



The stability and success of a New Testament Church will depend in great measure upon the strength of the human leadership. This does not nullify the guiding ministry of the Holy Spirit or the operative, enabling grace of God. These truths comfort and sustain us. But the organization of the church has been established by our Lord and revealed in Scripture. And this organization requires responsible human leadership. But how does one know who should lead and who should follow? What guidelines do we have in order to ensure that we are making the right choices?

Interestingly, God has revealed the kind of man who is qualified to be an elder (shepherd or overseer). The remarkable observation is that the emphasis is upon mature character, not ability or promise. It would appear that godliness is God's standard for leadership. Whatever talents, leadership traits, and abilities an elder might possess is all well and good, but the bottom-line issue remains: "What kind of Christian character does he possess?"

What follows is a cursory analysis of the Biblical qualifications of an elder. Two major passages give the appropriate data: 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Considering both the Titus and Timothy passages, twenty character qualities are identified. To assist in personalizing the meaning, suggestions have been made as to how this characteristic might appear in life-situations. The "principle-in-action" merely attempts to describe (applicationaly) the quality. Certainly, additional words could further describe the life-principle.

To lead God's church requires a special man. None of us are perfect, certainly not even the leadership of the church. But an elder is characterized as a man who is making progress in these various areas of personal life. Like Paul, he would readily admit,

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead..." — Philippians 3:12-13 (NIV).

May the Lord guide us in recognizing such men to lead us in the church. Let us consider the importance of the task and trust God to enable us to seek out and confirm our elders.



The Office of “Elder” Character Qualifications

TEXT	CHARACTER QUALITY	PRINCIPLE-IN-ACTION
1. Titus 1:6 (1 Tim 3:2) (Titus 1:7)	“above reproach”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The person not only has a good reputation, but deserves it.• Man of genuine, observable integrity – thoroughly honest.• Unassailable Christian conduct; blameless; unrebukable; spotless.• The sum total of a mature, distinctive Christian’s testimony.
2. Titus 1:6 (1 Tim 3:2)	“husband of one wife”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A one-woman kind of man, married and devoted to but one woman.• Creatively meets the needs of his wife in a special way.• Known for his love, fidelity, and devotion to one wife.• Has not been through a broken marriage.
3. Titus 1:6 (1 Tim 3:4)	“having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion” (“one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This means he manages well the affairs of the family in a Christian manner.• The older children (lit. “offspring”) have not rejected Christ and rebelled against the parent’s authority.• Describes a temperate family not characterized by riotous improper living, but by growth unto maturity.• Does not describe a man who can minister to others but not his own home.
4. Titus 1:7	“not self-willed”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not a self-centered, self-pleasing, arrogant person.• This man is flexible, open, fair; he is willing to admit his mistakes and move forward to correct them.• Does not dominate and crush others to one’s own way of thinking.
5. Titus 1:7	“not quick-tempered”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The person described has his temper under control; does not let anger flare up quickly; does not have a short fuse.• This one does not let his anger lead to sin (Eph 4:16).• Does not jump to angry conclusions before the facts are heard.
6. Titus 1:7 (1 Tim 3:3)	“not addicted to wine”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The person does not have a “drinking problem” but rather is moderate or temperate rather than excessive and addictive.• There is no excessive habit which controls this person; he is self-controlled.• This one does not exert his liberty and freedom in Christ to the point of excess.

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| 7. | Titus 1:7
(1 Tim 3:3) | “not pugnacious”
(humble) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not come to blows in anger against others; does not fight either physically, verbally, or emotionally. • Does not use physical force against others; does not physically abuse his wife or children. |
| 8. | Titus 1:7
(1 Tim 3:3)
(1 Pet 5:2) | “not fond of sordid gain”
(“free from the love of money”) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The person’s life is characterized by the pursuit of God rather than dishonest gain (Matt 6:33). • This one is generous in material gifts, not one who hoards his wealth. • Does not see world riches to the exclusion of God. |
| 9. | Titus 1:8
(1 Tim 3:2) | “hospitable” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This one’s home is used to entertain others in a relaxed, friendly, hospitable manner. • Feels free to entertain both Christians and non-Christians. • Open to other people and their company; sees opportunities to use home for ministry (and does so). |
| 10. | Titus 1:8 | “loving what is good” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated to that which is truly good or beneficial for personal or family life. • Seeks out the good in thought, motive, and deed. • Known better for the good he embraces, rather than simply the evil he avoids. • Can discern between things and issues to know what is truly good and what is not. |
| 11. | Titus 1:8
(1 Tim 3:2) | “sensible” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This person lives his life in a wise, prudent manner. • He has balanced judgment at home, church, and at work. • This one makes sound, rational decisions after prayer and reflection, not rash or overly quick to action, but sound-minded. |
| 12. | Titus 1:8 | “just” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His life evidences a rightness and justness in dealing with God and man. • Conforms his life to the standard of Scriptures; demonstrates practical righteousness. • Can make mature, wise, and just decisions based on Biblical principles and fairness. |
| 13. | Titus 1:8 | “devout” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is set apart to God by a distinctive, holy lifestyle that is in harmony with Biblical standards and principles. • Seeks to daily walk with God in a close, intimate manner. • Is becoming less attached to the staining, polluting effects of sin and is becoming more and more “pure in heart” and action; he is engaged in a pursuit of God and practical holiness. |
| 14. | Titus 1:8 | “self-controlled” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This one is disciplined in his personal control of desires, appetites, and felt-needs. • He holds in check his natural impulses; evidences the fruit of self-control. • Refrains from that which is not profitable, beneficial, lawful. |

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| 15. Titus 1:9
(1 Tim 3:2) | "holding fast the faithful word..."
(able to teach) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is doctrinally stable, a life-long student of the Scriptures, sound in every respect. • Does not believe, promote, or hold to unreliable beliefs; stands without hesitation in the doctrinally true, conservative, evangelical camp. • He is both teachable by the Scriptures; capable of feeding himself from the Word of God. • Characterized as a man of the Word (see Ezra 7:10). • Able to exhort in sound teaching, but also capable of correct rebuke on the basis of Scriptural teaching. |
| 16. 1 Tim 3:2 | "temperate" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refers to one who is "calm, cool, and collected" in the various situations that might arise. • This man has sober-minded judgment; not prone to excessive bursts of uncontrolled emotion. • He is stable and steadfast, free from worldly thinking that would tend to cloud his thinking. |
| 17. 1 Tim 3:2 | "respectable" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The man is orderly and well-disciplined in personal projects; finishes tasks before him; organized. • Refers to a responsible, dependable individual; keeps his promise with actions as well as words. |
| 18. 1 Tim 3:3 | "gentle" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He demonstrates patience, forbearance, and yieldedness (deference) toward others; he is a true gentleman. • This one is sensitive and tender in dealings with others; he can be bold without being brash. • The man is sensitive and empathetic. |
| 19. 1 Tim 3:3 | "uncontentious" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The man is not offensively aggressive; does not insist upon his own rights to the exclusion of others. • He has his temper and words under control; is not quarrelsome. • He is agreeable, cooperative, and a team-worker for the best benefit of the ministry. • Does not instigate disagreements, quarrels, fights, and unprofitable debates. |
| 20. 1 Tim 3:6 | "not a new convert" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He has been a believer long enough to clearly demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) and spiritual qualifications for an elder. • He is not prideful and arrogant; does not seek the office for personal gain (whether financial, social position, prominence, or otherwise). • Desires to serve Christ, not self; is spiritually mature enough to distinguish the difference. • Has had adequate time to grow and season as a believer; he's not simply eager and enthusiastic about Christ; he demonstrates depth and duration of commitment. |

