

The Elders of the Church

"The saying is sure: If any one aspires to the office of bishop (elder), he desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no love of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household well, how can he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil; moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." (I Timothy 3:1-7)

- (I Tim.: 3:1) 1. *Aspires to the office...desire a noble task:*
There is an apparent, sincere desire to serve the Father. The elder has his heart set upon service.
- (I Tim.: 3:2) 2. *Above reproach:*
This cannot mean sinless. Rather, a man who, though a sinner, habitually strives to walk by the rule of God's Word. A blameless man will not be found doing what he knows is plainly wrong. The prospective Elder must have a favorable testimony from two groups, church members, and those outside of the church as well.
- (I Tim.: 3:2) 3. *Husband of one wife:*
A "one-woman man" requires that an elder be a loyal husband living in a pure marriage relationship without adulterous relationships or attitudes. This has nothing to do with previous divorce on Biblical grounds, nor does it prohibit a single man from serving. The implication here is the importance of morality.
- (I Tim.: 3:2) 4. *Temperate:*
Not given to excess in any area of life. He remains stable, steadfast, and his thinking is clear. He "calm, cool and collected" in most situations. Most of all, he doesn't lose perspective because of false security. He is filled with spiritual and moral earnestness.
- (I Tim.: 3:2) 5. *Sensible:*
As Paul wrote to the Romans: "*For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment.*" (Romans 12:3) A *sensible* man is a humble man. He realizes that he was lost without Christ and that all of his human abilities and achievements were useless in winning any favor with God. He is not swayed by sudden impulses over which he exercises no mastery. The sensible person is always ready and willing to learn.
- (I Tim.: 3:2) 6. *Dignified:*
Having a well-ordered life. He lives in such a way that his life-style adorns the teachings of the Bible. Whether it be his dress, his speech the appearance of his home, his office, or the way he does business—all are to be in proper relationship to biblical principles. Since God is a God of order, a man of **God too** should be orderly and proper. He is to be a Christian gentleman in all areas of his life.
- (I Tim.: 3:2) 7. *Hospitable:*
His concern for the people is expressed in the use of his home. It is not just a sacred responsibility or religious duty, but rather an act of Christian love. It is this love that provides the basic motivation for reaching out to others. "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" A friend of strangers...the Elder communicates to their necessities. Hospitality is the responsibility of all but in the position of Elder it should be an area of strength to such a degree that it should be a gift.
- (I Tim.: 3:2) 8. *An apt teacher:*
He has a knowledge of sound doctrine and ability to use it to instruct, to exhort, and to "refute those who contradict". He must also be teachable in receiving instruction and sensitive to people in giving it, being kind to all, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition. Aptness to teach implies possibly the gift of teaching.

- (I Tim. 3:3) 9. *No drunkard:*
The Scriptutres are clear. No Christian was to allow himself to be affected in a negative way by strong drink. As Paul wrote: *"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit."* (Ephesians 5:18 see also I Peter 4:2,3; Proverbs 23:29-34). This is especially important for a leader in the church. A wine-bibber, tippler, or drunkard cannot be a worthy Elder.
- (I Tim. 3:3) 10. *Not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome:*
Should not have a quick temper. The Bible nowhere classifies all anger as sin. Anger is sinful when it arises too soon. When a person "flies off the handle", he is not in control of his own spirit. He is easily threatened and is quick to retaliate. On the opposite side we have the one who is gentle, yielding, forbearing, considerate, magnanimous, genial. He is willing to yield when it comes to his own rights, in the spirit of I Corinthians 6:7, *"Why not rather suffer wrong?"*
- (I Tim. 3:3) 11. *No lover of money:*
His life must not be concerned with amassing material things. When this is the case there is constant seeking after more and more. Selfishness and pride take over. The Scriptures tell us: *"Let your way of life be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.'" (Hebrews 13:5)* A holy habit of tithing would indicate his priorities were in order when it comes to money.
- (I Tim. 3:4) 12. *He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive:*
Young children must be under control in all dignity. His wisdom makes it natural for a child to obey, and his love makes it a pleasure for a child to obey. Older children should be following the faith of their father and, as Paul reminds us *"not open to the charge of being profligate or insubordinate."* (Titus 1:6) Any man unable to govern his children graciously and gravely by maintaining good discipline, is no man for government in the Church. This, of course does not mean that it is necessary to have children to be a spiritual leader in the church, or even that he must be married.
- (I Tim. 3:6) 13. *Not a recent convert:*
As Paul points out, *"he may be puffed up with conceit"*. The conceit that is engendered by over-rapid advancement would tend to cloud the judgment. Also, inevitably, pride leads to a fall. In other words, an Elder must be a mature man of God.
- (I Tim. 3:7) 14. *Well thought of by outsiders:*
The necessity of adding this requirement follows from the fact that often such "outsiders" know more about the man in question than do the members of the church. It frequently happens, for example, that most or all of those associated with him in his daily occupation are unbelievers. Their judgment is of some importance. Besides, the church seeks to exert a powerful influence for good upon the world, leading sinners to Christ. An overseer's bad reputation with the world will not be of any help in achieving this purpose.

As Paul puts forth:

"Appoint elders in every town as I directed you, if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of being profligate or insubordinate. For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, master of himself, upright, holy, and self-controlled; he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it." (Titus 1:6-9)