

Biblical Grounds

- Acts 14:23; 15:1-5; 20:17-38
- Ephesians 4:11
- 1 Timothy 3:1-7
- Titus 1:5-9

* *presbuteros, episkopos, poimen*

Qualifications / Duties

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1. above reproach (lit. "blameless") 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7.
This qualification is the summation of all of the rest. It means that there is nothing in his life that would justify a legitimate accusation of misconduct or call his character into question.
2. the husband of one wife (lit. "a one-woman man") 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6.
Whether a man is single or married, he must be living a sexually pure life. For a married elder, it also means that he must be faithfully devoted to loving his wife (Ephesians 5:25; 1 Peter 3:7).
3. temperate (moderate, not given to excess) 1 Timothy 3:2.
In all areas of life, an elder must be calm, well-balanced, careful, and sane—one who at all times is capable of clear thinking and sound judgment.
4. sober-minded (a sensible, serious person) 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8.
This does not mean that an elder may not laugh or joke or play. It means he leads a disciplined life, not allowing frivolous activities to distract him from more serious and important concerns.
5. of good behavior (respectable, orderly) 1 Timothy 3:2.
The opposite of the Greek in this case is chaos (utter confusion). An elder's outward behavior must demonstrate decency, orderliness, and self-control.
6. hospitable (lit. "one who loves strangers") 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8.
An elder must be one who shows genuine kindness and hospitality, not only to the members of his church, but also to people he does not know well.
7. a lover of what is good (lit. "one who is inclined to do good") Titus 1:8.
Closely related to hospitality, an elder must be one who not only loves the concept of goodness, but also is prone to doing good to others.
8. able to teach (lit. "skilled in teaching") 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9.
There is no biblical requirement that an elder have a formal education, but he must be an able teacher and defender of the truth (cf. 2 Timothy 2:2, 24; 2:15; Titus 2:7-8).
9. not given to wine (lit. "not a drinker" or "not addicted to wine") 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7.
Though not an absolute prohibition, this is a serious warning that an elder cannot be preoccupied with alcohol or known as a drinker. Due to abuse, however, it may be advisable for elders to abstain from alcohol altogether in order to avoid offense or damaging influence (cf. Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8).

10. not violent (lit. not "a giver of blows," or "a striker") 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7.
An elder must be a man who solves problems and settles disputes peacefully, using persuasive words and calm demeanor, not his fists or other weapons.
11. gentle (patient, gracious, forgiving) 1 Timothy 3:3; 2 Timothy 2:24.
An elder must not be a man who holds a grudge or is slow to forgive. He must be one who will patiently bear with those who are needy, difficult, reluctant to change, or slow to learn.
12. not quick-tempered (he must be slow to anger) Titus 1:7; James 1:19-20
Anger in itself is not always a sin. There is a righteous sort of anger. An elder, though, must be a man who recognizes and controls his own propensity to become angry.
13. not quarrelsome (not argumentative) 1 Timothy 3:3; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; James 3:13-18
He must be a man who will defend the truth strongly, but in a peaceable manner. He must not be one who allows himself to become embroiled in hostile disputes or petty arguments.
14. just (righteous or upright) Titus 1:8.
He is a man who is known for doing what is right. He lives a life of practical righteousness, trying to reflect God's view in every decision he makes.
15. holy (lit. "devout" or "set apart to God") Titus 1:8.
An elder must be firmly committed to God and His Word. He must be faithful to the ministry and to biblical doctrine, not one who gives in to social, political, or religious pressure to compromise.
16. self-controlled (or self-disciplined) Titus 1:8.
He must be a man who is disciplined in terms of his response to physical desires for food, pleasure, comfort, money, sleep, sex, or anything else which could cause him to stumble.
17. not covetous (not a lover of money) 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:2.
An elder cannot be motivated in the ministry by financial gain or greedy in his lifestyle. He is a man who will trust the Lord, be content with what is provided, and be thankful.
18. one who rules his own house well (a good manager and leader) 1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6.
An elder must have proven himself a good manager of his children (if he has children), his personal finances, and his household in general.
19. having his children in submission with all reverence (having obedient, respectful, faithful children) 1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6.
The children of an elder must not have a reputation for uncontrolled behavior or insubordination. Additionally, an elder must not be a harsh or brutal man, but must maintain order in his family through loving leadership, consistent biblical training, and proper discipline.
20. not a novice (not a new or immature believer) 1 Timothy 3:6.
An elder must be a mature believer, especially in relation to others in his particular church. If even a capable man is elevated to the position too rapidly, he will battle with pride.
21. He must have a good testimony among those who are outside (well respected even by unbelievers in the community) 1 Timothy 3:7.
An elder must have a consistently good testimony in all places and with all people (aside from those who would persecute him or accuse him falsely), even outside the church. He must be just, honest, peaceable, and loving in every context.
22. He must serve, not by compulsion, but willingly . . . eagerly (he must desire to serve) 1 Peter 5:2; 1 Timothy 3:1.
Elders must not be pressured into service if it is not their personal desire to serve in this capacity. An elder's desire to serve must be God-given and his motives pure.

23. not self-willed (not anxious to control others or to have his own way) Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:3.

An elder must not be a man who is anxious to dominate or control others. He must be a team-player, realizing that while he is a shepherd, he is also one of the sheep.

24. an example to the flock 1 Peter 5:3; Titus 2:7.

An elder will not be perfect, but he must be a man who will lead the church, by instruction and example, according to God's Word.

Duties of an Elder (Elliff)

In the Bible, the distinction is made between a shepherd and a hired hand (John 10:11-15). A shepherd (elder) has in his heart a God-given love for the sheep and a desire to care for those entrusted to him. The hired hand is unwilling to become as emotionally involved—unwilling to confront the dangers that threaten the sheep—unwilling to truly love the people under his care.

As you consider a man for the position of elder, evaluate him in light of these six essential duties which characterize a good shepherd:

1. Pastoral intimacy: An elder must develop the relationships that under-gird all other ministry toward individual members. (John 10:11, 14)
2. Pastoral tutelage: An elder must provide personal biblical instruction for increasing character, skills, knowledge, faith, love, and enthusiasm. (Acts 20:20, 27; 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 4:1-2 Titus 3:1-2, 8)
3. Pastoral guidance: An elder must offer objective biblical direction through conflicts, reversals of life, distortions in thinking, and difficult decisions for those under his care. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
4. Pastoral consolation: An elder must give spiritual comfort during trials. (2 Corinthians 1:3-7; Thessalonians 5:14)
5. Pastoral guardianship: An elder must watch out for the enemy's assaults on the weakness of the sheep. He must warn the sheep of danger and discipline them when they become rebellious. (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Hebrews 13:17)
6. Pastoral intercession: An elder must pray with and for those entrusted to him. (1 Samuel 12:23; Romans 1:9; Ephesians 1:15-21; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12)

Role / Function

1. Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-11)
 - a. Humble oversight
 - i. Teaching
 - ii. Correction
 - iii. Serving
 - iv. Exemplary
 - v. Eschatologically focused
 - b. Guarding the flock
 - i. From themselves
 - ii. From those within
 - iii. From those without
 - iv. From the devil
 - v. With sound doctrine
 - c. Suffer for the gospel

- i. Relentless work
- ii. Exhausting labor
- iii. Emotionally taxing
- iv. Difficult on the family
- v. Gospel - enabled
- vi. Until Jesus comes

2. Lead (Hebrews 13:17)

- a. Authoritative proclamation
- b. Humble presentation
- c. Accountable direction
- d. Joy-filled
- e. For the good of the people (contingent on the people's joyful response)

FAQ

Q: How common are elders in Baptist life?

A: Well, the short answer is "not very." If we mean that in a distinctly recognized role do most Southern Baptist churches have elders, they do not. Historically, it's always been a mix. Some SBC churches have had elders throughout our 150+ year history. The first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, W. B. Johnson of South Carolina, wrote of the New Testament churches that "each church had a plurality of elders... A plurality in the bishopric is of great importance for mutual counsel and aid, that the government and edification of the flock may be promoted in the best manner," (W. B. Johnson, *The Gospel Developed*, in *Dever, Polity*, pp.192-193)

Q: Don't we already have elders?

A: Yes. We have a pastoral staff that functions in this capacity. No, in the sense that it is a recognized group in this distinct capacity including lay elders.

Q: Do we need elders?

A: No, in the sense that in order to be a New Testament church these roles (elder & deacon) must exist and we have them. Yes, in the sense that moving toward a distinct elder council more closely resembles New Testament order and provides greater leadership, consistency, and accountability.

Q: What's the difference between elder "rule" and elder "led"?

A: "Elder rule" vests all the decisions and direction for the church in the council of elders. "Elder led" vests the council of elders with directional leadership with the final decision vested in the congregation. In this way, UBC continues to be congregational, but elder led. The current constitution states, "Christ ruled, Pastor led, Deacon served, Committee operated, and Congregation affirmed." Instead of "Pastor" the interchangeable word would be "Elder." The congregation would remain in the affirming role.

Q: How will the elders be structured?

A: It will be proposed that the majority of the elders serving will be those not in the paid employ of the church. This helps maintain continuity in the body regardless of who serves the church in a paid capacity. As well, it promotes trust and accountability at a level beyond that of employment.

Q: What does this mean for the Church Council?

A: The Church Council would defer its administrative responsibilities to the elders and would cease to exist. At this time, there is prudence to the thought of having the Church Council continue to meet quarterly during the first year of elders in order to insure a smooth transition and foster continued communication. Their counsel has been invaluable, so it would be at the recommendation of the elders and approval of the body if the Council should remain intact for the purpose of quarterly meetings on a perpetual basis.

Time Frame

- Wednesday, January 26, 2011 - Quarterly Church Conference (White Paper presentation)
- Thursday, January 27, 2011 - Church letter and Elder resource page on website
- Wednesday, February 2-23, 2011 - Wednesday Town Hall teaching & discussions
- Monday, February 21, 2011 - Church Council discussion #3
- Monday, April 11, 2011 - Church Council (formal recommendation for adoption Elders)*
- Sunday, April 17, 2011 - Distribution of Proposed Church Constitution
- Wednesday, April 27, 2011 - Quarterly Church Conference (recommendation with discussion)*
- Monday, June 13, 2011 - Church Council discussion #4 (contingent Elder appointment recommendations)
- Wednesday, July 20, 2011 - Quarterly Church Conference (vote on newly amended constitution)
- Monday, August 8, 2011 - Church Council discussion #5 (prayer for Elders)
- Wednesday, August 24, 2011 - Elder installation service

* Denotes presentation of newly amended Constitution & By-laws