



# *Qualifications* OF CHURCH LEADERS

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**G**od's directive concerning the character of those who aspire to serve in the offices of the church is given in Titus 1:6-9: – "If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound

doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Before men can be appointed to the offices of the church, these biblical qualities (specifically those delineated in vv. 6-8) are to be found in their lives. Though there will be men in the church who may think of themselves as fit to be leaders and ready to take on great responsibilities, they must be examined over a period of time by the leaders and the church. Only when they are found equipped with those biblical qualities, upon examination (which would require the evaluation and approval of

both the leaders and members of the congregation), ought they to be appointed to leadership position. This article will briefly examine the respective biblical qualities required of church leaders.

### **Blameless Life [v. 6a]**

Twice this word “blameless” appears in Titus 1:6-9 (vv. 6, 7). Living above reproach must be the consistent characteristic of a leader. “Blameless” cannot refer to sinless perfection because no man is without sin. Rather, it speaks of a consistent life of spiritual maturity. Its similar usage in 1 Timothy 3:2 emphasises that “nothing in the person would cause an opponent to make a damaging charge against him, thus the person is irreproachable or unassailable” (Alexander Strauch). There must be a commitment to moral and spiritual reputation. Holiness and submission to God’s Word should characterise the leader, so he must be free from damaging and offensive behaviour and lifestyle.

In verse 7, Paul said, “For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God”. A leader or an elder is God’s steward and, therefore, the overseer of God’s household. He is entrusted with God’s household. God’s interests in the church are his main concern and he acts accordingly. He needs to be morally and spiritually fit to fulfil God’s demands for His invaluable possession. His duty is to set an example to those who are called to be saints.

As the Christian author Alexander Strauch aptly puts it, “What the churches of Jesus Christ need in the way of leadership is men of deep inner spiritual and moral character. The best systems, laws, and constitutions are impotent without men who are just, devout, lovers of what is good, sensible, self-controlled, forbearing, free

from love of money, uncontentious and faithful keepers of God’s Word. These are precisely the qualities that God requires of those who lead His people”.

### **Sexual Morality [v. 6b]**

An utmost virtue of a leader that characterises him as a blameless person is that he is “the husband of one wife” (v. 6b). This literally means he is a “one-wife” husband, or “one-woman” man. Paul is not forbidding a man from marrying if his wife dies. Rather, he is speaking of the sexual purity of a leader. A leader should not be a flirtatious, promiscuous or an adulterous man.

The phrase “husband of one wife” therefore implies loyalty and faithfulness to his wife. It prohibits divorce, adultery, polygamy, and suchlike. The leader must be a faithful spouse. As one writer said, “Marriage is the most probing test of a man’s character and beliefs.” This thought is consistent with what Paul said in 1 Timothy 3:5, “For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” The task of building godly marriages and strong families in the church necessitates a good marriage history in every church leader’s life. In these days of increasing sexual immorality, this quality of being committed to the sanctity of marriage and keeping oneself from sexual sin is to be highly stressed.

### **Good Family Leadership [v. 6c]**

Another essential spiritual quality mentioned by the apostle Paul is that of “having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly” (v. 6c). In 1 Thessalonians 2:11, the apostle Paul described his leadership ministry with these words – “we exhorted and comforted and charged every

one of you, as a father doth his children”. A leader’s role is much like a father’s role in the house. Since the leader is to be a loving parent to the family of God, there is no better place to prove his spiritual leadership than in his own family. In 1 Timothy 3:4-5, Paul reinforced this importance of good family leadership: “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)”.

To begin with, the church leader must have “faithful children”. The Greek word (*pistos*) for “faithful” is also rendered as “believing” elsewhere (cf. 1 Timothy 5:16; 6:2). Some argue that the word “faithful” does not require the children to be believers but only to be trustworthy, dutiful and responsible children, whereas others say that the word demands the children to be “believers”. Suffice it to say that this writer personally thinks it is rather impossible to guarantee the biblical requirements of a leader’s children without they being believers.

The scriptural passage in Titus says that the church leader’s children must “not (be) accused of riot or unruly”. “Riot” and “unruly” are very strong words. The Greek word (*asōtia*) translated as “riot” refers to an immoral, wasteful, drunken lifestyle (cf. Ephesians 5:18; 1 Peter 4:4). It pictures prodigality. The second Greek word (*anupotaktos*), which is translated as “unruly”, refers to the insubordinate, disobedient and rebellious attitude of the children (cf. Titus 1:10). In 1 Timothy 3:4, the apostle Paul said that the children ought to be “in subjection with all gravity”. The words “riot” and “unruly” fitted the children of Eli the priest (cf. 1 Samuel 2-3). Wild and disobedient children are a bad

reflection on the home, especially on the father’s inability to guide others. Church leaders’ children are not to be professing believers who lead immoral lives. On the contrary, their lifestyle must exemplify the life of “faithful children”.

It must also be noted that the leader must be “one that ruleth well his own house” (1 Timothy 3:4). A Christian author remarks, “A most important principle, which has not always had the prominence it deserves (is that) ... any man unable to govern his children graciously and gravely by maintaining good discipline, is no man for government in the Church” (Donald Guthrie). A biblical leader or elder is best tested by how well he handles his children, and not by his wealth, success or popularity. The necessity and importance of this requirement are immediately supported by the question: “For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” In other words, a man who is successful as a businessman, a top military officer or a bank manager, but a failure in the upbringing and nurture of his children (so that they become faithful and obedient children), is disqualified from being a leader of the church. So, a leader must not only be a faithful husband but also a good parent who knows how to bring up his children in a godly way.

### **Nobility in Attitude and Conduct [vv. 7-8]**

Titus 1:7-8 gives two lists of general characteristics, one list of five “negatives” and the other of six “positives” – “not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate”. All

of them depict the leader as a morally noble man.

### *The “Negatives” [v. 7]*

*“Not selfwilled”* – This trait is the opposite of self-loving arrogance. A leader should not be always seeking his own way, satisfaction and glory. He must first of all be one who seeks out the mind of God and does only that which God wants him to do for the church. Secondly, he must also be willing to cooperate with others and consider others’ ideas and thoughts.

*“Not soon angry”* – A leader of the church cannot be quick-tempered. The apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:24-25 that “the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men ... patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves”. When things do not go the way the leader wants them to be, he should be able to retain his composure (internally and externally). Anger does not produce anything valuable in the spiritual leadership.

*“Not given to wine”* – This leadership requirement appears in 1 Timothy 3:3. This is not to say that the leaders never drank wine, which was a common drink (more like grape juice) in those days. This is rather a warning against intoxicating wine or any other intoxicants. He is not to be a drinker, one who goes into bars and inns, or places associated with drinking where there is a potential for drunkenness.

*“No striker”* – The term “striker” also appears in 1 Timothy 3:3. It basically speaks of someone who uses his hands, fist, a stick or a rock to hit someone else. It is reflective of one who takes vengeance on others violently. A leader must be willing to suffer even violence! He who goes around

punching people obviously has no part in spiritual leadership.

*“Not given to filthy lucre”* – A leader must not be a man who is desirous of sordid gain. The phrase “given to filthy lucre” describes a man whose heart is set on amassing wealth through any means. Such a man would not value honesty and integrity. [This qualification is certainly not against a leader taking his wages (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:14; 1 Timothy 5:17).]

### *The “Positives” [v. 8]*

*“A lover of hospitality”* – The Greek word which is translated as “a lover of hospitality” can literally mean “a lover of strangers”. It is expected of all Christians to be hospitable (cf. Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 5:10; Hebrews 13:2). The message portrayed by this word is that a leader must be willing to make himself and his possessions available to people, whom he does not know, primarily other Christians. The biblical meaning of hospitality is not to have one’s friends coming over to one’s house for dinner, but to have even the strangers come under one’s roof and to entertain them. A leader must be a generous man.

*“A lover of good men”* – These words refer to a leader’s associations and acquaintances. They translate the Greek word (*philagathos*), which simply means loving what is good. A leader is to be a lover of good men. Indeed, much can be said about a man by looking at his friends and what surrounds him. A leader’s heart should dwell upon things and people who are noble and excellent.

*“Sober”* – This word is a translation of the Greek word that literally means having “soundness of mind” or being “sober-minded”. It requires a leader to be

discreet, balanced, sensible in thinking, reasonable and controlled through sound judgment. Alexander Strauch expresses the importance of this trait most succinctly: “Sober-mindedness greatly tempers pride, authoritarianism and indiscretion. Prudence is an essential quality of mind for a humble, servant-leader who must handle problems and guide others in the Lord’s ways.”

*“Just”* – A leader must be a just man who conducts himself according to the divine principles about life. This word is a description of a man who meets God’s standards for life. He must be one who is known for the fact that he lives according to divine standards.

*“Holy”* – The word translated as “holy” has the idea of being pure, unpolluted and free from stains of sin. A leader’s ways should be guarded by self-examination, confession of sins, prayer, and application of God’s Word. A leader is to be a reminder to the church that it is possible to live a holy life.

*“Temperate”* – In order to be a leader, a man must be characterised by self-discipline, self-restraint and self-control in every aspect of life. The book of Proverbs reminds us that “He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls” (Proverbs 25:28). A man in the leadership who is not firm

and disciplined will cast the congregation wide open to spiritual disasters!

## Conclusion

In a nutshell, the character of a leader must be the reflection of his inner man. It is not a feigned or forced outward polishing of life in order to cover up the indiscipline and corruption of the real person. The spiritual qualities discussed above must consistently characterise the leader’s life. Only morally and spiritually qualified men should come to the various offices of the church leadership.

To compromise on compliance to these biblical qualifications would have grave consequences for the church. Absence of any of these spiritual virtues in a leader’s life would mean that the wrong man had entered the leadership of the church. It is thus essential that those considered for church leadership be examined in the light of these inviolable scriptural requirements. While no man is perfect, every aspiring leader must have growing commitment to God’s truth, holiness and effective service. This is non-negotiable. In the proper administration and oversight of church matters, we need men who have exhibited abiding faith in God and His Word, submission to the Holy Spirit, godly and practical wisdom in their individual, family and church affairs.

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