

SCRIPTURAL ELDERS: Office and Qualifications

Introduction

- 1) The church is a divine institution and organization built by Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:18)
 - a) Jesus is the head of the body, the church (Eph. 1:22-23)
 - b) To understand its true organization, work, terms of admission, etc, we must learn what is taught by Jesus (apostolic doctrine – NT)
- 2) The church in a **universal sense** includes all Christians everywhere – *no revealed organization*
- 3) The church in a **local sense** includes Christians in a certain locality who come together to worship and work as a body of Christ – **divine organization** (*elders, deacons Phil. 1:1*)
- 4) Not an optional arrangement, but necessary to full and effective working of God's will for church
 - a) **Problems**: 1) Some like it without elders, 2) Few men qualified, 3) Few men desire
 - b) **Solutions**: 1) Teaching, 2) Encourage men to prepare selves for the work
- 5) What is a greater aspiration, labor, or accomplishment this side of heaven?
 - a) Will now study the office and qualifications of scriptural elders/bishops/pastors

I) DEFINITIONS OF TERMS (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-2)

- A) **Presbuteros** – an elder, either of 1) age, or 2) of rank or positions of responsibility; has reference to maturity of spiritual experience
- B) **Episkopos** – literally, an overseer (*epi* = over; *skopeo* = to look or watch), bishop; reference to the character of the work undertaken (overseeing life and work of others)
- C) **Poimen** – a shepherd, pastor, one who feeds and tends flocks; the service committed to elders/bishops; involves ideas of tender care and vigilant superintendence; does *not* refer to work of an evangelist, preacher (see Eph. 4:11)

II) OFFICE

- A) **1 Timothy 3:1** – position/office of a bishop = “a good work”
 - 1) “Office” = a special, proper, or assigned service, duty, or function; not just “grow into it”
- B) Necessary in the churches (Acts 14:23 – vital matter; Titus 1:5 – intended in every church)
- C) First mentioned in Acts 11:30, then also in Acts 15:4, 6; 20:17; 21:18 (plural, revealed by H.S.)

III) SCRIPTURAL QUALIFICATIONS (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)

- A) Necessity of mature, godly attitude and life in order to oversee and shepherd the church of Jesus Christ in its God-given work – high character to carry out a great responsibility
 - 1) Not popularity contest, or for prominent and rich alone; must be rich, mature spiritually
 - 2) Marks of a mature Christian who has attained spiritual growth and experience
- B) Complete and detailed – great responsibility and critical work
 - 1) Need qualified men: *right person* = do incredible good, *wrong person* = do incredible harm
 - 2) Demand perfection? No, for then no one would be qualified; these are qualities of maturity taught to all Christians; only a few specifics (man, married, children, apt to teach)
 - 3) A man is to manifest *all* of these qualifications in his life, and continue to grow and improve

C) DESIRE

- 1) Is to be a willing service, not forced (not by constraint, but willingly, eager – 1 Pet. 5:2)
- 2) We pray that those otherwise qualified will see the great need and opportunity for their service, and desire to do this good *work* – not just fill an “honorary” position

D) CHARACTER

- 1) **Holy** – pious, devout, pleasing to God, not polluted with a worldly mind
- 2) **Just** – upright, impartial, fair, distinguish right from wrong

- 3) **Gentle** – calm, meek, patient, even-tempered, not easily provoked; not “lords over” (1 Pet. 5:3)
- 4) **Not Quick-Tempered** – not easily provoked with a short fuse, not prone to quick anger
- 5) **Good Behavior** – modest in outward manifestation of life, well-ordered, not sloppy, careless, or questionable
- 6) **Lover of what is Good** – desires the good, hates evil; seeks good in others
- 7) **Temperate** – under control, careful, watchful/vigilant, attentive
- 8) **Self-Controlled** – not give in to passions, self-will, or anger; control of tongue and mind
- 9) **Sober-Minded** – clear mind, serious, stable, sensible, master of self
- 10) **Not Self-Willed** – not arrogant, stubborn, bullheaded, think his way is only way; willing to yield personal preferences
- 11) **Not Given to Wine** – not influenced by intoxicants; not compromise abilities and reason
- 12) **Not a Novice** – not a recent convert (immature, without knowledge) who could be easily puffed up; requires combination of spiritual maturity and experience of age

E) REPUTATION

- 1) **Blameless** – above reproach, good reputation, no charge of evil can be sustained, past mistakes corrected
- 2) **Good Testimony Among those Who are Outside** – not hypocrite, lives for Christ at all times, watchful for reproach and snares of the devil
- 3) **Hospitable** – concern for others manifested in action, willing to give (food, lodging, care)
- 4) **Not Quarrelsome** – not contentious, brawler, instigating arguments, raise voice and fists
- 5) **Not Violent** – no violent behavior, striker, physical abuse, vengeful
- 6) **Not Covetous** – no lover of money or earthly goods, not hoard up or refuse to use goods
- 7) **Not Greedy for Money** – not seek dishonest gain (1 Pet. 5:2); not stingy or covetous
- 8) **Hold Fast the Faithful Word** – total conviction, no doubt/wavering, no compromise

F) DOMESTIC RELATIONS

- 1) **Husband of One Wife** – man, married, scriptural marriage, no polygamy
- 2) **Children** – experience as father; ruling a house; use of authority; grammar allows plural to stand for one [child] in a general expression
- 3) **Children Faithful, Submissive** – raised to be believers and followers of God (“children that believe” ASV), not accused of dissipation or insubordination under his rule

G) ABILITY

- 1) **Able to Teach** – prepared and ready to instruct in truth and answer false doctrine; “be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict”

H) CHARACTER OF WIFE

- 1) 1 Timothy 3:11 – qualifying character of the wives of elders *and* deacons
- 2) **Reverent** – serious, grave, careful attentive to words and actions
- 3) **Not Slanderers** – mouth in control, not gossips, talebearers
- 4) **Temperate** – under control, sober-minded
- 5) **Faithful in All Things** – trustworthy to her role as wife/mother at home and everywhere

Conclusion

“The Lord’s two lists of qualifications, when combined and assessed, tell us to select men ‘who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil’ (Heb. 5:14). In other words, we need experienced, successful Christian men ” (Randy Blackaby). Let us carefully consider the divinely given qualifications as we search out those who would serve as elders. The next lesson will consider the work of the elder and the role of the local church.