

1 Timothy 3.1-7 Qualified Elders

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Date: 15 March 2026

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[0:00] Now, if you recall the beginning of the book of 1 Timothy in the setting, that there were false teachers in the church of Ephesus, and Paul wrote Timothy to tell him that these false teachers needed to be stopped.

They needed to be confronted, and they needed to be stopped. Now, what is the reason why Paul has written to Timothy? That if he is delayed, he writes, so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and the ground of truth.

The church is to stop false teachers and to confront them. And the church must make sure that the wrong men are not teachers, that the wrong men are not in leadership, and that the right men are. And as we saw already, Timothy was to ensure that these wrong men who were teaching wrong doctrine were to be confronted and stopped. So, there's a very important distinction to be made, isn't there? This is a very weighty matter. The wrong men are not to be in leadership, and the right men are.

The question, then, is, how do we know? How is that distinction made? Just as false teachers don't walk into the church with a name tag that says, hello, I'm a false teacher, so also there is no divine inscription of a name tag of those who are qualified for leadership.

[1:22] So, how is the distinction made? Or to back up, or to paint a bigger picture, let's ask the question is, how is a church to be organized and governed? How is a church to be organized and governed? Is it to be organized and governed according to culture?

Is it trying to be relevant with culture and the trends of culture? Or, is the church to be organized and governed by being reliant on scripture?

Let's take a look. Our text today is going to be verses 1 to 7, but we will read all of chapter 3. This is a faithful saying.

If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop, then, must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous, but one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence.

For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God? Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride, he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.

[2:45] Moreover, he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Likewise, deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.

But let these also first be tested, then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.

Let deacons be the husband of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly, but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.

[4:02] Our great God, we thank you for your word that we have supernatural revelation. We thank you for the means of grace through which you speak to your people through the preaching of the word.

And we pray that you would indeed bless the preaching this morning, that you would be with me and that you would use me as the preacher and that you would be with the hearers, that you would bless the hearing of the word and that you would be at work in our midst.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Now in chapter 3, verses 1 to 7, it speaks of qualified elders. And what we see in this text is that the church is to call only qualified men to eldership for the care of the church in ruling and teaching.

This is very important. I'm going to say it again. The church is to call only qualified men to eldership for the care of the church in ruling and teaching.

So from the text, we'll divide into three parts. First is the call, the call of qualified elders. Second is the character of qualified elders. And third is the competency of qualified elders.

[5:14] So the call, the character, and the competency of qualified elders. And I will argue from this text that all three of those things are required. They're a must to be qualified as an elder.

There are many churches who will compromise on one of these three things. Perhaps somebody comes to their leadership and says, God's calling me to be a preacher.

Well, is that in itself a call? What if his character does not meet the requirements listed in verses 1 to 7? Or if somebody's character is kind and gentle, but yet they're not able to teach, are they qualified to be an elder?

Or what if somebody is very well grounded in scriptures and in theology, but yet they do not desire to be an elder? Or their lifestyle doesn't demonstrate the requirements listed here in this text?

So again, I will argue that the call, the character, and the competency are all required to be qualified for eldership. So first of all, the call. To divide into two parts the person, what the person is, there are two church offices, that of elders and deacons.

[6:31] So verses 1 to 7 today, we'll be looking at elders. And then verses 8 to 13, Lord willing, next week, we'll be looking at deacons. So those two church offices are elder and deacon.

With our focus being on elder, there are different terms that are used. It's not a hierarchy of position, which we may see elsewhere.

But where it says elder or bishop or overseer, this is all synonymously used for the same position, which we would call a pastor.

An example of that would be in Acts 20, when Paul calls the elders and says, you are all overseers. So when it says bishop, it's not that a bishop is a hierarchy of position over elders or whatever it may be.

But elder, bishop, overseer, pastor, shepherd, these are all synonymous for the position of church leadership, which is to care for the church in ruling and leading.

[7:34] So what is an elder? In verse 5, we see that an elder will take care of the church of God. That is a pretty broad term, but an elder will take care of the church of God.

How so? An elder bears responsibility before God for the spiritual welfare of the church. If a church is disorderly or is following after false teaching, ultimately, who is responsible?

It's the eldership. Elders bear responsibility. This is a very weighty thing. It's a very weighty matter. And so it is a significant ordeal of who is in eldership.

So they take care of the church of God. They bear responsibility. How? How do they do so? By shepherding the church of God by oversight and ruling and teaching.

How do they do that? How do they do that by ruling and teaching? By leading and teaching by exhorting in sound doctrine and refuting those who contradict. Both the ruling and the teaching is done by exhorting in sound doctrine and refuting those who contradict.

[8:48] Therefore, somebody who is to be an elder must exhibit crucial character and giftedness requirements demonstrating God's grace in the

man.

Because of that, the church, the position of the church is to put qualified men into eldership and to put unqualified men out of eldership.

Such as Timothy was charged in Ephesus to put the unqualified men out of eldership. So, the desire. In our text, it says, This is a faithful saying.

If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. It starts off by saying, This is a faithful saying. Now, that might be ringing a bell in you thinking, I've heard that before recently. And you have heard that before. This is the second time in the pastoral epistles where Paul uses the saying, This is a faithful saying. And when we see that saying, that should alert us to know that what follows is something that's very important.

[9:55] Just like the first time we heard it. This is a faithful saying, worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. The main thrust of the gospel in one statement to correct the misuse of the law by these false teachers is a very important and significant statement in the matter at hand.

So this should alert us that what's to follow is very important and pertinent with the issue at hand. Timothy had false teachers and they needed to be put out.

And we have before us the qualifications of those who are to be put in to eldership, into leadership. This is a faithful saying.

So if a man desires a position of a bishop, he desires a good work. Notice the two words there, position and work. It's not if a man deserves to have the title to put it on his resume so he looks better, or the plaque to put on his desk, or the honor of the name.

That is not the motive behind it. Rather, the work. To desire the work involved of eldership. So what does that desire for the work look like?

[11:08] It's a disturbance about the need of the word of God to be made known. A disturbance about the need for people to understand the word of God and a concern for others and for their true good.

Of course, their true good being to live blessedly in this life and life to come. Now, when it says desire, if a man desires, a desire in itself is not a call to ministry.

There are in many churches where someone says they have a desire to be a pastor, they have a desire to preach, or they might say, God is calling me to preach, and so they'll say, well, if this is a work of God, who are we to stand in the way?

And they just put him straight in without actually testing or vetting or looking at the qualifications required. So while they may have a desire, perhaps their life doesn't meet up to the qualifications listed, or perhaps they've only been a Christian for two weeks, and they zealously have a desire, but yet we're told here that they are to be seasoned.

So a desire in itself is not a call to the ministry. In other words, elders are not self-called. Someone doesn't call themselves into the position of an elder.

[12:22] But that being said, the desire must be there. So who does call a person into eldership? It's the church. The church that calls a man to the ministry.

If you remember, the church is to call only qualified men to eldership. The church calls a man to the ministry, but that man must have the desire. He must aspire to the work.

If he does not have the desire, it's not something that can be merely assigned. It's not that people take turns whether they want to or not. It's not something that they're compelled to do involuntarily. Rather, rather, there must be there a desire. The desire itself isn't a call. The church is to call the man, but the man must have the desire.

He must aspire to it. So the church calls a man that is recognized and affirmed. So he has the desire, and the church affirms that he meets the qualifications and calls him to eldership.

[13:30] The church calls a man that is recognized and affirmed, but I want you to ask the question, who makes somebody an elder? Somebody has a desire.

Does his own desire make that person an elder? If the church wants somebody to be an elder, do they make somebody an elder? In Acts 2.28, it says, therefore, take heed to yourselves.

So if you recall, this is when Paul called the elders in a meeting. He said, therefore, take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which, here it is, the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.

So we see that the Holy Spirit makes a person an overseer. Someone doesn't make themselves an overseer or an elder. The church doesn't make somebody an overseer or an elder.

If you remember in Ephesians 4, Christ's victory gifts, that Christ gives gifts to the church of pastors and teachers. So, it's the Holy Spirit that enables or that gifts somebody to be an elder.

[14:42] But, how then are we to know? How is the church to know? How is a person to know who exactly the Holy Spirit has made to be an overseer?

When God enables men for the ministry, he also gives them the desire for it. When God intends a creature to fly, he creates them with wings and with feathers that are necessary to take flight.

So, first of all, there's the desire. This calling is not assigned or compelled involuntarily. He must have the desire. And the desire alone is not the reason to put a man into eldership.

Someone's personal intuition is not divine calling and doesn't trump the authority of Scripture. The desire must be there. So, how does the church know?

How exactly does the church know who to call to ministry? Or that is to say, how does the church know whom the Holy Spirit has made overseers? There's the desire that must be there.

[15:47] There's a godly character that must be there. And there's giftedness qualifications that must be there. And it's not that these things will become apparent once they are made an elder.

Rather, these things are already present and obvious to others. That's why it's the affirmation or the confirmation of the church that these qualifications are there in the man.

So, that brings us to our second point. The church is to call only qualified men whose character demonstrates the work of grace.

Now, there are a number of graces that are listed here and we are not going to go into depth and consider five practical steps of how to be above reproach, but we will look at each grace listed and a brief understanding of what it is and move through it rather quickly.

But the church is to call only qualified men whose character demonstrates the work of grace. So, first of all, the call, so the man has the desire for the work of an elder.

[16:54] Next, we'll see, does he meet the qualifications of character? So, we'll look at the graces and gifting. Now, if you're thinking, well, I'm not going to be an elder, I don't have a desire to be an elder, so this sermon doesn't really apply to me, I will argue that everybody should understand how important it is to understand this for two reasons.

One is to understand who should be and who shouldn't be in eldership. And the second reason is that these graces and gifting that are listed, it's not things that are exclusive to elders.

It's things that every serious Christian should aspire to in their life. And because it's something that every serious Christian should seek to exhibit in their life, it is that much more important for somebody who is to lead by example to demonstrate.

So, if every Christian is expected to possess the spiritual, the spiritual character, then an influential leader in the church must not be a cause of stumbling in these things to the people, but to lead by example.

A church leader who does not lead by example consequently will have an influence. Every leader will have an influence. So, if a church leader doesn't have a positive influence, they are going to influence in a way which leads to destruction, as we see in what Timothy had to deal with.

[18:19] A church leader who does not lead by example will influence in a destructive way. So, how one governs himself and his home will be an indication of how he will manage the church.

If somebody is being examined for qualifications of how they would be in ruling and teaching and taking care of the church and there's the concern of if it may be destructive, how they govern themselves and their home will be an indication of how he will manage the church.

So, the graces being a godly character, he must exhibit a godly character that is demonstrable evidence of the grace of God in the man's character and conduct in multiple spheres.

In the spheres of self and in the sphere of family and the sphere of church and in the sphere of the world. So, to put it another way, he must have godly character in personal faithfulness, in domestic

faithfulness, in seasoned faithfulness, and in reputable faithfulness.

So, the first one, personal faithfulness. Now, these four categories of graces, they're not necessarily symmetrical, so there's a lot that fit into personal faithfulness and there's shorter number as we move on.

[19:48] So, personal faithfulness in verse 2 starts off by saying blameless. Now, what does blameless mean? It does not mean sinless, it means above reproach.

In this world, in this sin-cursed world, there is remaining corruption and nobody is in a state of perfection. Nobody is in a state of glory. Nobody in this sin-cursed fallen world is perfect so we can't expect somebody to be perfect.

Even the best of men are still men at best so it's best that we not expect a man to be more than what a man is at best.

But their character must be above reproach and that's presently. everyone who is a pastor is not born qualified to be a pastor.

We're born with a sinful nature. Regeneration takes place and sanctification takes place. So, everybody who is a pastor, we could examine their history from their birth onward and particularly before their regeneration.

[21:04] An example would be John Bunyan. John Bunyan was very unreputable. His reputation was not a good one before his regeneration.

It was such an unreputable reputation that he struggled quite a bit with assurance of salvation after his conversion. So, it's their present character, not prior to regeneration, not prior to conversion and maturity, but their present character.

Another example of that would be Augustine who was very much given over to the passions of the flesh prior to his conversion. He was given to the impulses of the flesh. So, above reproach or blameless.

Next, it says a husband of one wife. Now, in chapter two, we went over that God's order from creation is that God has created men, the man as head and woman as helper and that because of sin this inverts God's order and that is the way of culture.

The way of culture is inversion of God's order. But, God is restoring order in Christ and the church is to be a place that is a refuge of the curse, not a return to the curse.

[22:27] And the church is to be a place of order just as biblical marriages are to be. So, having already gone over male headship, we'll go on and say husband.

He is to be a husband of one wife. This is better understood as being a one woman man, or rather to say he is faithful, or that he is chaste.

Some will misread this and say he must be a husband. So, if he's not yet married, he can't be an elder because he hasn't proven himself as a husband. That's not the case.

That's not what the text is getting at. It's being faithful, being chaste. To interpret it that way, Jesus himself was not married. The apostle Paul was not married.

So, according to that standard, they would not have been qualified for ministry. Rather, a one woman man, he is faithful, he is chaste. Others might also misread this by saying he must have only had one wife.

[23:34] So, if a man is a widower and remarries, then they would say he is not qualified to eldership. Or, if he underwent a lawful divorce and remarried, then he is not qualified for eldership.

This is not the intent of the text, rather, as a one woman man being faithful to his wife. The Bible, we're not going to go into depth to this here, but the Bible does indicate instances where there is lawful divorce.

There is unlawful divorce, and there is lawful being abandoned by an unbeliever or by adultery. So, where there is a lawful divorce and lawful remarriage, this is not a prohibition against being lawfully remarried.

rather, he is faithful, he is chaste. Next, we see in verse two, temperate, that is being self-controlled, being level-headed, having a balanced judgment, having restraint in conduct and in drink or in other substances, which then it goes on to say sober-minded, that is moderation in drinking.

Nowhere in the Bible does it condemn having a drink, so having a glass of wine or a beer, for example, is not forbidden in Scripture, but having it in excess is, is forbidden in Scripture.

[24:59] We are to be sober, sober-minded. So there is prohibition of being impaired. Regardless of what the substance is, being impaired is prohibited.

We are to be sober-minded, clear-headed, and in control. Next, it says of good behavior, that is to be orderly, to be appropriate, to be respectable, to be honorable.

Next, it says to be hospitable, to be of an impartial disposition and willing to serve others and a desire to be around others. Then going on to verse 3, it says not given to wine, that is not addicted to wine, not to be enslaved to wine.

It goes on to say not violent, that is able to stay objective in conflict, not resorting to violence to end the conflict, someone who doesn't seek to settle disagreements by being prone to resorting to blows.

It goes on to say not greedy for money. If you remember about false teachers, what is the motive of a false teacher? It's gain. False teachers use deception to exploit for money.

[26:22] They have self-serving motives. Rather, to be qualified is to abhor dishonest gain, to be consistent with the 8th commandment, moral principle of the 8th commandment, and to be good with his own finances.

He used to be gentle, which of course is to be patient, and to be kind. He is not to be quarrelsome. He is not to be someone who is not satisfied unless he's in conflict, not satisfied unless in an argument of some kind, not satisfied unless he's tearing down as opposed to building up, not to be pugnacious.

And it says not covetous, that is, he is content with his lot in life. So, personal faithfulness, there's a list of qualifications required there, and then it goes on into domestic faithfulness.

In verse 4, we'll look at domestic faithfulness, that is, he rules his household well, or he manages his household well. Now, some people might hear that word rules, and get their hackles up, and think, well, we can't say that, it must not mean that, because that means domineering.

Well, it doesn't mean domineering. If it did mean domineering, he would have said domineering, but it doesn't say domineering because that's not what he means, what he means is to rule, and the Bible does say not to be domineering.

[27:50] So, ruling does not mean domineering, but ruling. And the house, the home, typifies the church. So, somebody who is to be qualified for eldership must rule his home, and rule it well.

So, a man who is passive in his own home doesn't rule it. He must rule his home, and not only ruling it, he must rule it well. If the home typifies the church, an unruly home does not offer the right kind of influence, training, and growth, which is necessary for governing the church.

How a man's home looks is how the church will look if he is leading and ruling the church. It goes on to say with domestic faithfulness, children in submission.

This does not mean sinless, and this is where it's beneficial having a biblical understanding of the doctrine of man, in that we are born with a sinful nature.

It's not that children are born sinless, with a clean slate, as angels. We are born with a sinful nature, and that sinful nature will sprout itself, and that is why scripture speaks so much about parenting, especially in the book of Proverbs, the principles that are given for parenting, because children are born with a sinful nature.

[29:19] So if you were to expect that a man's children must be sinless, it's not a biblical understanding of the doctrine of man. Rather, children will sin.

We are to expect that they will sin, which again is why scripture says so much about what to do when children sin, particularly in Proverbs. So the question isn't whether or not the man's children sin or not, but it's what he does when they sin, if they are left to themselves, if they are left to their sins, or if it's addressed.

Do his children obey? Is a better question. Not, are they sinless, but do they obey? Or, do they ignore their parents? Do they walk all over their parents?

Are their children rude or indecent or rebellious? Or, are the children kept in order? Are they orderly? The man of a disorderly home will not well manage order in the church.

And Matthew Poole, on a matter, I think you worded it very well, he said, for if a man has a family and has showed that he neither has wit nor honesty enough to govern that little society with which his constant presence with it, with what reason can anyone presume that he should be fit to be trusted with the care of the church of God, which is a larger society?

[30:49] He must be faithful with little to be entrusted to be faithful with much. It says, children in submission, it goes on to say, with all reverence, children in submission with all reverence.

That is, they're not emotionally battered or fearful because of intimidation into compliance. If a man's family appears in public to be emotionally battered all the time, imagine what the church is going to look like after he's been governing it for a year.

So, with all reverence, that they're not emotionally battered and in fearful compliance, but they look up to him with affection and they look up to him with respect and they look up to him with gravity. So, personal faithfulness, domestic faithfulness, and then seasoned faithfulness, that is, with experience as a Christian, not a recent convert.

Look to verse six, not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride, he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Just as a young plant does not have deep roots, so also a recent convert will not have deep roots.

[32:06] A novice would lack Christian experience and be in danger of conceit, in danger of pride, in danger of the motives of wanting to be exalted, but the office of an elder is not one of self-exaltation, but it's an office of service.

It's an office of serving as a steward of God. So, personal faithfulness, domestic faithfulness, seasoned faithfulness, and fourth, reputable faithfulness.

So, looking at the character, reputable faithfulness, look at verse seven, moreover, he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. He is to have a good reputation with outsiders. That doesn't mean he's seen as one of the boys going bar hopping with outsiders.

Rather, that means that even outsiders will see a consistency within him, a consistency between profession and lifestyle. He behaves the same way in the world as he does in the church.

[33:21] He behaves the same way when he's around outsiders as he does when he's around Christians. Not double-minded, but resolved in both doctrine and in practice. I think that's something that we've learned a lot in the past year in examination of scripture, that both doctrine and practice is of utmost importance.

both faith and conduct. So, having looked at the call and the character, we come now to our third point.

The church is to call only qualified men who are gifted for ruling and teaching. Only qualified men who are gifted for ruling and teaching.

So our third point is the competency. The competency of qualified elders. more specifically, the gifting or the ability.

Now, as we worked through some of the character qualifications, perhaps you noticed that I skipped over something.

[34:26] It's because I'm saving it for after. More for just ease of outline. But gifting or ability. Able to teach.

This is non-negotiable. many churches will compromise on this one. But notice the flow of the text in verse two.

A bishop then must be and then it lists things and one of those things it lists is able to teach. A bishop must be able to teach.

An elder must be able to teach. This is non-negotiable. Well a church might ask, well what if we don't put him into office of teaching or preaching but his functioning is going to be more of the ruling aspect of things.

Well ask yourself the question, by what rule is he going to manage and govern? Is it going to be according to the trends of culture? Is it going to be according to his own intuition? Both teaching and ruling is to be according to the word of God.

[35:37] So if he doesn't know the word and if he doesn't know sound doctrine and would seek to govern the church in another way, then Christ is not the head.

Christ is the head of the church. How is Christ head of the church? Christ is head of the church is by following the word of Christ by conducting ourselves according to scriptures so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself.

So if the ruling, if the governing, if the managing of the church is not according to an understanding and knowledge of scripture and sound doctrine, then Christ is not head and it's not the pillar and ground of the truth.

And for some reason contemporary churches compromise on this. They overlook this qualification because the man is nice.

Because perhaps he meets the character qualifications. He's gentle, he's kind, he manages his household well. But all three of these things are necessary to be qualified for the office of elder.

[36:51] Call, character, and competency. All three of them. Being nice is not enough. or being well regarded for business.

These are not reasons to put somebody as an elder. Notice that Paul does not say that if he's good at public speaking, or if he's eloquent, or if he's entertaining, or if he's funny, or if he's a prominent leader in the secular community, then he would be fit, rather, says, must be apt to teach.

That is well grounded in the Bible, and the doctrines contained therein. Therefore, he's able to do the work of an overseer, the work of an elder, able to lead, able to shepherd, able to edify, able to instruct, and able to reprove.

That's the work of an overseer of the church of the living God. So, there's the call for qualified elders, there's the character for qualified elders, and there's the competency for qualified elders, and all three of those must be demonstrable in the man to be fit for the office of elder.

So, some concluding uses. The church is the house of God. The church is not a club. The church is not a council.

[38:28] The church is not a business, so it's not to be run according to how a club is ran, or a council is ran, or how a business is ran. Rather, the church is the house of God, the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Now, it is not wrong for somebody to not be an elder, but it is wrong for the church to put the wrong person into eldership.

The church is to ensure that the wrong men are not elders and that the right men, that only qualified men, are. Third, these qualifications are not exclusive to elders.

So, it's not that these qualifications are only important for a man who's going to be an elder and everybody else doesn't have to worry about it. understanding that these things, these graces and gifting are for every Christian to aspire after.

And if you are a Christian and you felt convicted that you're not living according to something that has been listed in this text, remember that there is forgiveness and mercy in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[39:46] And fourth concluding use, finally, grace is only evident in those who are saved. So, if you have not yet laid hold of Christ for salvation, then you are still in bondage to the dominion and condemnation of sin.

A person cannot demonstrate these graces when they are in bondage to sin, when they are under the dominion of sin. It is only by the merits and mediation of Christ that you will be saved.

So, if you have not yet laid hold of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, turn and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ alone, and you will be saved. Our great God, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for the church and your purpose for the church, and we thank you that in your word you make it clear to us how the church is to operate, how we ought to conduct ourselves.

And I pray, Lord, that as we seek to be a faithful and healthy church, that we would do according to your word, that you would build your church, that you would provide for our needs to be a faithful and healthy church, for the installation of biblical qualified church office.

[41:09] We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, still. Amen. Amen.