



## “THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ELDER”

### 1 Timothy 3:1

#### Part 1

**Theme:** *There are aspects of a spiritual leader’s reputation that are essential.*

**Introduction:** Military tactics for a long time forbade the shooting of officers by enemy soldiers. During the battle of Brandywine in the Revolutionary War, a British soldier had the opportunity to shoot General Washington, but refused because it would not be “gentlemanly.” However, Morgan formed a band of sharpshooters which evolved into the modern snipers, and they recognized that with such an inferior force, one of the ways to capture advantage is to eliminate the officers and thus weaken the enemy force through the lack of leadership. Additionally, they sat atop horses which provided an excellent target for those with “long guns.” It was considered despicable and a violation of conventional standards of the day for a “professional army.”

Satan realizes that leaders provide the greatest target for mischief in the Church. If he can strike an elder, luring, tempting, seducing, illegitimizing, and compromising, he can weaken and defeat the effectiveness of an entire church. In Matthew 26:31 – Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7. The antithesis of this principle is given by Paul in 1 Timothy 4:16. If faithfulness to the truth will “ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” then unfaithfulness to the truth will ensure the falling away “for those who hear you.” Hence Paul realizes that if shepherds fall, many will fall away. Therefore, it is necessary that spiritual leaders be men of integrity in whom exist a clear manifestation of grace. Our text today emphasizes that **“there are aspects of a spiritual leader’s reputation that are essential.”**

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### I. FREEDOM FROM INDICTMENT – 3:2a

#### A. The Requirement for Overseers

- Given the role overseers provide to the integrity and strength of the church by means of influences that have eternal consequences, Paul states: **“An overseer, then, must be ...”**
- “must be”** [δεῖ οὕτως] – of essential necessity; something that must be; non-negotiable.
- The emphasis here is that God has a standard for leaders that can only be

compromised to the detriment of the Church.

4. As we look at the qualifications for spiritual leaders, we must recognize that no church is free to determine what these qualifications are – God has dictated that if a church is to be strong, it must have strong leaders.
5. The notion that anyone who wants to serve ought to be able to serve is unbiblical.
6. Certainly, a desire to serve is the subjective aspect of a qualified spiritual leader that is between God and the man – something only the individual man can assess.
7. No leader ought to be compelled to serve if God has not stirred the desire within him; but elders cannot serve “under compulsion, but voluntarily” – cp. **1 Peter 5:2**.
8. However, simply having the desire without the objective qualifications falls short of the divine standard necessary for a man to serve the Church – many a man has yearned to be “in charge,” but their spiritual maturity prevents it.

## **B. The Reputation of Overseers**

1. Hence, God has provided this 2<sup>nd</sup> qualification of an overseer – describing the reputation and objective element in setting a man into the office.
2. It is **necessary** that he be “**above reproach**” [ἀνεπίλη(μ)πτος] the emphasis is on the absence of guilt where it means “*having no handles.*”
3. Essentially, this means that “*his life has not been marred by some obvious sinful defect in character which would preclude him setting the highest standard for godly conduct.*”<sup>1</sup>
  - a) *His life must not provide an opportunity for Satan to discredit the Gospel.*
  - b) *His life must be ready to endure the stricter judgment of which we are warned.*
  - c) *His life must not disprove in conduct what he teaches in word – “lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues.”*<sup>2</sup>
4. In Titus 1, the term “**above reproach**” [ἀνέγκλητος] - means not just the absence of guilt, but the presence of an unmarred reputation – cp. **Colossians 1:22**.
5. Unfortunately, we have reached a period in church history where evangelicalism prefers to have men who are “marred” in reputation as it accomplishes two things:

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Baxter, The Reformed Pastor, pp. 63.

- a) *It enables us to have our own consciences assuaged.*
- b) *It enables us to feel like a pastor can “relate” to us in our struggles.*

## II. **FREEDOM FROM IMBALANCE** – **3:2b**

### A. **“Husband of one wife”** - literally a “one woman man” [μῑᾶς γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ].

1. Various explanations of this term exist:
  - a) *He cannot be divorced.*
  - b) *He cannot remarry if widowed.*
  - c) *He can have one wife at a time.*
  - d) *He must be married.*
  - e) *He can have only one wife living.*
2. However, the essence of this qualification is that he is renown as a man who demonstrates devotion to one woman for life: “for as long as we both shall live.”
3. It bans a “womanizer” – a man whose eyes are constantly prowling for satisfaction from the attention of females – ***2 Peter 2:14***.

### B. **“Temperate”** - [νηφάλιος] – lit. = “wineless”

1. It refers to the state of being “sober.”
2. It is the freedom from excesses of passion or extreme, renown for restraint in conduct through the exercise of self-control because you are clear-headed.

### C. **“Prudent”** [σώφρων] – this is the “distillation” of being sober – and becomes a quality of being in control of self; thoughtful to avoid extremes so that responsible actions are deliberately sought.

### D. **“Respectable”** - [κόσμιος] – lit. = “orderly” – cp. “adorn” in v. 2:9

1. It refers to being characterized by qualities that evoke admiration or delight.
2. It is the opposite of having a life that is a mess – or is chaotic and undesirable.

### E. **“Hospitable”** - [φιλόξενος] – lit. = “lover of strangers”

1. It shows the kind of maturity that exists by the ability to extend oneself to others to include them in one’s life.
2. It avoids seeking to preserve one’s solitude at all costs and causes a spiritual leader to open himself and his home up for all the see and enjoy.
3. This is something we seek to have characterized even our church

generally as we welcome new people into the assembly all the time.

4. All of these characteristics provide a “blamelessness” on the part of the elder pertaining to various imbalances.

### III. FREEDOM FROM IGNORANCE – 3:2c

#### A. The Interest in Truth

1. The anomaly in all these characteristics is this one – “*able to teach*” - [διδασκτικός] which is a skill more than a moral quality.
2. It has led some to claim this term refers to the “ability to be taught” or “teachability” which would bring it into alignment with the other qualifications.
3. However, in the only other place it is used, it clearly refers to the ability to impart knowledge to someone else – cp. 2 Timothy 2:24.
4. However, before a person is “*able to teach*” they must learn what it is they will be teaching.
5. Hence, this qualification requires the prerequisite of being taught – cp. 2 Timothy 2:2.
6. This qualification does not mean that an elder must have the gift of teaching, but that they are familiar enough with the truth that they can explain it and disciple others into the truth.
7. Clearly some within the eldership will be gifted in teaching and they will usually assume the pulpit responsibilities as the teaching pastor.

#### B. The Imparting of Truth

1. There are two aspects to the activity associated with being “*able to teach*.”
2. First, there is the proactive exhortation of the flock in sound doctrine – cp. Titus 1:9.
3. Second, there is the correcting exhortation of those who are embracing false doctrine – “refute those who contradict.”
  - a) “*refute*” [ἐλέγχω] - *means to scrutinize or examine carefully, bring to light, or expose.*
  - b) “*contradict*” [ἀντιλέγω] - *to speak against or contradict.*

### IV. FREEDOM FROM INDULGENCE – 3:3

#### A. “*Not addicted to wine*” - [πάροινος] – literally, “not beside wine”

1. This characteristic describes a person who is not given to drinking too

much wine.

2. “drunkard” is a way the describe this indulgence – cp. *Isaiah 28:7*.
3. A spiritual leader “*must be a man whose associations are radically different from those of the world, and whose example leads others to righteous conduct, not sin.*”<sup>3</sup>

**B. “Pugnacious” - [πλήκτης] – lit. = “not a giver of blows”**

1. This is the man who expresses violent behavior, easily provoked into an altercation.
2. It is a man who “bullies” others through intimidation and outburst of hostility.
3. A spiritual leader must not indulge in his anger, but is able to calmly and meekly respond to wrongs in a way that persuades others of the benefits of grace.

**C. “Gentle” - [έπιεικής] – refers to the man who does “not insist on absolute and immediate conformity to every letter of the law;” but is tolerant and courteous; such a one does not hold a grudge.**

**D. “Peaceable” - [ἄμαχος] – “without a machete”**

1. The idea is that such a man is not armed for battle.
2. The spiritual leader must be one who is more interested in unity and conciliation than fighting against other believers.

**E. “Free from love of money” - [ἀφιλάργυρος] – a man who is not covetous or materialistic**

1. It is the “*love of money*” that lays at the heart of those engaged in false teaching.
2. When the “*love of money*” exists in a spiritual leader, it results in the inevitable straying from the truth and causing many heartaches and disappointments – cp. *1 Timothy 6:10*.
3. When these characteristics are present in a spiritual leader, it provides handles onto which critics can lay hold and make indictments of hypocrisy, imbalance, ignorance, and indulgence.

## So What?

1. What handles “stick out” in my life and reputation onto which others might take hold?

<sup>3</sup> MacArthur, p. 110.

2. What imbalances exist in my life?
3. In what ways can I become more interested in the truth?
4. Are there ways in which I indulge in anything that would disqualify me from spiritual leadership?
5. If I were to ask someone very close to me: “How can I become more ‘blameless?’” – what would the response would be? ... What should I do about it?

**There are aspects of a spiritual leader’s reputation that are essential.**