Greek words in 3:3 (*me paroinon*) which literally means “not beside, by, or at wine.” *Me* is the Greek word for not; while *paraoinos* is a compound word where *para* means beside, and *oinos* means wine. Literally the phrase then should be understood to indicate abstaining from drinking wine and most likely even abstaining from being in the presence of those who are drinking.

This understanding of drinking alcohol is consistent with the other qualifications of the elder such as “sober-minded” which comes from the Greek word *nēpháleos* which is defined as sober or temperate and abstaining from wine² or “free from intoxicants” and “abstinent in respect to wine.”³ The word here likely has a wider meaning of being sober-minded or self-controlled in all respects, not just as it relates to alcohol.

5. What does 3:4-5 teach us about how an elder manages his family life?

² <http://www.studylight.org/lexicons/greek/gwview.cgi?n=3524>

³ <https://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1208#>

As in marriage, there are experiences gained in parenting that cannot be learned elsewhere. Elders are men who are involved in the lives of their children. Their children have learned to be godly from them and at least while they are living at home, the children are to be obedient.



As all people have free-will, elders cannot be held responsible for the actions of their adult children after they leave home. It is unlikely that this passage is meant to teach that elders must be fathers since not all couples are blessed with children. Whatever the household, whether a spouse or a spouse and children, the elder will be one who demonstrates how to lead a family.

The word translated “*dignity*” describes a man who has the right mix of respect, love, courtesy, humility, and seriousness.

6. What does 3:6 along with being able to teach tell us about an elder’s spiritual maturity?

While the eldership is something to be desired, it is important that those who come to this office have demonstrated over time their faithfulness, devotion, and ability to serve in this position. Some new converts shine brightly for a short time, but the cares of this world and other interests take them away from a long term commitment to Christ and his church.

7. Why is it important what those outside the church think of a man serving as elder?

The eldership is important to a strong and vibrant congregation. The man who aspires to this role desires a noble task. Not all men are gifted to serve in this position either because of a lack of desire to serve as an elder or because he lacks some of the qualities listed; such as an ability to teach.

Practical Application

1. Each church should begin to cultivate young men who one day may become elders. Through spiritual development and by seeing faithful examples young men may aspire to one day become elders themselves.
2. Churches should be thankful for those men whom God has entrusted as shepherds of the flock. We should encourage them and listen to them as they teach us by word and action.
3. Elders should not take lightly their responsibilities in their own homes and in their own lives.