

# Qualifications of Elders and Deacons

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## QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS

Clarification of terms: 1) **ELDER**--an elderly man, one who is up in years, aged, full grown in years; hence a man who is spiritually full-grown, mature, discerning, experienced in the things of God, a "seasoned veteran" in the spiritual realm. 2) **BISHOP**--an overseer, one who superintends and oversees, and especially one who watches over the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4). **Elder** points to the man; **bishop** points to the man's work (or office). These two terms are equated in Titus 1:5,7 (they both describe the same office). In 1 Timothy 3:1 the word "desire" means "to stretch one's self out after, to aspire," and thus the man is willing to study and serve and sacrifice in order to be equipped for this office.

### 1 TIMOTHY 3:2

**BLAMELESS**--above reproach, does not cast reproach upon God's Word or God's Son. Literally it means, "cannot be laid hold of" (like a wet bar of soap). People are looking at this man's life trying to find something that is wrong which they can use against him. Think of a large iron frying pan. People would like to pick up this frying pan and smash this man over the head, but if he is blameless he gives them *no handle!* They cannot pick it up if there is no handle on it (Daniel 6:4-5).

**THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE**--faithful to his marriage partner and exemplifying what Christian marriage really ought to be. He is to be a "one-woman man." No background of divorce."

**VIGILANT**--temperate, sober, mentally alert. Having a well-disciplined mind, in possession of the full use of all his faculties.

**SOBER**--sound mind, sensible, serious, "in his right mind" (Mark 5:15), having a serious attitude. There is a need for balance here. He is not to have the reputation of always cracking jokes and being a clown (Eph. 5:4), nor is he to be one who casts a cloud of gloom everywhere he goes. A serious attitude can be blended with a healthy and Christ honoring sense of humor.

**OF GOOD BEHAVIOUR**--orderly, organized, a well-arranged and well ordered life (opposite of "chaos"). A man who is disciplined and faithful in his stewardship of time. His life should exhibit good planning and purpose.

**GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY**--a lover of strangers. A real love and concern for people. One who manifests a genuine love for the brethren. His door and his heart are always open when it comes to rightly ministering to the needs of others.

**APT TO TEACH**--able, skilled and willing to teach and communicate God's truth. According to Titus 1:9 he must be able to exhort and bring conviction by sound doctrine, "holding fast the faithful word." This does not necessarily imply pulpit ability, but it does imply the ability to rightly use and communicate God's Word in helping and confronting and admonishing others (see 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17).

### **1 TIMOTHY 3:3**

**NOT GIVEN TO WINE**--literally, "not beside or alongside wine." No affinity for wine. In a society infatuated with alcoholic beverages and defiled by the unwholesome things associated with drinking, total abstinence from alcoholic drinks and avoidance of any wrong or questionable association is the only truly safe choice for the elder.

**NOT A STRIKER**--not quick tempered to fight. The man must not be a fighter (ready with his fists). Comes from a verb meaning "to strike." You rub this kind of violent person the wrong way and he will really let you have it.

**NOT GREEDY OF FILTHY LUCRE**--not someone who is out for personal gain and profit. The man's financial dealings must be blameless and not in the least bit questionable. Free from greed.

**PATIENT**--gentle, forbearing (Phil. 4:5), sweet-reasonableness, considerate of the feelings of others, a man who is able to yield and who does not always insist on having things his own way, willing to concede, and yet not compromise when it comes to truth.

**NOT A BRAWLER**--not a fighter (literally "without war"),not one who is always arguing and getting involved in carnal disputes and quarrels. A man who is peaceable (Rom. 12:18).

**NOT COVETOUS**--literally, "not a lover of money" (Heb. 13:5). The ruling motive in his life is not money or possessions, but the glory of God.

### **1 TIMOTHY 3:4-5**

**RULES WELL HIS OWN HOUSE**--faithful in superintending his own household, having children who are obedient and respectful and well-disciplined (kept in line). Compare Titus 1:6--his children are properly controlled and not accused of riot or unruly. They are not wild and disorderly and rebellious.

### **1 TIMOTHY 3:6**

**NOT A NOVICE**--not one who has newly come to the faith, not a new convert, not one who has recently become a Christian, not a new believer, but rather one who has had years of growth and development in the faith (well tested by time).

### **1 TIMOTHY 3:7**

**A GOOD REPORT**--an excellent testimony before the unsaved, a good reputation among the

community.

**NOTE:** The other passage which list the qualifications of bishops (elders) is found in Titus 1:5-9 and is similar in many respects to the 1 Timothy 3:1-7 passage.

## **QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS**

The word "DEACON" means "servant" and refers to one who humbly serves the local assembly, caring especially for the financial and physical needs of the assembly. This allows those with shepherding responsibilities to give themselves more fully to prayer and the Word of God (Acts 6:1-7). That the early "deacons" were spiritual men is clearly seen by the fact that both Stephen and Philip were deacons (Acts 6:5). Philip held the office of deacon (Acts 6:5) but was gifted as an evangelist (Acts 21:8; compare Eph. 4:12).

### **ACTS 6:3**

**AMONG YOU**--a deacon must be a believer, a saved person.

**OF HONEST REPORT**--must have a good reputation and an excellent testimony.

**FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**--a spiritual man, controlled by God the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-6:1; Eph. 5:18).

**FULL OF WISDOM**--the ability to judge rightly and follow a sound course of action by way of knowledge and experience; the ability to apply God's Word to life's situations and problems.

**WHOM WE MAY APPOINT OVER THIS BUSINESS**--able to do the job, competent.

### **1 TIMOTHY 3:8**

**GRAVE**--dignified, serious, respected, a man people look up to, a good example, a good testimony, a man of character.

**NOT DOUBLETONGUED**--not "say one thing and mean another" and not one who says one thing to one person and then something different to another person. He must say what he means and mean what he says. A man whose words can be trusted and whose motives will not be suspected. One who is honest, truthful, sincere.

**NOT GIVEN TO MUCH WINE**--not addicted to wine. Because drinking is such a problem today, we insist that the deacon be a man who does not drink any alcoholic beverages at all in light of the stumbling block principle of Romans 14:21.

**NOT GREEDY OF FILTHY LUCRE**--literally "shameful gain." See above discussion under 1 Timothy 3:3. He must be a man you could fully trust to take care of your money.

## **1 TIMOTHY 3:9**

**HOLDING THE MYSTERY OF THE FAITH IN A PURE CONSCIENCE**--the mystery of the faith refers to Christian truth. "The faith" is that whole body of truth that we believe (Jude 3). The "mystery of the faith" is more specific and involves those aspects of the faith that relate to church truth (compare 1 Timothy 3:14-16). A deacon must have the right concept of the local church. He must see the local assembly as God sees it--a living organism under the sovereign Headship and Lordship of Christ.

## **1 TIMOTHY 3:10**

**PROVEN MEN**--to be put to the test for approval. Time must be allowed before the judgment is made that this man should be a deacon. Give the man time to show his faithfulness and prove himself worthy of the office. The same should be true for the elder as indicated by the phrase "not a novice" (1 Timothy 3:6).

**BLAMELESS**--unaccused, "one who can't be called in." His life is so consistent and faithful that he will not need to be called in before the church to answer for some questionable action or behavior or deed.

## **1 TIMOTHY 3:12**

**THE HUSBANDS OF ONE WIFE**--see discussion under 1 Timothy 3:2.

**RULING THEIR CHILDREN AND HOUSES WELL**--see discussion under 1 Timothy 3:4-5.

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