

Issues Pertaining To Church Elders

Introduction

Appointing church leaders is a most serious matter and if mishandled, can have dire consequences for the future of any church. So if a church is to be spiritually healthy, it needs to appoint elders based upon:

What are the biblical qualifications of elders

What are the main responsibilities of an elder

Who - in the congregation - meets the qualifications

The Bible gives us information on what to look for in church leaders in 1 Timothy 3:2-5 and Titus 1:7-9.

"A bishop <1985> then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" [1 Timothy 3:2-5]

"For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." [Titus 1:7-9]

What qualifications should we be looking for?

blameless, the steward of God (meaning they must be **saved** individuals)

husband of one wife (have to be **married** to be a husband, married and never divorced and remarried)

vigilant (watchful over his family, their material AND spiritual welfare, protects them from ungodly influences and teaches them what is safe and what is not)

rules his house/family well (#1: how is his relationship to his wife? respectful, a servant, patient - 1 Cor 13, etc.) (#2: how is his relationship to his children? Has he earned their respect by love and discipline, spending time with them, teaching them things, by example and well as by word. Does he discipline unbiblically (by yelling and making threats) or does he biblically discipline them - so that he does not have to yell or make threats because they know he is *reliable* at carrying through when biblical discipline is necessary?)

sober, not given to wine (not just a non-drinker but not a jokester, serious when his wife, children and others need him to be serious. Also, not taking the problems/concerns of others lightly)

of good behavior, not self-willed, not soon angry, no striker, not given to filthy lucre, patient, not covetous (a good example of a man of God to all around)

him)

given to hospitality (opens his home to others and makes others feel at home and welcome just about any time)

apt to teach (teach what? How to be an overseer of a home someday, how to be a father & husband, how to be an overseer of a local congregation someday, how to resolve disputes, how to manage tasks and people.)

What are the main responsibilities of an elder?

According to 1 Timothy 3:2 & Titus 1:7, an elder is a bishop and a bishop is an **overseer** which we see from Strongs number 1985, indicating the original Greek word is: episkopos {ep-is'-kop-os} - translated as bishop 6 times and as overseer 1 time in the KJV.

1) an overseer, 1a) a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian or superintendent, 1b) the superintendent, elder, or overseer of a Christian church.

So then an elder:

Acts as a role model of a servant who teaches servanthood by word and by example

Resolves disputes (tie-breaker) for the unity and health of the congregation

Provides counsel for leadership in the home, child rearing, etc.

Oversees matters of church instruction and discipline when appropriate/necessary

Makes sure that things get done that need to get done and that the appropriate people do them

Who meets the qualifications?

Who do we trust to do the job of an elder, patiently, adequately, responsibly & without favoritism?

How much perfection do we expect from the candidates?

Do we trust ourselves to submit to their decisions when necessary?

Do we trust them to be teachable, open to correction themselves?

Are they able and willing to handle more "children" than they already have?

Does anyone have any concerns about those who may qualify including the individuals themselves?

How should those concerns be addressed?

Some comments on Biblical models for the local church:

To reinterpret or overlook the requirement for elders to be **married heads of households** is to denigrate the importance of the family, especially **as a model** for the local church. It also ignores the fact that **we are forgetful people**. One who is busy being an overseer in his own home is constantly being trained as an overseer and constantly being reminded of his weaknesses as he responds to the needs around him. He may not be responding as faithfully and as quickly as he ought, but nevertheless, he is faced with challenges from his family throughout each and every day, challenges that he

must respond to, even if his response is to do nothing or to go the path of least resistance until the long term effects of that approach forces him into action. It is a very different role also from those who are not heads of households, in that it incorporates immature subordinates (children) with diverse and constant needs as well as a lifelong teammate (wife) with her own needs in the 24 by 7 ministry of cooperatively raising godly children. This is a pretty unique environment when we view the overall depth and breadth of ALL of our relationships.

Can anyone deny that getting along with one's teammate in the very challenging ministry of child rearing is the best training God could provide for church overseers, especially considering that it affords on-going, day in and day out training and reinforcement? Can anyone deny that God would want the local church to have a proper and thorough proving ground for its overseers? And in that regard, can anyone deny the importance to the health and welfare of the local church, of being able to see how a man deals with those whom God has entrusted to him for a lifetime, before appointing that man as overseer of the souls of those outside of his immediate family?

And in summary, let us consider these verses:

Luke 16:15 - "And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

1 Corinthians 1:27 - "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are"

Now ask yourself, in the eyes of the world and in the realm of "churchianity" whom do people consider to be good church leaders? Usually it is men who are brilliant theologians, dynamic speakers and fascinating story tellers rather than men who have their homes in order. Most church members have never even seen the inside of their pastor or elder's home and probably don't know all his children's names, nevermind know much about the spiritual condition of his household. However, according to scripture, we are accountable to God to know each other well enough to know if a man meets the biblical qualifications of a God fearing father and husband, which is why biblically run home churches are essential to the proper functioning of local congregations.
