

BIBLICAL ELDERS (3)
BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS
Covenant Fellowship Church
Wednesday, 19 March 2025
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The following material relies on many sources, but especially Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth Publishers, 1995).

1 Timothy 3:2–7 (Titus 1:5–9)

²Therefore an overseer must be [1] above reproach, [2] the husband of one wife, [3] sober-minded, [4] self-controlled, [5] respectable, [6] hospitable, [7] able to teach, ³[8] not a drunkard, [9] not violent but gentle, [10] not quarrelsome, [11] not a lover of money. ⁴He must [12] manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶He must [13] not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷Moreover, he must be [14] well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

1. ABOVE REPROACH: Heading the list of qualifications stands the general, overarching, “all-embracing” qualification: “above reproach.” To be above reproach means to be free from any offensive or disgraceful blight of character or conduct, particularly as described in verses 2–7.

2. THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE

Four possibilities:

- elders must be married (BUT: 1 Cor 7 [advantages of singleness])
- elders must not be polygamists (BUT: 1 Tim 5.9, similar phrase, not vs. polyandry)
- elders may marry only once (no one divorced/remarried, widower remarried; BUT Scrip nowhere prohibits second marriages)

Regarding the issue of whether or not a divorced or divorced and remarried man (whether the divorce took place before or after his conversion) can become an elder, the New Testament doesn't directly comment.

- elders must be maritally and sexually above reproach

Conclusion: above reproach in his sexual and marital life.

What about the forgiveness and restoration of a fallen spiritual leader? These and many other related questions are not answered directly here. They must be answered from the whole of Scripture's teaching on divorce and remarriage, forgiveness, grace, and restoration, as well as its teaching on leadership example and the full spectrum of elder qualifications. Moreover, these situations call for deep wisdom and discernment on the part of those evaluating the suitability of such a person for holding office.

3. SOBER-MINDED / TEMPERATE: The Greek word for “temperate” can mean sobriety in the use of wine. Here, however, it is used to mean *mental sobriety*. “Temperate” denotes self-control, balanced judgment, and freedom from debilitating excesses or rash behavior. Negatively, it indicates the absence

of any personal disorder that would distort a person's judgment or conduct. Positively, it describes a person who is stable, circumspect, self-restrained, and clear-headed.

4. **PRUDENT / SELF-CONTROLLED:** Similar to the word "temperate," "prudence" and "self-control" related particularly to exercising good judgment, discretion, and common sense.
5. **RESPECTABLE:**
6. **HOSPITABLE:** Giving oneself to the care of God's people means sharing one's life and home with others. An open home is a sign of an open heart and a loving, sacrificial, serving spirit. A lack of hospitality may indicate a selfish, lifeless, loveless Christianity.
7. **ABLE TO TEACH:** The ability to teach entails three basic elements: a knowledge of Scripture, the readiness to teach, and the ability to communicate.

In his parallel list of elder qualifications in Titus, Paul expands on the meaning of "able to teach." He writes, "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he [the elder] may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9).

8. **NOT ADDICTED TO WINE / DRUNKARD:** An elder must be above reproach in his use of alcohol. Paul uses strong language here that means not preoccupied or overindulgent with wine. Note, however, that Paul says, "not addicted to wine." He is not presenting an absolute prohibition against drinking wine. He is prohibiting the abuse of wine (or any other substance) that would damage a man's testimony and work for God.
9. **NOT PUGNACIOUS BUT GENTLE:**
10. **UNCONTENTIOUS:** Along with being gentle, it is important that an elder be uncontentious or peaceable.
11. **FREE FROM THE LOVE OF MONEY:** be content with God's provision. Hebrews 13:5.
12. **A MAN WHO MANAGES HIS HOUSEHOLD WELL:** That is: be a responsible Christian father, husband, and household manager. We must note that the children referred to in verse 4 are children who live at home, under their father's authority:
13. **A NEW CONVERT:**
14. **A MAN WITH A GOOD REPUTATION AMONG NONBELIEVERS:**

SUMMARY:

Character Traits: Blameless, temperate, self-controlled, etc.

Family Life: Faithful marriage, household management.

Teaching Ability: Skilled in teaching, defending doctrine.

Reputation: Good standing, not a novice.