



SLBC ELDER BOARD

THE QUALIFICATIONS ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE OFFICE OF ELDER AND DEACON*

**Credit must be given to the Elder Board that first published this document in March of 1987. Their original document is the backbone of this one; and except for formatting modifications, there have been very few changes. A great deal of fine, biblically based work was done by that Elder Board, and it is greatly appreciated.*

I. THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE OFFICE OF ELDER (1 Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:5-10)

Gregory the Great, an early church father, once wrote, “He who is required by the necessity of his position to speak the highest things is compelled by the same necessity to exemplify the highest things.” His statement echo's the mind of the Scripture. For this reason, it is incumbent upon a leader in a church to be and be perceived as being, godly. It certainly doesn't imply perfection but being a church leader does demand a life that is relatively blameless.

In the two passages cited above, Paul outlines 21 different personal requirements. These can be grouped into four different categories. The following lists the four categories with the different requirements. Along with it is some commentary offered to help you assess a potential Elder.

A. PUBLIC QUALIFICATIONS:

1. ABOVE REPROACH

This is the overriding qualification that applies to every area of an Elder's life. The word means “irreproachable” or “uncaused.” It does not imply perfection, but it would demand that, in general, an Elder's life is respectable. His conduct would be of such a nature that no one would have any reason to injure his reputation or question his character. One question to ask is, “If a false statement were to be mentioned about the individual, would you have a tendency to believe it or question it?”

2. HOSPITABLE

The word literally means “lover of strangers”. It does not mean simply entertaining friends as much as it does sharing your home, your food, and your material possessions to help meet the needs of others. A person who is hospitable is a “people person.” A question to ask an Elder candidate is, “Do you open your home and share of yourself and your family to encourage and edify others?” [See also Romans 12:9-13; Hebrews 13:1,2; I Peter 4:8,9; Luke 14:12-14].

3. A GOOD REPUTATION WITH THOSE OUTSIDE

The importance of maintaining a consistent testimony through one's lifestyle before unbelievers is the obvious responsibility of everyone who professes to be a Christian. How much more so for Elders of the church. A Christian reputation among the unsaved is a test of his spiritual maturity. A question to ask is, "Do his co-workers and relatives think of him as being a good Christian?" [See further I Corinthians 10:31-33; Colossians 4:5,6; I Thessalonians 4:11,12].

4. GENDER LIMITATION

Since elders are to be a husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2), it is our conviction that a gender limitation is placed on this office. In other words, it is only open to a man.

B. PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS

1. TEMPERATE

"Keep your head in all situations" (KIV). A man who is temperate has a clear perspective on life. He is stable, balanced, maintains perspective and is clear-headed in most situations. A question to ask, "Is his reaction to adversity and strife characterized by impatience and irritation or by love?"

2. PRUDENT

One who exercises common sense and demonstrates good judgment. A prudent person is serious about the Lord's work and is earnest in serving Him.

3. NOT ADDICTED TO WINE

The word literally means "one who sits too long beside his wine." In other words, one who over drinks and consequently is brought under alcohol's control. A mature Christian will not allow himself to be dominated or controlled by anything that will harm his body, cloud his thinking, or hinder his testimony for Jesus Christ. [See I Corinthians 10:31.]

4. NOT PUGNACIOUS

A mature man of God is not to be a "striker." A pugnacious man is one who is eager to use his fists or one who creates trouble or fights. It looks at anger out of control, whether it is expressed verbally or physically.

5. GENTLE

The ideas of patience, meekness, forbearance, and kindness are to be understood in this word. This should be the disposition of a mature man. A question to ask would

be, do his actions reflect a gentle spirit? Is he looked upon as a source of quiet strength?

6. UNCONTENTIOUS

A contentious person is offensively aggressive. He is one who struggles against others. Elders must be peacemakers, not troublemakers, not one who is unwilling to bend or who has to have his own way. This does not mean they must compromise their convictions, but it does mean that they must “disagree without being disagreeable.” This is a very important quality as it relates to practical Elder Board dynamics and decision-making. A question to ask of a potential Elder is, “Are they able to engage in disagreements with a spirit of negotiation and appropriate compromise?”

7. FREE FROM THE LOVE OF MONEY

The Overseer is not to have his attention fixed upon monetary rewards for serving. See I Peter 5:1-3. In a materialistic world, the Elder must wage an unceasing battle to keep material things in their proper perspective. A question to ask is “Does he seem preoccupied with building up an estate? Does he financially give with a good spirit?”

8. NOT A NEW CONVERT

The word here is "novice" which means, “newly planted.” It is to be understood in the spiritual sense. Maturity in faith is essential in serving as an Elder. One who is not a novice is one who has been saved long enough to develop a spiritual maturity and wisdom. The great danger to the new Christian elevated to leadership is that it could cause him to inflate with pride. Age is certainly no guarantee of maturity. Nevertheless, it is not wise “to lay hands on a man too quickly.”

9. NOT SELF-WILLED

The self-willed man is a self-centered man. Usually a man who is self-willed thinks he is never wrong, but if he were his pride would never let him admit it. He is usually overbearing and has to have his own way. It is easy to see why this kind of person would not be appointed as an Overseer in the church. A good question to ask is, “Is this potential Elder overbearing and insensitive to others?”

10. NOT QUICK TEMPERED

A quick-tempered person usually has a “short fuse.” He does not deal with the ordinary functions and frustrations of life with emotional stability. He often loses control and will verbally lash out at others. This kind of man can be devastating to the cause of Christ. Not only is he a bad example and model, but he will inevitably hurt others and frustrate their spiritual growth. A good question to ask is, “Is this person known as one with a ‘boiling point?’”

11. LOVING WHAT IS GOOD

One who pursues good rather than evil. One who is devoted to all that is good and beneficial. See further Romans 12:21; II Corinthians 5:10; Philippians 4:8; Ephesians 2:10; Galatians 6:10.

12. JUST

This is an individual whose honest conduct meets God's approval. This is practical righteousness.

13. DEVOUT

Similar to the term "just" but with a different emphasis. It means holy in the sense of unpolluted. "Conduct that is true to one's moral and religious obligations." A quality that shows that a believer is in the process of becoming like Jesus Christ in his daily life and behavior.

14. SELF-CONTROLLED

This quality describes a person who is in control of his physical, psychological, and spiritual faculties. A man who is self-controlled is not in bondage to fleshly desires, impulses, and passions.

C. FAMILY QUALIFICATIONS

1. HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE

This is often a hotly debated topic. Does this prevent anyone who has ever had a divorce for any reason from being an Elder? This is an allowable interpretation, but we see the emphasis being on the idea of a "one woman man;" i.e. one that is committed and devoted to his wife. If married, is this person's marital relationship characterized by commitment and priority? Does he perceive divorce as an option? Thus, it is conceivable that a divorced person could be an Elder. The key factor is, do the circumstances of the divorce cause him to no longer be "above reproach?" This is a question that can only be answered on an individual basis.

2. ONE WHO MANAGES HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD WELL

The way in which a man manages his home reveals his capacity for leadership. Whether or not an Elder must be married or must have children is not the issue. His administrative ability required to cause a home to function smoothly is the issue, as these skills are necessary to oversee the church. If he is married and has children in the home, they must be under his control with a dignified and respectful relationship. A question to ask is, "Would his home situation detract from his Elder responsibilities or otherwise cause his ministry to stumble?"

D. MINISTRY QUALIFICATIONS

1. ABLE TO TEACH

One who can communicate the truth of God's word to others. Teaching is one of the primary roles of the Elders. It is important to feed the flock by “rightly dividing the word of truth” and imparting the doctrines of the faith. It would be unfair to read into this “an ability to captivate audiences as some great speakers do.” This does not necessarily follow that one who is “apt to teach” is a great speaker, but it would imply that he is knowledgeable in the Word and both able and willing to teach others the basic truths. A question to ask is, “Does this person know and understand God's Word well enough to measure people's actions against the Word and able to promote the truth to others?”

2. HOLDING FIRMLY TO THE WORD

The Elder of a congregation must be firm and hold to God's Word which is in accordance with the recognized body of doctrine taught by the Apostles. At SLBC, this means that an elder must not only embrace the statements of faith and position statements as spelled out in the church constitution, but he must also actively and positively teach such doctrines to others within the church. Two reasons are given for this. First, he must be able to encourage and exhort believers in the healthful teaching of true doctrine. This function will protect the people from the inroads of error and false teachers. Secondly, and in a negative sense, he must be equally able to refute those who through legalism or any other error oppose sound doctrine. In other words, through the ministry of the Word the Elder must always promote truth and ward off error. Sometimes warding off error involves the unpleasant task of naming the specific names of false teachers, so that the flock can be properly warned (2 Tim. 1:15; 2:17; 4:10, 14; 3 John 9).

II. THE ROLE OF AN ELDER

Often, in evaluating Elder candidates, attention is given solely to a person's innate spiritual qualifications; i.e., those mentioned above. However, the Scripture sees the Elder as performing a “work.” Therefore, there are certain skills and abilities necessary to effectively fulfill the office.

The following outlines the overall role of an Elder. Careful attention should be given to each candidate to determine if they have the ability, willingness, personality and time to perform this ministry.

A. PASTORING (1Peter 5:2 and 1Thes. 2:5-12)

The idea behind “pastoring” is that of shepherding. One who pastors is one who actually oversees, provides guidance and encouragement to the individual members of the body.

The word “care” is a good synonym. An Elder is one who spends time caring and loving the different members.

B. TEACHING

Teaching implies a three-fold commitment:

1. A commitment to study the Word (Titus 1:9)
2. A commitment to apply the Word (2 Tim. 2:15)
3. A commitment to communicate to others. (2 Tim. 4:2; 2 Tim. 2:24-26)

C. RULING (Heb. 13:17; Acts 20:28; 2Thes. 5:12,13)

Anytime two or more people get together, there must be a certain level of organization. As the numbers increase, the need for organization grows. Ruling implies decision-making and direction. It differs from pastoring in the sense that pastoring is primarily concerned with the individual, whereas ruling is more corporate. It is important to realize that much of what an Elder is called to do is to provide direction to the corporate body. This demands certain skills coupled with much wisdom and sensitivity.

III. THE SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN ELDER IN SUGAR LAND BIBLE CHURCH

The above pages deal with the general qualifications and responsibilities of an Elder. However, listed below are what We believe and hold to regarding the specific applications of those qualities for an active and/or inactive elder at Sugar Land Bible Church. These specific applications, unlike the general qualifications and responsibilities above, can change as the specific needs of our body and culture change.

A. PASTORING

1. Family Visitation - taking the initiative in determining how we are proceeding. Asking the basic question, "How is your soul doing?"
2. Counseling offering direction to individuals and families in: personal, emotional, financial, and spiritual matters.
3. Discipling - seeking to multiply followers of Christ. Being diligent to pass the faith on to others.
4. Exercising hospitality - having people in their homes or over for lunch or dinner. Showing concern by giving of ourselves.
5. Leading Fellowship groups - being an example to the church and plugging into peoples' lives.

B. TEACHING

1. Sunday School and mid-week services - regularly attending and being ready and

willing to teach/lead a class.

2. Regular personal Bible Study - being in the Word on a consistent basis.
3. Being involved in our worship service through Scripture reading, prayers, and even preaching.

C. RULING

1. Exercising prayer and discernment in church issues - being available to offer wise counsel relative to problems or issues that arise.
2. Offering short- and long-term direction to the church - studying all of the factors involved in our church life and making and recommending decisions relative to staff and building needs, specific direction, etc.
3. Chairing a specific ministry - being the Elder to whom the ministry leader answers. Offering direction and functioning as - a liaison between the Elder board and the ministry.

D. PRAYING

1. Although this is not a specific requirement of Elders only, it would certainly include Elders.
2. Personally praying for the church, and people in and out of the church.
3. Being available to all who call upon the Elders to pray.

IV. IMPORTANT NOTE REGARDING THE ELDER BOARD AND SENIOR PASTOR RELATIONSHIP

In our culture it is common to have a pastoral staff, led by a Senior Pastor. These persons are usually paid employees who are expected to devote their whole workweek to the effort.

While the pastoral staff obviously has a high profile, the Senior Pastor has the highest profile of all. Nevertheless, it should be noted, that although the Senior Pastor is the only permanent member of the Elder Board, he is but one of a group of governing elders who all share equaling in the governance of SUGAR LAND BIBLE CHURCH.

V. THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE OFFICE OF DEACON (1 Timothy 3:8-13)

A. PUBLIC QUALIFICATIONS:

1. DIGNIFIED (1 TIM. 3:8)

This means worthy of respect.

2. NOT DOUBLE TOUNGED (1 TIM. 3:8)

This means not two-faced, saying one thing or living one way part of the time and another at other times; honest, not hypocritical, sincere; men of integrity.

3. HAVING A CLEAR CONSCIENCE (1 TIM. 3:9)

This describes a man of conviction who behaves in harmony with his beliefs.

4. MEN WHO HAVE BEEN TESTED (1 TIM. 3:10)

This means that the church should constantly be examining and testing the members of the congregation, so that whenever the need for selecting deacons arises, they will know what members are qualified for appointment.

5. GENDER LIMITATION (1 Tim. 3:12)

Since deacons are to be a husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:12), it is our conviction that a gender limitation is placed on this office. In other words, it is only open to a man.

B. PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS

1. NOT ADDICTED TO WINE (1 TIM. 3:8)

The word literally means “one who sits too long beside his wine.” In other words, one who over drinks and consequently is brought under alcohol's control. A mature Christian will not allow himself to be dominated or controlled by anything that will harm his body, cloud his thinking, or hinder his testimony for Jesus Christ. [See I Corinthians 10:31.]

2. NOT FOUND OF SORDID GAIN (1 TIM. 3:8)

The Deacon is not to have his attention fixed upon monetary rewards for serving. See I Peter 5:1-3. In a materialistic world, the Deacon must wage an unceasing battle to keep material things in their proper perspective. A question to ask is “Does he seem preoccupied with building up an estate? Does he financially give with a good spirit?”.

C. FAMILY QUALIFICATIONS

1. HUSBANDS OF ONE WIFE (1 TIM. 3:12)

This is often a hotly debated topic. Does this prevent anyone who has ever had a divorce for any reason from being an Deacon? This is an allowable interpretation, but we see the emphasis being on the idea of a “one woman man;” i.e. one that is committed and devoted to his wife. If married, is this person's marital relationship characterized by commitment and priority? Does he perceive divorce as an option? Thus, it is conceivable that a divorced person could be a Deacon. The key factor is, do

the circumstances of the divorce cause him to no longer be “above reproach?” This is a question that can only be answered on an individual basis.

Deacons wives must be:

- “Dignified” meaning worthy of respect just as their husbands are (v. 8).
- “Not malicious gossips” describes wives who do not slander others.
- “Temperate” means well balanced. A wife who is temperate has a clear perspective on life. She is stable, balanced, maintains perspective and is clear-headed in most situations.
- “Faithful in all things” means completely trustworthy.

2. GOOD MANAGERS OF THEIR HOME (1 TIM. 3:12)

The way in which a man manages his home reveals his capacity for leadership. Whether or not a Deacon must be married or must have children is not the issue. His administrative ability required to cause a home to function smoothly is the issue, as these skills are necessary to oversee the church. If he is married and has children in the home, they must be under his control with a dignified and respectful relationship. A question to ask is, “Would his home situation detract from his Deacon responsibilities or otherwise cause his ministry to stumble?”.

D. MINISTRY QUALIFICATIONS

A deacon is responsible for holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (1 Timothy 3:9). At SLBC, this means that a deacon must not only embrace the statements of faith and position statements as spelled out in the church constitution, but he must also actively and positively teach such doctrines to others within the church.

Paul gave no specific instructions about the duties of deacons thus indicating that he did not associate specific tasks with the office. He seems to have intended that deacons should function as official servants of the church in whatever capacity the elders may see a need for this. They were in effect the elders’ assistants. Acts 6:1-6 gives some insight as to how this played out in the early church.

VI. THE ROLE OF A DEACON

As when evaluating Elder candidates, Deacon candidates should also be evaluated with attention toward not only innate spiritual qualifications, but also regarding skills and abilities necessary to effectively fulfill the office of Deacon.

The following outlines the overall role of a Deacon. Careful attention should be given to each candidate to determine if they have the ability, willingness, personality, and time to perform this ministry.



VII. THE SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF A DEACON IN SUGAR LAND BIBLE CHURCH

- A. COLLECTING AND COUNTING WEEKLY OFFERINGS
- B. SERVING AT THE LORD'S TABLE
- C. MAINTAINING THE PHYSICAL PLANT
- D. COORDINATING SPECIAL EVENTS

VIII. CONCLUSION

One who is called to be an Elder or a Deacon assumes a great responsibility and commitment. It is not something to be taken lightly. One must be willing and physically able to devote large amounts of time to the effort. In return, rewards are promised to those who serve well (Elders specifically, I Peter 5:4; Believers generally, 1 Cor. 3:14).

With these things in mind, you are fervently encouraged to be in prayer for the existing Elder and Deacon Boards and to give due diligence to prayer and consideration for all future Elder and Deacon candidates.

Although this only represents a brief synopsis, for more details on the proper roles, functions, and qualifications of elders and deacons, Sugar Land Bible Church members are encouraged to access Pastor Andy Woods' lessons on Ecclesiology (see lessons 40-43) found on the Sugar Land Bible Church website sermon archives.