

## **Eldership: The Calling of God**

### **1 Tim 3:1-7**

Quote Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899)

*“If I take care of my character; my reputation will take care of itself.”*

God give us men! A time like this demands  
 Strong minds, great hearts, true faith, and ready hands;  
 Men whom the lust of office does not kill;  
 Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;  
 Men who possess opinions and a will;  
 Men who have honor; men who will not lie.

Appropriate words for us today as we take another step in obedience to our Lord by installing another qualified elder.

We will be looking specifically at 1 Tim 3 where we find the **Requirements** for elders and deacons. We will also be comparing other Scriptures as we study what God requires of those He calls into his service as leaders in His church.

It would seem, looking at the passage that God is far more concerned with the **personal integrity** of church leaders than with their education, eloquence, or charismatic personality.

Please understand, that the standards are very high, but that **does not** imply a higher standard for church leaders than “ordinary” Christians. The same standards are for all!

We are all called to exhibit the character of Jesus Christ in our lives, whether or not we are in leadership. However, those in leadership must display and practice these character qualities without exception.

There is an inseparable link between the character of a church and the quality of its leadership. Much of the destruction wreaked within the church today finds its roots in an unqualified leadership, and the consequential weak and defeated congregation. The prophet Hosea stated, *“And it shall be: like people, like priest.”* (Hosea 4:9) Jesus taught His disciples that a *“disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.”* (Luke 6:40) Paul urged the Corinthian church, *“Therefore I urge you, imitate me.”* ... *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”* (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1) To the Philippian church he wrote, *“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”* Philippians 4:9

There is still a great deal of misunderstanding throughout Christendom as to the Biblical mode of church governance and leadership. One of the main problems with the church not understanding the role of church leadership is that it does not understand the headship of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:15-20

The **ultimate purpose** of the Headship of Christ is that He might have pre-eminence in all things. That all praise and glory and honor might go to Him: Colossians 1:18

There are some very clear and important implications of the Headship of Jesus Christ, as it relates to His church and the way they are governed.

**1. Any form of church government which gives preeminence to men rather than to our Lord is unbiblical.**

God intended for preeminence to reside with Jesus, so any form of church government that supersedes His preeminence and puts it on men is contrary to the will and purpose of God.

The Scribes and Pharisees loved the spotlight. They could be seen in the prominent places where attention and elevation could be theirs. Matthew 23:8–10

John MacArthur

*“Human teachers who faithfully proclaim and interpret God’s Word are to be appreciated, loved, and highly esteemed by those they serve (1 Thess. 5:12-13). But they are not to seek honor, much less demand it or glory in it.”*

So the Lord refused to allow His disciples to take titles that would exalt them above others.

Someone has said

*“Never in the New Testament do we see any kind of hierarchical ‘pecking order’ ...There is only one Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), and even the great Apostle Peter dares only call himself a ‘fellow elder’ (1 Peter 5:1).”*

The error of the Scribes and Pharisees was two-fold in Matt. 23:8-10.

- They wanted to elevate themselves over men, to be served, and not serve.
- They wanted to claim that which belonged only to Christ.

## 2. The Headship of Christ is best reflected in the rule and oversight of a plurality of elders.

The necessity of plurality of elders is clearly taught in the Scriptures. What are the benefits of this plurality?

- **Proper Exaltation**

It avoids one person gaining too much recognition and exaltation. That is why there is always a plurality of elders, so no one individual gets too much power and position.

The Scriptures are so clear about the office of elder. It is to be a place of **service** not self exaltation.

The example is given by none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. Luke 22:27

Exaltation and preeminence belongs only to Jesus Christ as the Head, the Creator, and the Sustainer of His church.

- **Proper giftedness**

A plurality of elders ensures that the various gifts of those called are more evenly used. No one person has all the gifts necessary to lead the church. God has intentionally divided the spiritual gifts among His church, and that necessitates a rule from plurality. 1 Corinthians 12:27-30

Elders, lead by the Holy Spirit, teach and lead so that the church can function within the parameters of the spiritual gifts given to it by the Holy Spirit.

- **Proper testimony**

A plurality of ruling elders most clearly demonstrates to the world and to the angels the Headship Christ has over His church.

Someone in the business world would say, “That’s crazy! You’ll never get anything done.” But, they speak from the standpoint of business structure. I would remind you that the NT Church is not a business, and is not to be treated or governed as one. There is a testimony to be upheld! The world and the angels are watching.

Paul speaking to the church at Corinth of the natural order of creation and God’s placement of rank and authority, speaks of this testimony. 1 Corinthians 11:8-10

The angels are the guardians of God’s church. The angels were there at the creation (Job 38:7) and saw how God made man and woman and the establishment of their God given roles. They would be offended at any violation of God order. Ephesians 3:9-11

Operation of the Elders

Responsibility of the Elders—Acts 20:17-31

**Requirements for Elders**—1 Tim 3:1-7

The qualifications Paul gives in 3:2–7 are set against the backdrop of the unqualified leaders in Ephesus. He places God’s standards in opposition to what the Ephesian church had allowed to be practiced.

The list of these departures from God’s instruction are cited through the epistle. Some of the leaders were:

- teaching false doctrine 1 Timothy 1:3; 4:7; 6:3-5
- turning aside to “fruitless discussion” 1 Timothy 1:6
- misusing the law and misunderstood the gospel 1 Timothy 1:7-11
- Some were women, even though that was forbidden by God’s command. 1 Timothy 2:12
- Others were guilty of sin, and needed public rebuke 1 Timothy 2:12

All these lead to the qualifications, not the duties of the elder. God is far more concerned with the spiritually, morality, and character of His under-shepherds than about their responsibilities.

In fact so clear is God’s Word about this matter, that Paul says in 1 Tim 5:20-24 that elders must support these standards or be publicly disciplined.

**The Call of the Elder**—3:1a

It is an important truth to understand that God calls those who serve in the capacity of elder leadership in the church.

- **Serious Calling**—“*This is a faithful saying:*” [Very Important]

This phrase appears in the epistles 5 times in Paul’s epistles, and is a statement that needs no proof; one that is self-evident.

Here the statement has reference to the call into the ministry. In the other places it is used it always has reference to doctrinal truth.

The significance of that is that it emphasizes the importance of the call of God on a man’s life. It was in the early church, and still is a serious and sacred trust.

Godly leaders have always been the backbone and support of the

church. This standard began with the apostles and then was eventually transferred to an eldership in each church. In Galatians 2:9, Peter, James and John were called “*pillars*” of the early church. Paul states in Ephesians 2:19-20 that the church is built on the “*foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone.*”

The importance of Biblical, spiritual eldership in the church cannot be underscored too much.

- Paul and Barnabas Acts 14:23

Other examples are numerous.

- Elders, along with the apostles, presided at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23 ).
- Paul had appointed elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:17, 28).
- Paul addressed the book of Philippians (1:1) to “*all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the **bishops and deacons.***”
- He wrote to the Thessalonians in (5:12-13) “*we urge you, brethren, to **recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, [13] and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.***”
- In a similar fashion Hebrews exhorts its readers to “**Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls...**” Hebrews 13:17

That’s the kind of man God wants to lead His church, His redeemed people. That’s the *seriousness* of the calling of God.

- **Selective Calling** - “*If a man*” [Limited]

Leadership in the church is not for everyone, or just anyone. One doesn’t just decide one day, “I think I’ll become a church leader.” It doesn’t happen that way.

One of the essential and non-negotiable requirements is that church leaders are to be **men**.

There is no indefinite article in the Greek language. But, the indefinite pronoun ‘**tis**’ (**anyone**) is masculine, agreeing with the masculine form of the adjectives in verses 2–6.

Everything stated here in this passage about church leaders in masculine in form.

For instance, it would be difficult for a woman to be a “one-woman man” (v. 2), nor did women in that day head households (vv. 5–6). Paul is

applying the same truth that he gave in 2:11-15, where he lays out the limits of women’s functions in the church.

This is hotly debated in our day with the ever increasing rise of feminism in the ranks of the church. There is very often an attempt to change or misinterpret Paul’s meaning with regard to these instructions.

(I am not going to take time today to speak of their arguments.)

- **Strong Calling** - “*desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.*” [Compelling]

In order for a man to become an elder he must have a Spirit-given desire for it.

Notice the word “*desires or aspires*” Gk word, [*oregomai*] {*or-eg'-omi*} very rare word used only here and Heb 11:16, means, “to stretch one's self out in order to touch or to grasp something; to reach after or desire something.” [*Middle voice*]

The word does not speak of **internal motives**, but only of the **external act**. Here it describes someone who is taking steps to become an overseer, a shepherd/elder.

Notice the next word, “*desires*” it is a different Gk word, [*epithumeo*] {*ep-ee-thoo-meh'-o*} means, “to long for; to have a passionate compulsion or desire for something.” In this context the compulsion is for good not evil.

When the two verbs are taken together, we get the complete picture of what takes place in the call of God on a man’s life for ministry and shepherding. He outwardly pursues ministry because of a driving inward desire placed there by the Holy Spirit.

The question might be asked, “Why do men seek the ministry of eldership apart from the Holy Spirit?” For many reasons:

- Because they were encouraged to do so by others. (Mothers/Dads/Teachers/SS Teachers/Pastors/Friends)
- Because ministry seemed to be the best option in careers.
- Because of a sincere love for the Lord and His church.
- Because of an apparent opportunity for power, position, and status and sometimes money.

Quote John MacArthur

*“The man truly called to the ministry is marked by both an inward consuming passion and a disciplined outward pursuit. For him the ministry is not the best option, it is the only option. There is nothing else he could do with his life that would fulfil him. Accordingly, he works diligently to prepare himself to be qualified for service.*

*While some may be called later in life, from that point on nothing else will do.”*

As one has said;

*“Simply put, ambition for office corrupts, desire for service purifies.”*

The church, our church, must be lead by men full of compulsion, with hearts of service and self-sacrifice, who are there because the Lord has placed them there, and for no other reason. Mark 10:42-44

- **Subjective Calling** - *“desires the office of overseer, he desires a good work.”* [Responsibility]

Having the responsibility of oversight of the church is no small task. Hebrews 13:17

Here again we have the Gk [*episkopos*] {*ep-is'-kop-os*} “an overseer.” The word really gets its function from the ancient Jewish community more than the Greek community. The overseers among the ancient Jews preached, taught, presided, exercised care and authority, and enforced discipline. That mirrors more closely the function of elders than that of the Greek culture.

What are the responsibilities of the NT church elder?

- **They are to rule, as well as preach and teach** 1 Timothy 5:17
- **They are to pray for the sick** James 5:14
- **They are to care for the church and be examples for others to follow** 1 Peter 5:1–2
- **They are to set church policy** - Acts 15:22ff
- **They are to ordain other leaders** 1 Timothy 4:14

- **Superior Calling**—*“he desires a noble task.”* Excellent]

Notice the word, “noble” Gk [*kalos*] {*kal-os'*} means, “beautiful, excellent, commendable, admirable, honorable.”

It is translated by words such as honorable, fine, noble and good.

Twentieth century English preacher writes:

*“In all the frustration and confusion of the times, is it possible to imagine a work comparable in importance with that of proclaiming the will of God to wayward men?”*

There is no task or calling so high or so holy as the call to lead God’s people and handle rightly the Word of God and shepherd their lives.

- **Strenuous Calling**— *“he desires a noble task.”* [Hard work]

Notice also the word “work” Gk [*ergon*] {*er'-gon*} means, “business; employment; that to which any one is occupied; that which one undertakes to do; enterprise; undertaking”

The **position** of eldership is **not** what is stressed here, but the **work** of the ministry is.

The emphasis is not the esteem and honor of the profession. The emphasis is upon the work of shepherding. It is the work that is honorable, excellent, beneficial, and productive.

When the emphasis is given to the position or office it is in reference to the work of God’s servant leader. 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13

Alexander Strauch

*“When the church eldership is viewed as just a status symbol or board position there are plenty of volunteers, but when it is viewed as a demanding, pastoral work, few will rush to volunteer.”*

Spiritual laziness is a major opponent to Biblical eldership, because it is just plain hard work. Acts 20:34–35

This calling of God to the eldership is a calling to hardship, suffering, disappointment and sometimes persecution. But, it can also be a calling full of joys, delights, satisfaction and blessings.

No matter which, it is the calling of God and the delight to do His will.