

Right Attitude Essential When Selecting Elders and Deacons

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Elders must be selected and appointed in every congregation for it to reach the potential to please Christ and accomplish His mission upon earth. When the time comes to select men to be elders and deacons, invariably some men and women will look for "loop-holes" in the qualifications of elders and deacons listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The obvious reason is to eliminate some whom they do not want to be elders or deacons, or to include some they do want to be elders or deacons who are not qualified. Sometimes it is the objector himself who wants to call the shots. He wants to be an elder for the power he thinks he will have to make things go as he wants them, and he knows he is not qualified. Some brethren can actually get into shameless fights about this matter. This simply can not be tolerated.

The qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are as essential in every detail as the qualifications to receive the remission of sins as listed in the Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:9,10; and other passages in the New Testament dealing with remission of sins. These verses require the gospel to be preached to "every creature." Everyone who will believe the gospel, repent of his/her sins, confess that Christ is the Son of God and be baptized in the "name of the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Ghost" for the remission of sins, he will be in Christ and forgiven of all his sins. No individual can obtain remission of sins short of these conditions. These conditions cannot be modified or deleted to accommodate the whims of men and women. One either does ALL these things, just as the word of God requires, or he does not have the remission of his sins. It is that simple.

In the same way, older, mature men MUST BE just what the requirements demand in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 before he can be an elder and all must agree and submit to that standard. God requires it!

Some attitudes need to be examined and corrected before a peaceful, scriptural and successful selection of qualified men can be appointed as bishops and deacons.

From *Scriptural Elders And Deacons*, Guardian Of Truth Foundation, copyrighted by H. E. Phillips in 1959, the following is taken from Chapter IX, page 74-80 to indicate some potential problems with attitudes.

ATTITUDES TOWARD QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS AND THE CONSEQUENCES

"Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount" (Heb. 8:5).

A proper attitude toward the study of the qualifications for the eldership must be taken if we are to make "all things according to the pattern" of the church as Christ built it. Presently too many are ignorant of the truth regarding these qualifications, and are too easily led to accept about any

explanation given in making void some quality of the eldership.

I. ERRONEOUS ATTITUDES TOWARD THE QUALIFICATIONS

One might ask, Why are preachers and church members in general so divided over the standard of God in forming the oversight of the church? To properly answer this question we must remove attention from the standard given in the Bible to the opinions and theories of man, because there lies the all important answer to this question. Man's speculating has always led him to false premises in matters of faith, and certainly this is a subject of faith, and speculating is usually based upon some idea foreign to the plain revelation of God. A great mystery is why one man with great intellect and accomplishment will look at an apparently simple passage of Scripture and draw one conclusion, while another, equally intelligent and accomplished, will look at the same passage and draw an opposite conclusion. This fault can not be attributed to the weakness of the Bible, nor can it be blamed on the inability of the Holy Spirit to adequately express himself; the inefficiency must be charged to the man in spite of his intellect and learning. We are compelled to inquire, What is wrong with the man in his approach to the Bible that makes one interpret a passage one way and another man another way? The answer is inevitable: his attitude toward the passage colors his mind in favor of himself as he approaches it.

Before a proper and thorough study of the qualifications can be successful, it is essential to look for a moment at the various attitudes toward these qualifications that have been exhibited by a number of outstanding preachers and writers of the past one hundred years. It must be said in fairness that not all these positions—for that matter very few of them—are proclaimed in dishonesty. Therefore, this exposition of error in attitude does not reflect on those who hold these positions, as to their integrity, but it is hoped that the proper attitude may be determined that all may approach the qualifications of the eldership to know the truth. Preconceptions on the part of the exegete always bind him to a thorough and accurate understanding of any passage of Scripture. Attention is now directed to the most prominent attitudes toward the qualifications of bishops that hinder a correct understanding.

A. No man can qualify today, hence no elders today.

If one approaches the study believing that there are no men who can fully qualify today to be elders, then, of course, he would be unable to find any passage that can be used, in his opinion, to deny his position. In every reference to any qualification of an elder he could find something that would be impossible for man today. But what qualification listed in the Bible can a man not develop? The universal answer almost always comes from those who hold this attitude: "No man can be inspired today." But who said inspiration was an attribute for the eldership? The Bible certainly does not say so. But the argument responds: "Will you deny that elders in the early church were inspired?" Certainly not! But how does this concession help the contender? Neither would I deny that preachers and other Christians were inspired in the New Testament days. Does it follow that there can be no preachers and Christians today because no one can be inspired of God today as then? Until some passage is adduced that establishes this quality as an essential part of the elders, the argument and contention amounts to nothing. As long as one holds the attitude that no man can qualify today he will never see the truth concerning the matter.

B. *All the Bible qualifications are for the group of elders rather than for one man.*

Perhaps the origin of this attitude was an attempt to escape some essential quality mentioned in the Scripture to allow some esteemed man to enter the oversight. Since the standard was so plainly essential, the only escape was to say that what one man lacked another could supply, hence the position that the qualifications are for the whole group rather than for one man. If this attitude is tolerated it would allow one man to have the ability to teach, another to have a good report from without, another to be kind and patient, another to be the husband of one wife, etc. By this standard about any rascal who may have just one of these qualities, such as having ability to teach, could be appointed to the eldership, and this principle would be definitely contrary to the New Testament. The language of the apostle to both Timothy and Titus tells that these qualities are for one man. "If any (man) be . . ." Each man appointed to the eldership must have to a good degree all the qualifications listed.

C. *Only one qualification for the eldership - Blamelessness.*

It appears evident that this attitude grew out of the desire to emphasize some quality and minimize the importance of another. We do not attribute to every professor of this theory the motive just mentioned, but refer only to its origin. This conclusion could be acquired only if the major premise is established that there is only one qualification: blamelessness, and all other qualities mentioned are related to *blameless*. One of the foremost advocates of this attitude in modern times is H. E. Winkler of Nashville, Tennessee. Brother Winkler wrote a large book entitled *The Eldership* in which he produced all the arguments that have been thought of to support this idea. He is consistent in that he refers again and again to "the qualification" of elders, but he says that one must be qualified in all "points of qualification." Just what is the difference in "points" (plural) of qualification, and "qualifications" (plural)? If it be conclusively established that there is just one qualification, namely: BLAMELESSNESS, there are no "points" of the qualification, for one is either blameless or he is not. On page 89 of *The Eldership* Winkler said: "I come now to notice the qualification of elders. The reader will note that I speak of it as qualification, singular, and the points of qualification, instead of the qualifications, plural. I believe there is only one basic qualification required of an elder, namely, 'Blamelessness.'

Paul told Titus to appoint elders, 'If any man be blameless.' And to Timothy he said: 'The bishop therefore must be without reproach.' 'Blamelessness' and 'without reproach' express the same thought."

Should not all Christians be without reproach? If so, why would this become a qualification for the eldership only? If blamelessness is not the qualification for the eldership only, but for all Christians, the only logical deduction is that there are actually no qualifications for the bishops, but *blamelessness* is an attribute for all Christians. This conclusion rules out any standard of God for the eldership and is absolutely wrong. Why is this THE qualification for elders when all Christians must also be without reproach? To concinnate this attitude with known truth is an undertaking few, if any, are actually willing to approach.

May we amicably inquire that if this be THE qualification for the elders, why not appoint a *woman* who is "blameless"? There could be no scriptural opposition *if blameless* be the only

demand of the Scripture. But if an elder must be a *man*, then we have at least TWO qualifications: (1) a man (2) blameless. This is enough to rule out the idea that there is just one qualification to be an elder. Actually this attitude rests upon the same kind of foundation as the doctrine of "faith only," which is: Find one passage that mentions justification by faith and conclude that it is by faith alone. Blamelessness is a qualification, but since others are mentioned in connection with it, we are compelled to conclude that they, each of them, stand in equal force and importance to that quality of blamelessness.

On page 89 Winkler says further: "Paul says the elder must be blameless and then proceeds to mention those points in which he must be blameless in order to have the required qualification of blamelessness."

Just how does one, who does not already have this attitude to vindicate, twist and arrange the context of the word *blameless* to draw the conclusion that all other qualities are "points" of blamelessness? I confess I am unable to see it, and I have observed it from every angle possible to my knowledge. Should not all Christians be blameless in those things mentioned by Paul, even to be saved, much less to be in the eldership? *Blameless* has to do with the demeanor of the man in every day living. Again, should the elder be blameless in only those things mentioned, or must he be blameless in his whole life? If the latter, why should Paul mention just a few of the things in which the elder must be blameless and leave other things without a mention?

If *blameless* be the only qualification, would not this whole matter be as complete and much plainer had the Holy Spirit just said, "The bishop must be blameless in all things" and let it go at that? What could be added to the term *blameless* to make it more complete? The fact of the matter is that *blameless* has to do with being free from guilt of any wrong, and one may be blameless in this respect and still not be suited for the eldership. To illustrate: a blameless woman. If we begin to enumerate the "points" in which one must be blameless, where are we to stop short of every point in a man's life and relationship? It is a qualification of every Christian to be blameless. But just to mention a few "points" in which an elder must be blameless is to conclude that he must be blameless in only those things mentioned, and other matters are not important to become bishops. Must an elder be *blameless* in only the "points" mentioned in both Timothy and Titus? Or can he be blameworthy in anything not mentioned and still be an elder? Both the grammar and punctuation show that *blameless* is just one of the qualifications in the list and stands equal in importance to all the rest but not above them. Like baptism in the plan of salvation, it is only one of the several qualifications to be an elder.

Again on page 86 Winkler says: "God wants men who possess, each one of them, all the points of qualification as he inspired Paul to give them. I have often stated, and do not now have cause to retract, that if there cannot be found, in the church of Christ today, men who meet Paul's requirements of an elder, we have a very poor set of Christians on earth today and that righteousness has reached a very low ebb."

Brother Winkler cannot express himself without using language that shows he must accept more than just the quality of *blamelessness*. Here he speaks of "points" of qualification.

"Points" of qualification would, in every way, equal "qualifications." Qualification means that which suits or makes fit for a use or service. Any "point" that becomes necessary to the qualification is essential and becomes itself a qualification.

He also used the term "requirements" (plural). A requirement is an essential to an end and is by all definitions a "qualification." Just how much difference is there between *qualification* and *requirement*? These requirements, Brother Winkler says men must meet in order to be elders, are really "qualifications" and there is no escape from it.

The normal consequence of this attitude is that any man (and he will not admit that a woman can be an elder, even though she may be blameless) can be an elder whether he be young or old, experienced or not, married or single, just so he is a man and is *blameless*. (This amounts to two qualifications). Notice now in the next quotation where this attitude leads.

Page 193: "I have often stated, both in private and publicly, that there is NOT ONE SINGLE QUALITY (Emphasis mine, H.E.P.) required of an elder that is not also required of every other member of the church. To this position no one has ever dared, in my presence, to offer one word in contradiction."

I venture to "dare" a contradiction to this statement with Bible proof. Here are some qualities of elders that are not in "every other member of the church."

1. An elder must be a man—Some Christians may be women.
2. An elder must be experienced—Some Christians may be novitiates (babes).
3. An elder must be a man of age—Some Christians may be early teen-age people.
4. An elder must be a husband—Some Christians may be single.
5. An elder must be a father—Some Christians may not be fathers.
6. An elder must be a "meat-eater" of the gospel—Some Christians may take "milk."

Again on page 193: "Does one ask, 'Then why state the qualification of an elder if all the members are required to develop the same characteristics?' The answer is obvious. The Lord knew the members would not all make that forward advance but would be like those to whom Paul speaks in Hebrews 5:12."

It is a great mystery to this scribe how one can see the "obvious" answer in Hebrews 5:12. Why give the *qualification* for elders when every other Christian should have the same one? Winkler replies that the "obvious" answer is that "God knew" that all the members would not try to make that forward advance. But some of them wanted to advance. Does that mean that all who "advanced" are to be elders? And in what must they "advance" beyond blamelessness to be elders, since all Christians must be blameless? Does God have two sets of conduct, one for those who want to advance and another for those who do not want to advance? God gave the qualifications for the elder and it takes further development in attributes to make the oversight than it would be just to be a member of the church. Those who "advance" go further or obtain something besides the average Christian. Only an approach to this passage with the attitude mentioned here would cause one to conclude, as Winkler, that there is only one qualification for the eldership.

D. Several qualifications, but marriage and family relations are not essential.

It has been taught by several that a man does not have to be married--does not have to be a father—in order to qualify for the eldership. Arbitrarily these advocates select from the list of qualifications those that do not seem to them to be important by their own reasoning and set them aside. Just what rule of exegesis does one follow to set aside a part of a list of things toward a common end and bind others? This is a vital matter and will be dealt with more fully when we consider some of the qualifications that have to do with this matter.

E. All qualifications are flexible and not absolute.

The detestable effort in this idea is to weaken the standard of God to the extent that the range from side to side is so broad that almost any sort of person may be initiated into the eldership. The final end, with respect to other Bible matters, will not be accepted by its supporters. Are the qualifications for a Christian so flexible that one may believe what he wants to believe, repent after his own notion, confess about anything pertaining to religion, and be baptized in any form and for any purpose that pleases him? The answer comes back an unquestionable No! But if the qualifications of elders are so pliable, why are not the other requirements of God equally flexible? Why not allow the plan of salvation to be curved or reformed for different men in different situations if this be true of the eldership?

After one becomes allied with this proposition there are some other questions that must challenge his attention, and they certainly demand an answer. Just how flexible are the qualifications for the eldership? How far will they stretch? And how far can one shrink them? Who is permitted to do the stretching? It is perfectly consistent with the rules of Bible study to allow every man the same liberty granted to any one. If, then, one be permitted to stretch a point here or there, all others may stretch where they want to. Now who will be in authority to say when the stretching has reached its limits and in what points a man can stretch? But if there is no man who can rightly limit the flexibility of these qualities, what is to hinder someone from stretching them completely out of existence? These are pertinent questions to the issue and, to the honest man, must be fairly answered. But when he undertakes to answer them in the light of Bible truth, the whole structure of this theory falls because there is not one single scriptural stone in its foundation. The whole attitude is contrary to inspiration. The truth of the matter is that there is nothing in all the Bible that pertains to qualifications for any work of God that is so flexible as to allow man to bend to suit his own purpose.

F. Once an elder always an elder.

This attitude was planted in the soil of arrogance, cultivated in strife, and nurtured in self-willedness. Its origin can undoubtedly be traced to some unqualified man locked in combat with truth in trying to retain a hold on the oversight. One is an elder by qualifications and appointment. The qualifications are essential in every case and these qualifications must remain, every one of them though the circumstance of developing the quality may not remain, such as family illness over a period of years may develop the quality of patience which is necessary, and once that quality is developed, the illness need not necessarily continue to keep the man qualified, but the patience, which is a qualification, must remain if the man is to continue to be in the eldership. When any man ceases to be qualified by the Bible standard he should be deposed as an elder. If one must be a good Christian man to be an elder, if he should stop being

a good Christian man, should he still be retained in the eldership? Both Scripture and reason tell us that he should not. It is a Bible doctrine that one can so sin as to be eternally lost after he has become a Christian. This being true, an elder who ceases to live as a godly Christian man ceases to be an elder of the church. This attitude of *Impossible Apostasy* from the eldership is no better in taste to the Christian than the doctrine of *Impossible Apostasy* with regard to Christianity. All lovers of truth detest vehemently the treacherous and contemptible doctrine that once a man is saved nothing he can do, think or say will cause him to be lost. He can murder, steal, lie, get drunk, and commit any sin that can be mentioned and still he is in no danger of being lost. This is offensive to all who know anything about the Bible and the order of God. Yet the attitude of "once an elder always an elder" is of the same caliber and rests upon the same proof for its existence as the doctrine of *Impossible Apostasy*.

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