

## Servant-Leadership in the Church

The qualifications for church leadership are clearly mandated by Scripture and are the standard for all who serve in leadership capacities in the church. Rather than randomly fill open slots with any available body, it is crucial to evaluate our lives according to the biblical standards set forth in Scripture. What follows is a brief explanation of God's requirements for those who would serve and lead His church.

### QUALIFICATION FOR AN ELDER

The New Testament teaches that the church is to be led by a plurality of biblically qualified men who unanimously, equally, and autonomously shepherd the local church. Elders, as the spiritual overseers of the church, are to determine church policy (Acts 15:22); ordain others (1 Timothy 4:14); rule, teach, and preach (1 Timothy 5:17); exhort and refute (Titus 1:9); and act as shepherds, setting an example for all (1 Peter 5:1-3). Those responsibilities put elders at the core of the New Testament church's work. Therefore, you can understand how God protects and advances His church even through the way He has structured the leadership. Any departure from God's biblical prescription for leadership is to the peril of the church.

The pastoral epistles are given to inform us of what the church is and how it is to operate. First Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, in particular give these qualifications for one who holds the office of an elder:

***He must be above reproach.*** All other qualifications in this list are subordinated under this as the single, overarching qualification. To be above reproach speaks of having an unquestionable and irreproachable character. There must be no blight of any kind of sin that taints his reputation or puts his character in question. That's not to say that there will be no accusation, because leadership is fraught with those who like to cast stones at those up front, yet any accusations cannot stick to him. Hence, there must be no obvious defect in his character.

***He must be a one-woman man.*** He is to be devoted solely to his wife. He is to love, desire, and think only of the wife that God has given to him. This even has ramifications for single men, as it speaks of moral purity. Whether single or married, an elder cannot be a womanizer and there can be no hint of impropriety.

***He must be temperate.*** He must deny any excess in life that diminishes clear thinking and sound judgment. He is to be well-balanced, calm, careful, and steady, not self-indulgent.

***He must be sober-minded.*** He is to be serious about spiritual things, not frivolous. He is to avoid excess so that he can see things clearly, and that clarity of thought leads to an orderly, disciplined life.

***He must be well-organized.*** He is to approach all aspects of life in a systematic, orderly manner and fulfill his duties and responsibilities diligently. He is to have a disciplined mind that produces disciplined actions.

***He must be hospitable.*** He is to show kindness to strangers. He is to be generous and caring toward others, using what God has given him to serve them.

***He must be able to teach.*** He must be skilled in communicating God's Word and careful to teach with integrity what the Scriptures say. This is the primary quality that separates elders from deacons. Though all the elders and deacons may be involved in teaching, to some degree, elders must have cultivated an aptitude toward handling the Word of God.

***He must not be given to wine.*** He is not to have the lifestyle of a drinker or be characterized by a belligerent, negative temperament and quarrelsome attitude that is associated with drunkenness.

***He must not be a fighter.*** He is not to be quick-tempered or resort to verbal or physical abuse. He must be able to handle things with a calm and gentle spirit.

***He must be gentle.*** He is to be patient, considerate, genial, forbearing, and gracious. He must not seek to domineer others.

***He must not be quarrelsome.*** He is to be a peacemaker, not contentious or argumentative. He is not to be offensively aggressive or to insist on his perceived rights. He is to keep his temper under control.

***He must be free from the love of money.*** He is not to have his attention fixed on passing rewards. He is not to be preoccupied with amassing material possessions or involved in shady business practices.

***He must maintain a godly family.*** He must be able to demonstrate spiritual leadership in the context of his family before he can lead in the church. He is to have an unblemished and exemplary home life, with his children being respectful and under control.

***He must not be a new convert.*** He is to be a mature believer. His character is to be certified by the testimony of those who are not in the church. He should have a reputation for integrity, love, kindness, generosity, and goodness among those in the community who know him.

***He must not be self-pleasing.*** He is not to be self-willed or arrogant. He is not to be a headstrong, stubborn man who demands his way without regard to others.

***He must love what is good.*** He is to be devoted to all that is good and beneficial. He is to be an advocate of worthwhile pursuits.

***He must be just.*** He is to be upright in his dealings with men. His conduct in relation to others must conform to the standard of right. He is fair-minded and objective.

## **QUALIFICATIONS FOR A DEACON**

While the Bible teaches that *all* believers are to be characterized by a life of grateful service, some have been specially and uniquely gifted by the Spirit of God to serve (cf. Romans 12:7). Only in 1 Timothy 3 is there a specific discussion of the office of deacon (vv. 8-10, 12).

Those who serve in this capacity are to be equally qualified with elders in terms of character and spiritual life. The one difference between their qualifications, as previously mentioned, is that elders are to be able to teach. The elders oversee the work of those who serve the Lord, and they are assisted in their ministry endeavors by deacons. Note the specific qualifications given for deaconesses in 1 Timothy 3:11, in addition to those for the deacon outlined here. Notice as well that there is no inherent hierarchy among these officers, i.e., no subjugation of the office of deacon to that of elder. Deacons faithfully tend to the serving ministries of the church in order to free up the elders for the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:2, 4). Yet again, those serving in such a capacity must be biblically qualified. Said differently, those in a position of visibility must lead a life consistent with that visibility.

***He must be a man of dignity.*** The Greek term translated “dignity” means “worthy of respect, stately, dignified.” It denotes a seriousness of mind and character. A deacon must be worthy of respect and serious-minded, not treating serious things lightly.

***He must not be double-tongued.*** He is always consistent and righteous in what he says. He is not to be one who says one thing to one person and something else to another. He knows how to bridle his tongue and is not a gossip.

***He must not be addicted to much wine.*** He is to be characterized by clear thinking and self-control.

***He must not be fond of dishonest gain.*** His goals in life are not to be monetary. First Timothy 6:9 says that a pervasive desire for financial gain corrupts a man.

***He must be doctrinally sound.*** First Timothy 3:9 says that he must hold “to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.” “The faith” refers to the whole of Christian truth. A “clear conscience” is the result of obeying the truth. He must hold to the faith and apply the truth in his life.

***He must be active in spiritual service.*** Verse 10 says, “Let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons.” The verb translated “be tested” speaks of an ongoing test, not a single test of probationary period. The test is an ongoing

general assessment by the church of the candidate's service to Christ. Before being affirmed as a deacon, he must currently be faithfully serving the Lord.

***He must be morally pure.*** His life is to be "beyond reproach" (v. 10). Like an elder, a deacon must be morally pure, having an irreproachable character. Verse 12 echoes the standard of moral purity: "Let deacons be husbands of only one wife." A deacon must be totally consecrated and devoted to his wife.

***He must lead a godly family.*** Verse 12 also says that he must be a good manager of his children and household. The proving ground for leadership is how a man manages his children and home. The way that a man cares for his children and home is an excellent indicator of his ability to care for God's church.

Though these biblical qualifications must be met specifically by those in office, they are equally to be sought and implemented into the lives of all who claim to be servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. These spiritual qualities are not a higher standard or requirement for church leaders, but are simply a higher accountability, by virtue of holding a visible position in which these qualities are to be modeled. Every Christian should strive to have these qualifications consistently on display in his life and service to Christ and the church, whether he is a recognized, office-holding believer or simply a servant to the body of Christ.

If you see these qualifications lived out in the lives of members of NBC, please consider speaking to the elders about the possibility of these men being recognized in an official capacity.

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