



1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7 ESV

1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

STRUCTURE

- I. The high calling of elders is to be desired (v. 1)
- II. A high standard for elders is therefore required (vv. 2-7)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

We live in a world that values eloquence, giftedness, personality, celebrity, wealth, power, and status. Paul's qualifications for overseers mention none of these. Churches too easily *assume* the biblical qualifications while *evaluating* based on the world's list of values. This explains the predicament we are in where pastors fall and elders fail to protect anyone but themselves. Sadly, but for ample reason, people don't trust church leaders. We let too many bad apples through the filter because our filter is worldly.

The biblical filter focuses almost entirely on character traits. Its only mention of "gifting" sets a relatively low bar: "able to teach." This is a far cry from capacity for drawing thousands and inspiring multitudes. "able to teach" means that elders are shepherds who can feed the flock with biblical truth and refute false teachers (see below), but it does not require one to be an orator. Paul's vision for eldership is for shepherds who feed and lead by example. Churches must be careful to select elders worthy of imitation. The higher the calling, the higher the standard.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

—"The saying is trustworthy" appears five times in the pastoral epistles:

- 1 Tim. 1:15: "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."
- 1 Tim. 3:1 (see above)
- 1 Tim. 4:7-9: "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance."
- 1 Tim. 2:10-13: "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself."
- Titus 3:3-8: "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people."

—Sometimes the statement appears after Paul's "saying" and sometimes it appears before. In either case, it emphasizes that which is "deserving of full acceptance" (1 Tim. 1:15; 4:9) and cannot be opposed or debated. Instead, Paul says, "I want you to insist on these things" (Titus 3:8).

—Therefore, when Paul launches his instructional on eldership, he makes no room for compromise. On the contrary, he insists that these specifics be abided by without fail, without shadow, without fudging, and with great carefulness. The purpose of the "saying" is to emphasize the importance of these qualifications.

—"If anyone aspires":

- "desires" (NKJV); "seeks" (HNV).
- In 1 Tim. 6:10, it references "longing" for money, and in Heb. 11:16, "desire" for our heavenly country. The Greek word speaks of something beyond neutrality; it is a pure desire, a longing, an aspiration.
- We should not judge those who wish to be elders as though they lust for power and control. On the contrary, eager longing to serve as an elder is blessed by the apostle. Furthermore, when you observe the list of character traits, "power and control" are expressly forbidden!
- Someone who wishes to be an elder should likewise not feel condemned for such a desire (unless it is out of lust for power and control!).
- "If anyone" leaves the door wide open for who might be considered. Paul doesn't start with a list of disqualifications, as if his goal is to narrow the list to the fewest possible candidates. He does not say, "If any gifted orator wants to be an elder..." but rather "If anyone..."
- Church oversight is not limited to CEO hot-shots who happen to be big donors. Giftedness is barely mentioned in Paul's list of qualifications. Clout is not mentioned at all. Neither is personality. The things we tend to look for in a Lead Pastor (or an elder)—a high-capacity spiritual entrepreneur who inspires people with a big vision and who makes stuff happen—is nothing like what Paul writes for qualifications. Too often, churches look for the wrong traits, making little space for "anyone" who "aspires" to be an elder.
- At other times, "anyone" who "aspires" is deprived of consideration because he has never penetrated the inner circle that exists in many churches.
- Churches must take steps to ensure that "anyone" matching Paul's list of qualifications can indeed "aspire" toward eldership—not just the mega-gifted, mega-donor, mega-personality, mega-clout insider.

—"to the office":

- Offices and gifts are not the same. The early church only possessed two offices: elder (also called overseer, see below) and deacon. This is why 1 Timothy 3 addresses elders (3:1-7) and then deacons (3:8-13); it is why Philippians 1:1 addresses the "overseers and deacons" of Philippi.
- One could argue that "apostle" was also an office in the early church. But these did not exist inside of every local church. By nature these "sent ones" traveled from church to church. In addition, we have no modern equivalent for the twelve original apostles, whose names are inscribed on the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14). As an office, I believe apostles ceased in the first century. There are apostles—"sent ones"—who operate like church planters and missionaries (see 2 Cor. 8:23 where the same word is often translated "messengers"), but these do not comprise one of the church offices.
- In our culture, "pastor" is our usual term for what Paul would have used for "elder." All elders are called to pastor/shepherd God's flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4), but "pastor" is not the title of a church office. (I'm not suggesting it's sinful to call someone "pastor." Informally, it's fine. But this is why Convergence has opted to leave the word "pastor" out of official titles.)
- These two offices—elder and deacon—highlight two major needs in every church: the need for shepherding (elders) and for hands-on service (deacons). The word "deacon" is often translated "servant."

—"overseer":

- "bishop" (NKJV, RSV). In church history, there developed a hierarchy of archbishops, bishops, and elders. This hierarchy does not appear in the New Testament, since the word for "bishop" is synonymous with "elder."

- The word “overseer” (Gk. *episkope*) is literally “overseership.” It’s cognate (Gk. *episkopos*) is typically translated as “overseer,” and it occurs in the following verses:
 - [Act 20:28 ESV] 28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.
 - [Phl 1:1 ESV] 1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the **overseers** and deacons:
 - [1Ti 3:2 ESV] 2 Therefore an **overseer** must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,
 - [Tit 1:7 ESV] 7 For an **overseer**, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,
 - [1Pe 2:25 ESV] 25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and **Overseer** of your souls.
- What do we learn from these cross-references?
 - Both Acts 20:28 and Titus 1:7 indicate that “overseer” (Gk. *episkopos*) and “elder” (Gk. *presbyteros*) are used interchangeably. Just before Acts 20:28 says “overseers”, verse 17 says “elders”. Just before Titus 1:7 says “overseer”, verse 5 says “elders”.
 - Acts 20:28 indicates that “overseers” remain faithful by paying “careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock.” We must scrutinize ourselves, and we must deeply know our flock. As the passage continues, Paul warns of savage wolves who “will come in among you, not sparing the flock,” even “from among your own selves”, saying “twisted things” (vv. 29-30), requiring us to always “be alert” (v. 31). Scholars believe that “Hymenaeus and Alexander” were two of the elders who shipwrecked the faith of others (1 Tim. 1:20).
 - Acts 20:28 also highlights the weightiness of the task by emphasizing the cost of the church to God—“his own blood.” Elders must serve with sobriety, knowing how precious the church is to God Almighty.
 - Philippians 1:1 indicates (as I said before) that the church is made up of two offices: elder/overseer and deacon. Even though deacons occupied more of a “servant” role, Paul’s address to them here suggests they were still, essentially, leaders. We might say that elders are leaders who serve, and deacons are servants who lead.
 - Philippians 1:1 shows how each church is governed by a plurality of leaders. This is corroborated by Acts 20:28, 1 Tim. 5:17, etc.
 - 1 Tim. 3:2: I’ll comment on it below.
 - Titus 1:7 reminds us that an overseer is “God’s steward”. Stewards manage what doesn’t belong to them. As we saw in Acts 20:28, the church belongs to God—not us. He purchased it in His blood. As stewards, overseers manage God’s most precious possession. This would be like someone entrusting you with a million-dollar diamond. How carefully would you watch after it? How terrified would you be of losing it? A million-dollar diamond is nothing compared to God’s church. Jesus didn’t die for a diamond. He died for us. O, how elders must fear the Lord! O, that overseers might tremble before Him!
 - 1 Peter 2:25 teaches that every shepherd is an under-shepherd. Jesus is the true Senior Pastor of His church.
 - 1 Peter 2:25 also teaches that every shepherd is a sheep. If we forget how weak, defenseless, and vulnerable we are, we will begin to think we are powerful and smart—which is how wolves think.

—“a noble task”:

- “a good work” (NKJV); “an honorable position” (NLT); “a fine work” (NASB).
- “noble” can be translated as “GOOD fruit” (Matt. 3:10), “FINE pearls” (13:45), “BETTER” (Matt. 18:8-9), etc. Usually, it is simply translated, “good.”

- In a world where “pastor” is one of the least respected titles, we are not unlike this church in Ephesus. The title of “elder” was not aspired toward as a noble calling. It was a dirty job. Paul says it is a noble job.
- People once viewed clergy as “noble”—but no longer (Gallup):
 - Nurses (78%) are the profession most likely to be trusted
 - Veterinarians (65%)
 - Engineers (60%)
 - Dentists (59%)
 - Medical doctors (56%)
 - Pharmacists (55%)
 - Police officers (45%)
 - College teachers (42%)
 - Psychiatrists (36%)
 - Chiropractors (33%)
 - Clergy (32%)

2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

—“Therefore”: because overseership is a noble job, a high calling, the overseer’s character must match it. We don’t expect exotic dancers or drug dealers to operate with high character. These are ignoble jobs. High callings require high standards.

—“must be”:

- The following characteristics are not aspirational but compulsory. Anyone who lacks these traits is unqualified for eldership.
- Jesus Christ is the only perfect elder. These qualifications may seem like they describe Jesus alone, but this would be a false reading. Paul expects us to find men who meet these qualifications.
- The word “character” and “characterize” are related because someone with godly character is characterized by a pattern of godly speech and behavior. Paul tells Timothy to look for patterns, not perfection. Does the candidate display a pattern of godliness in his life?

—“above reproach”:

- Of the seventeen traits listed, this one summarizes them all. The elder who is above reproach cannot be justifiably accused or disqualified.
- Nehemiah’s enemies tried to discredit him—to reproach him—by luring him into the temple “for safety,” but it was a scheme intended to make him look fearful and unfit to lead. In Nehemiah 6:13, he says, *“For this purpose he [Nehemiah’s enemy, Shemaiah] was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me.”* Unfortunately for Nehemiah’s enemies, he was “above reproach.” They could level no accusation against him. He was not afraid; he did not fall for the trap.

—“husband of one wife”:

- This same wording appears in verse 12 about deacons and Titus 1:5.
- In Titus 1:5, this qualification immediately follows “above reproach,” just like it does here in 1 Tim. 3:2. The first evidence that an elder has lived a life beyond reproach is his married life. Marriage is the measure of a godly man.
- This does not suggest that godly men can’t be single—Jesus and Paul were single, and Paul says singleness is advantageous. I believe an elder could be single. After all, Jesus is the “chief overseer” of all elders (1 Pet. 5:4). Paul only intends to speak into the normal situation of his culture. Most elder candidates would have been married with children. If they were neither married nor had children, they were not disqualified by these facts.
- The phrase “husband of one wife” (or, related, “wife of one husband”) appears in three lists of qualification: (1) for elders, 1 Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:6; (2) for deacons, 1 Tim. 3:12; (3) for widows

worthy of benevolence, 1 Tim. 5:9. Again, marital faithfulness is a chief barometer for character in the NT.

- Based on “husband of one wife”, some hold that a divorced person can never be a church officer, but it would seem strange for Paul—a former murderer—to single out divorce as a disqualifying sin. Besides, divorce is not always a “two-party” sin. Sometimes one partner makes divorce the only safe option. Why would God forbid someone from ministry for being a victim of someone else’s adultery, abandonment, or abuse?
- Others believe that “husband of one wife” merely prohibits polygamy. This is certainly forbidden by the text, but it probably wasn’t Paul’s primary aim to address since it was uncommon in their culture.
- Another strong interpretation is that Paul requires faithfulness to one’s spouse as a qualification for serving as an elder or deacon. A similar phrase in 1 Timothy 5:9-10 about widows corroborates this conclusion. I have included both the ESV and NIV translations below:
 - ESV: “Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been **the wife of one husband**, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.”
 - NIV: “No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been **faithful to her husband**, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord’s people, helping those in trouble, and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.”
- The ESV’s language, “wife of one husband,” clearly refers to her deceased husband and resembles the “husband of one wife” wording about elders and deacons. Since Paul can’t be advising against polyandrist wives (women with multiple husbands)—an unknown practice in their culture—he is most likely suggesting that only widows who were faithful to their one husband should be “enrolled” on the list for benevolence funds. This logic explains the NIV’s rendering, “faithful to her husband.”
- Carrying this reasoning forward, it seems that Paul requires long-standing faithfulness to one’s spouse to be an elder. If someone violates his most precious covenant in his own house, that one should not be entrusted with eldership in God’s house. This same logic holds for those who divorced for unbiblical grounds and then remarried, which Jesus labels “adultery.”
- Paul’s language is very similar to the English idiom, “I’m a one-woman man.” The person is not directly addressing polygamy or divorce. He’s saying, “I am unwaveringly devoted to the covenant I have made with my wife.”

—“sober-minded, self-controlled”:

- To be sober-minded is to not be hasty, rash, or reactive in your deliberations; to not be conspiratorial; to not be “under the influence” of money, power, worldly culture, politics (whether secular or “spiritual”), demonic influences, false teachings, etc.
- A sober-minded person carefully hears all sides, making all sides feel heard.
- A sober-minded eldership is not dramatic. While emotions will be displayed, they are neither delusional nor disproportionate.
- The “self-controlled” person does not give himself to excess—food, drink, sex, pleasure, or chemical happiness.
- Elders must be circumspect, calculating, judicious individuals. To use a *Lord of the Rings* reference, they are more like Ents than Orcs. They do not rush into battle but rather slowly deliberate.
- Strauch says of “self-controlled,” which is sometimes translated as “prudence,” that the word *“stresses self-control, particularly as it relates to exercising good judgment, discretion, and common sense. To be prudent [or self-controlled, as the ESV renders it] is to be sound-minded, discreet, sensible, able to keep an objective perspective in the face of problems and disagreements.”*
- Elders control their minds and bodies.

—“respectable”:

- “of good behavior” (NKJV); “have a good reputation” (NLT); most translations render it “respectable” like the ESV here.
- The same Greek word appears in 1 Tim. 2:9 in reference to “proper” attire that is not flashy or seductive.
- Just like society does not think highly of a woman who dresses to show off her body or wealth, neither should a church appoint elders who are always showing off—their wealth, position, or status. Rather, they must be “respectable”, demure, modest, humble, unassuming, and unpretentious.

—“hospitable”:

- The Greek word is “*philoxenos*.” Broken down into its parts, “*philo*” speaks of brotherly love (think, “Philadelphia,” the “city of brotherly love,” which derives from the same Greek word). “*xenos*” is the normal word for “stranger” or “alien,” much like the English word, “xenophobia,” meaning to hate outsiders.
- To be “hospitable” is to show brotherly love to the stranger or outsider. It means treating the outer circle like a lifelong sibling.
- In an ancient context, this meant more than having people over for dinner; it required people to open their homes to travelers who had nowhere to go.
- I am reminded of Job, who was an “elder” in the Old Testament sense (Job 29:7, 21, 25; 31:21) and offered hospitality: “The sojourner has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the traveler” (31:32).
- In our context, elders must be people who readily open their homes to travelers and fellow believers.

—“able to teach”:

- This does not require one to be a skilled orator. Not every elder will be equally devoted to preaching and teaching; some will specialize (1 Tim. 5:17).
- However, every elder must be capable of espousing true doctrine, defending against dangerous doctrines, and contributing to doctrinal discussions.
- Since not every elder will preach, the expression of “able to teach” can occur in one-on-one or small group settings.
- Deacons are not required to be “able to teach”. It is the primary role of the shepherds/elders/overseers to feed the sheep with God’s Word.
- Titus 1:9 expands on “able to teach” by saying, “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”
- Rebuking false teachers requires not just ability but courage.

3 not a drunkard,

—“not given to wine” (NKJV), “not be a heavy drinker” (NLT), “not overindulging in wine” (NASB), “not an excessive drinker” (CSB).

—The prohibition is not against drinking but rather excessive drinking.

—Why does Paul add this, considering he has already advised selecting elders who are “self-controlled” or “temperate”? Would that descriptor not have already addressed the problem of drunkenness? Sometimes it is helpful to highlight nuances to help ensure nothing escapes our filter. In our culture, Paul might have additionally highlighted elders who do not abuse prescription medication.

—I am reminded of King Lemuel’s mother, who cautioned her son about alcohol abuse as a leader in Proverbs 31:4-5: *It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is **not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.***

—The virtuous and wise woman cautions leaders against strong drink because of its effect: making them forget the law and mistreat the afflicted. She goes on to advise him to be a voice for the voiceless, especially the poor (vv. 8-9). Throughout Scripture, this is the role of leaders: not to defend their own rights and power, but to advocate for those without power. Strong drink threatens this calling, as it did with King Belshazzar of Babylon who only cared about getting intoxicated (Dan. 5).

—This reality must be held in tension with the fact that Jesus drank wine. Ultimately, leaders must be very careful with alcohol and all forms of intoxication.

not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome,

—“not violent” by itself seems to go without saying. Does Paul really have to say, “Don’t choose murderers and mobsters” (aka “violent” people)? The next two words broaden the meaning, however, beyond mere physical violence. Paul is speaking about a disposition of “not being a fighter”—with weapons or with words.

—This is not to suggest that we do not “fight” in some sense. We are called to spiritual warfare. But our “battle is not against flesh and blood” (Eph. 6:12). If someone’s disposition is to attack others, even verbally, he is unfit for eldership.

—The CSB and NASB translate “violent” as “bully”. The NASB footnote says, “Or ‘combative’.”

—Elders are combative bullies when they react impulsively with anger, when they are overly defensive and attack those who bring charges, and when they use their power to control, belittle, gaslight (make you question your reality), or silence you.

—The opposite of this is to be “gentle” and “not quarrelsome”.

—Strauch commenting on “gentle”: *“‘Forbearing,’ ‘kind,’ ‘gentle,’ ‘magnanimous,’ ‘equitable,’ and ‘gracious’ all help capture the full range of meaning... The gentle man stands in vivid contrast to the pugnacious man. A gentle man exhibits a willingness to yield and patiently makes allowances for the weakness and ignorance of the fallen human condition. One who is gentle refuses to retaliate in kind for wrongs done by others and does not insist upon the letter of the law or his personal rights.”* He is *“graciously amenable.”*

—I have felt serious concern about Christian influencers who have gained a huge following by being mean and condescending. It has even become acceptable for these to publicly call other pastors “retarded and gay.” These influencers have disqualified themselves for eldership, yet most of them lead churches.

—There is a way to dispute false doctrine without condescending or resorting to name calling. Furthermore, we should not go out looking for fights. When disputes arise, it should be despite prior attempts to make peace.

—All of us know people who create drama everywhere they go. When it becomes a pattern, this should be viewed as a character flaw. Similarly, if a trail of broken relationships follows somebody, there is a reason. All of us will have broken relationships in our wake, and they are not always our fault. However, a long-standing and widespread pattern of relational brokenness should concern us.

—Examples from Proverbs connecting a pattern of relational destruction with one’s flawed character:

- Pr. 12:18: “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”
- Pr. 15:18: “A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.”
- Pr. 16:28: “A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.”
- Pr. 20:3: “It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling.”

not a lover of money.

—“not covetous” (NKJV), “not greedy” (CSB), “free from the love of money” (NASB).

—This single Greek word rendered “lover of money” (ESV) appears only one other time in the New Testament. Hebrews 13:5 says, *“Keep your life **free from love of money**, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”*

—The opposite of loving money is being “content with what you have”. Elders should not display a continual lust for greater and greater material wealth.

—How can we judge this? What if the elder possesses great wealth? It’s not a sin to be rich. Furthermore, Ecclesiastes tells us to enjoy our possessions as God’s gift.

- At some point, a continual amassing of extravagant assets should raise red flags. Three chapters after saying elders should be free from the love of money, Paul warns Timothy of the same sin, telling him to be content with food and clothing (6:6-10).
- This makes me think of Robert Morris, who preached excessively about tithing and owned four multi-million dollar properties at the same time.
- Later in 1 Tim. 6, Paul says, *“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus*

storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life" (6:17-19).

- Again, it's not a sin to be rich or even to enjoy the blessings of wealth. God "provides us with everything to enjoy." However, true wealth should be measured in quantities of hope, good works, generosity, and sharing.
- Someone has disqualified himself for eldership if he is extravagant with his possessions but stingy with his money and time.

4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

—Paul moves from character qualities to family responsibilities, but the line between these is not perfectly distinct. For example, the manner in which the father keeps his "children submissive" is not through an iron fist but "with all dignity." This means that he guides and disciplines his children in a manner worthy of the gospel. As Paul says elsewhere, "fathers, do not exasperate your children..." (Eph. 6:4). Where discipline is called for, it must not be cruel and unusual, nor must it be administered out of a spirit of rage. As the Proverbs say, we must "be careful to discipline" our children (Pr. 13:24). Discipline requires carefulness.

—Paul does not intend this to mean that children will never disobey or rebel. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child..." (Pr. 22:15). Space must be granted for children to grow up as normal human beings who sometimes make big mistakes. However, if an elder's children openly disrespect him, disregard his commands, are spoiled rotten, and are unruly, this disqualifies him. Again, we are looking for patterns, not perfection.

—What if the children rebel when they are adults? There is absolutely no way that Paul meant to disqualify everyone whose adult children turned away from God. God is a perfect Father, yet He has many prodigals. God's people have prodigals too, and that does not automatically disqualify. The real question is: can we look at a father's present household and see that he instructs his children in the way of God through word and action, never shirking from discipline, but rather administering it with a gentle and firm spirit that is worthy of the gospel? Furthermore, do his children generally respect and obey him, notwithstanding the folly that is bound up in every child's heart?

—Some argue that a father must have believing kids based on Titus 1:6: "*his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.*" I do not believe that Paul requires a father's children to be "believers"—as if a teenage faith crisis disqualifies the father. Most teens have a faith crisis at some point. Many translations render "believers" as "faithful", which I favor because of the qualifiers: "not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination." Paul's concern is with debased, rowdy, wild, rebellious children—children who are not faithful.

—I personally feel that if we interpret this to mean that a father must have "believers" for children, besides being an inaccurate interpretation, it also opens the door for abuse. Imagine a pastor feeling his job endangered because his teenager says, "I'm not sure whether I believe in God." He pressures the child to believe, laying on the apologetics out of frenzied fear that his child will disbelieve and disqualify him. Instead of the child having the opportunity to grow up in an environment safe to ask questions, he or she is silenced, shut down, and far more likely to reject the "God of control" his father worships. In my opinion, good parents create an environment in which it is safe to ask very uncomfortable questions. I'm thinking of a youth pastor in his late twenties who became an atheist four or five times during his teen years, and his dad—a pastor—did not feel threatened by it. He reasoned with his son calmly, without pressuring him to conform. This environment helped his son grope for God and find Him. To me, this made the father all the more qualified as a pastor, despite the fact that his child questioned God for a season.

—This is not the first time Paul related management of a household with management of the church. In the infamous passage about women in the church (1 Tim. 2:11-15), Paul says men should be the authority figures in the church because God formed Adam first, not Eve. This comes right before the passage about elders.

—Some take this to mean that women should not be part of major church decisions, but I believe this damages the church. I am the head of my household, but Alicia is not on the level of my children. She is an "heir" with me "of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). Furthermore, God calls children to honor BOTH their father and mother; parents share authority in the household. The church should be managed like a godly home, where fathers and mothers share authority to lead. Even if fathers—elders—hold "final say," wise elders seek consensus with mothers in the house.

6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

—“recent convert”: there has been great debate about this phrase on the mission field because traditional American Christians view eldership differently than those on the frontlines among unreached people groups. The former tends to envision elders as seasoned believers who have walked with Christ for decades. Americans have the benefit of a long-standing Christian culture. In other contexts, however, such a definition for “recent convert” would require churches to lack leadership for decades! Even in Oklahoma City, what should we do if we plant a house church full of new believers? Wait until they have walked with Christ for decades before appointing elders? Send in an outsider to shepherd them? What if that person doesn’t speak the language or relate nearly as well to their culture? Since the Bible requires plural leadership, it would be difficult to find multiple people willing and able to do this. I believe this explains why Paul does not define “recent convert.” If you’ve been a believer for a year, you might be “recent” in a North American Anglo context, but you might be relatively seasoned in a house church of baby Christians!

—“condemnation of the devil... snare of the devil”:

- The devil attacks leaders.
- These final exhortations—to not promote recent converts or disreputable believers—offer protection against the devil’s schemes. How?
 - A recent convert will get proud because of his fast track to authority. Consider the difference between Saul and David. Saul rose quickly and fell quickly. David was anointed as king and then ran for his life for over a decade. Kings are made in the wilderness. Leaders are formed through fire. To promote a believer before he has suffered—before he has been “tested first” (1 Tim. 3:10)—sets everyone up for disaster.
 - A disreputable believer who is not “well thought of by outsiders” will “fall into disgrace” because he developed his reputation for a reason. When even the world recognizes you’re bad news—you’re bad news. It’s only a matter of time before your stained reputation embroils the church with scandal.
- “condemnation... snare”:
 - Recent converts who get proud encounter the devil’s “condemnation”.
 - Disreputable believers who fall suffer the devil’s “snare.”

—It’s interesting to me that the disreputable person might “fall into disgrace” in the future. It seems like he’s already fallen into disgrace if even the world sees he’s a bad guy! I think I’m limiting Paul’s meaning here. Paul doesn’t say, “Make sure you don’t appoint someone with a bad reputation.” He says, “Make sure you appoint someone with a good reputation.” The latter assumes the former but goes beyond it. It requires elders to be out in the community, developing a reputation for good works. Such a reputation provides a safeguard for elder appointments. When even the world recognizes that you’re a good person, you’re probably a good person.

—What about passages that say the world will hate us because we testify against it? Though the world hated Jesus and Paul, when they stood trial before unbelievers, nobody could condemn them. Likewise, the world might hate us for proclaiming Jesus as the only way, but they won’t be able to justifiably attack our character.

—After this list of fifteen qualifications, Paul proceeds in v. 8 to list qualifications for deacons. In v. 10, he says, “And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.” Given that Paul required deacons to be “tested,” he certainly required the same of elders. This is implied by “also”, which likely refers back to the overseers, as if he is saying, “The deacons should also be tested, just like the overseers.” This is why the NEB renders v. 10, “No less than bishops, they [deacons] must first undergo a scrutiny, and if there is no mark against them, they may serve.”

—Gordon Fee comments on this “test” or “scrutiny” for elders/deacons: “The word ‘tested’ derives from the Greek word *dokimazo*. Anglican Archbishop Richard Trench (1807-1886) in his classic work *Synonyms of the New Testament*, claims that ‘in dokimazein... lies ever the notion of proving a thing whether it be worth to be received or not.’ In ancient Greek literature, this word was sometimes used in relation to testing a person’s credentials for public office... The idea here is for others to officially examine, evaluate, and scrutinize the prospective elder’s or deacon’s character. Just as medical doctors must be officially examined before they are licensed, prospective elders and deacons are to be examined in light of God’s requirements before they take office.”