



ELDER QUALIFICATIONS 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7 & TITUS 1:5-9

STUDY GUIDE
MICHAEL ROWNTREE

INTRODUCTION:

Several passages address the topic of eldership, but 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are noteworthy for their comprehensive lists of qualifications. While many of the traits are shared between these two passages, each also contains some unique characteristics. As you consider potential elders to nominate, this analysis of the qualifications will serve as a helpful guide. The analysis begins with 1 Timothy 3, followed by a detailed examination of Titus 1. Both passages are marked with a **bold underline** title for easy reference.

ANALYSIS OF ELDER QUALIFICATIONS FROM 1 TIMOTHY 3

[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.*

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

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 "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, it opens the door for abuse. Imagine a father feeling his job endangered because of a teenager who 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."

ANALYSIS OF ELDER QUALIFICATIONS FROM TITUS 1

[Tit 1:5-9 ESV] *5 This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— 6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. 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, 8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 9 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.*

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

5 This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—

—"This is why I left you in Crete":

- Paul explains his reason for leaving Titus in Crete in what follows, not in what came before. What came before was only an introductory salutation.
- Crete was an island in the Mediterranean. Later Paul will testify against the wickedness of Crete (1:12: "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons"), which makes it all the more astonishing that he expects righteous elders to rise up from among these formerly wicked people.
- We don't know when Paul was in Crete, but this verse definitely suggests he was there. No other verses record his time there.
- Liefeld: "Crete had been the scene of the great Minoan civilization but had languished in relative obscurity for more than a millennium. It was incorporated into the Roman empire in 67 BC. Judaism was active during the time of the New Testament, and some Cretans were in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost (Acts 2:11)... The island, approximately 156 miles long and ranging from 8 to 35 miles wide, had a number of towns scattered throughout it."

—Paul's purpose in commissioning Titus was for him to "put what remained into order"—how?—by appointing "elders in every town as I directed you." A church can exist without elders, but it lacks order without them. Churches need leaders.

—"appoint":

- The same Greek word appears in Acts 6:3 and is instructive for appointing leaders: *"Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will **appoint** to this duty."*
- In Acts 6, the apostles *appointed* the leaders (understood throughout church history as prototypical deacons), but the congregation *selected* them. No doubt, if the church had inadvertently selected someone wicked, the apostles would have opposed it. Instead, they gave their stamp.
- Therefore, "appointed" does not necessarily mean that Titus personally selected elders without congregational feedback. In fact, it is unlikely that he could have known the people well enough to appoint elders without soliciting such feedback to assess their qualifications.
- Titus probably gathered feedback from the congregation and then gave his final approval and appointment for service.

—"in every town":

- It's interesting that Paul commissioned Titus to appoint elders "in every town" but without reference to churches.
- Some understand this to mean that Titus appointed elders in every church, but since there was only one church per town, Paul's statement effectively meant, "appoint elders in every church".
- Some understand it to mean that even if there were multiple churches in every town, Paul intended for him to appoint elders in every church within every town.

- Paul undoubtedly expected each church to have its own elders, as we observe elsewhere (cf. Acts 14:23). The emphasis on “every town” reminds us that God intends every church to illuminate the city like the seven “lampstands”—local churches—in John’s apocalyptic vision (Rev. 2-3).
- In order to shine, each local church needs qualified elders. Otherwise, things get disorderly, and our light will not shine as brightly.
- Dr. Michael Kruger weighs in on how church governance worked out practically in the early church:

As a church began in a particular city it would have often been small enough to meet in a single house and would have been governed simply by a group of elders/presbyters. As such congregations grew in numbers and were forced to meet in additional houses, there may have been situations where a single group of elders found themselves ruling over multiple congregations in different locations throughout the city.

These multiple congregations would have been naturally connected by the fact that they were led by the same group of elders. Thus, Christians in a given city, even worshipping in different house churches, would have been able to maintain some common identity under the leadership of a single body of presbyters.”

- Convergence has aimed, as a “church of house churches”, to follow something like what Kruger describes above. Each distinct house church shares a “common identity under a single body of presbyters.” However, we differ in that we also envision elders within every individual house church, since this is the clear model of Scripture (Acts 14:23).

6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

—“above reproach”:

- See 1 Tim. 3:2 for commentary.
- This is technically a different Greek word than in 1 Tim. 3:2, but English versions typically translated it the same because it is a synonym. Here, I will only highlight that Paul names this term (or similar) first in both lists, and he says it twice in Titus 1 (vv. 5, 7)! To be “above reproach” or “blameless” is the overarching, all-important trait of elders. If any elder has justifiable accusations made against him, he is disqualified.

—“husband of one wife”: see 1 Tim. 3:2.

—“children are believers”: the Greek word for “believers” can be translated, “faithful”, “trustworthy”, “dutiful”, or “reliable.” Paul does not hold fathers accountable for a work that God alone can do: namely, imparting the gift of faith to save the sinner (Eph. 2:8-9; Jhn. 6:44; Phil. 1:29; Acts 16:14). Instead, he holds fathers accountable for raising kids who are not consistently wild. His concern is not with perfect children but rather the reputation of the church being linked to an out-of-control household. See also 1 Tim. 3:2.

—“and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination”:

- The “and” clarifies what Paul intends by “children are believers” (or “reliable”). Qualification for eldership requires that one’s children cannot be charged with a lifestyle of debasing themselves with worldly pleasure (debauchery) or of long-standing rebellion toward the father.
- This portion of the verse further clarifies that Paul is not writing about adult children. No one expects a fifty-year-old son to be “subordinate” to his father. If that son gets married, for instance (“husband of one wife”), he will have left his parents to be united to his wife (Gen. 2:24). Rather than being under his father’s authority, he has departed from it to establish his own household. A similar idea holds for any adult child. No elder can be disqualified based on the choices of his adult children.
- “open to the charge”: Paul expects Titus not to take the father’s word for it that his children are reliable and dutiful. He expects the community to chime in. Does the community validate that these are overall good kids?
- It is slightly uncomfortable to think about an elder’s kids being scrutinized to determine their father’s qualifications. Kids are kids. Folly is bound up in their hearts (Pr. 22:15). It seems like it could get out of hand, over-subjecting children to a microscope. I think Paul would agree. His

point is not that children and parents must be put under the microscope but that their general behavior in society does not raise red flags.

- For more commentary on a similar verse, see 1 Tim. 3:4-5.

7 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach.

—"For an overseer": as stated in the commentary above, "elder" and "overseer" are interchangeable titles for the same role (see 1:5, 7). Some have argued that "overseer" is a brand-new position that Paul introduces here, but this makes no sense of the "For" that begins verse 7. Paul is not starting a new subject but rather clarifying what he has already said about elders.

—"as God's steward":

- A steward is a household manager. To be an elder is to oversee God's kids. The test for overseeing God's kids is managing your own (1 Tim. 3:4-5).
- Elders should love the church like their own kids. Most parents will do anything for their kids. Elders should do anything for the church. It is not a "clock in, clock out" sort of job.
- If you're a parent, consider the standards for whom you would entrust your children to. Wise parents investigate the credentials and reputation of even a babysitter. They do so even more for a nanny. If you have ever selected "godparents" who will become your kids' guardian in the event of both parents dying, you can understand why God feels so passionately about elder selection. Elders operate like godparents, serving as guardians for God's kids until we live eternally in our Father's presence.
- "stewards" manage the possessions of another. The church does not belong to any elder; it belongs to God. Therefore, we should not say, "I go to the church of pastor so-and-so." Acts 20:28 says it is "the church of God", which He "obtained with his own blood."

—"above reproach": see 1 Tim. 3:2 comments. Note here, again, that Paul has said "above reproach" in the span of two verses (Titus 1:5, 7). This is foremost.

He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,

—Here, Paul launches a list of five vices, followed by seven virtues in vv. 8-9.

—"not be arrogant":

- "not self-willed" (NKJV, NASB), "not overbearing" (NIV).
- The same Greek word is translated in 2 Pet. 2:10 as "self-willed" (NKJV), "arrogant" (NLT, NIV, CSB), "willful" (ESV), "self-centered" (NASB).
- The "arrogant" person railroads people with his own self-will. He is an overbearing bully who asserts his opinion, probably claiming it is "God's will." He does not listen to people because he already knows he's right.
- Strauch: "A self-willed man wants his own way. He is stubborn, arrogant, and inconsiderate of others' opinions, feelings, or desires. A self-willed man is headstrong, independent, self-assertive, and ungracious, particularly toward those who have a different opinion. A self-willed man is not a team player, and the ability to work as a team is essential to eldership... A self-willed man will scatter God's sheep because he is unyielding, overbearing, and blind to the feelings and opinions of others" (2 Pet. 2:10).

—"or quick-tempered":

- Almost all translations render it "quick-tempered," with the CSB similarly translating it, "hot-tempered" and the KJV, "soon angry".
- Elsewhere, Paul depicts love as "patient" or "long-suffering," which is sometimes translated, "slow to anger."
- In Ephesians 4:31-32, after already showing how unresolved anger gives the devil a foothold (4:26-27), Paul elaborates: "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." Slow-cooked, seething anger as well as hot anger typically lead to "clamor" (fighting, drama), "slander" (lying to destroy another) and even "malice" (evil intentions).

All believers, and especially elders, must concertedly “put away” these expressions, replacing them with kindness, tenderheartedness (elders should have bleeding hearts), and forgiveness.

- I am reminded of Jesus’s manner of ministry: “a bruised reed, he will not break, and a smoldering wick, he will not snuff out” (Isa. 42:3; Matt. 12:20).
- It is all too common for shepherds to blame their frustrations on difficult sheep, but Jesus did not frown on difficult people. He felt compassion. He refused to snap the already-bruised reed; He did not snuff out the barely-lit flame in peoples’ hearts. Rather than looking down on them, He gently nurtured them. He was a tender shepherd. Elders must be tender, merciful, kind, and forgiving. Their fuse must be many miles long.
- Liefeld: “‘Quick-tempered’ is a weak translation of an adjective that denotes not merely a matter of losing one’s temper, but of being inclined to anger, irascible.”
- Proverbs about being quick-tempered:
 - Pr. 14:17: “A man of quick temper acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated.”
 - Pr. 14:29: “Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.”
 - Pr. 15:18: “A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.”
 - Pr. 16:32: “Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”
 - Pr. 19:11: “Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.”
 - Pr. 22:24-25: “Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.”
 - Pr. 29:22: “A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.”

—“drunkard... violent”: see 1 Tim. 3:3. Note the NASB translation for “or violent”—“not a bully”.

—“greedy for gain”:

- This is similar to “not a lover of money” (see 1 Tim. 3:3 comments).
- “not given to filthy lucre” (KJV), “not greedy for money” (NKJV), “not dishonest with money” (NLT), “not pursuing dishonest gain” (NIV), “not greedy for money” (CSB, NASB).
- The Greek word for “gain” appears only one other time in the New Testament—in Paul’s character sketch of a good deacon (1 Tim. 3:8: “not greedy for gain”).
- The word “gain” is associated with “greedy” in these contexts, which explains why some translations say it negatively (“filthy lucre,” “dishonest”).
- How can you discern whether a potential elder is dishonest about money? On the positive side, you can check their giving records, but this can never tell the whole story. Negatively, you can pay attention to one’s reputation. “above reproach” implies this. Some people have a bad reputation for financial dealings. For instance, someone might be a businessman known to stiff people. Perhaps he’s known to not pay off debt. Paul’s focus throughout seems to be on the elder’s reputation, lest disgrace befall God’s church.

8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

—“hospitable”: See 1 Tim. 3:2.

—“a lover of good”:

- The elder must not only “be” good but also love goodness. He must have passion and zeal for God and everything categorized as “good”. Does the elder display passion? And is it rightly-ordered passion?
- “good” is extremely general. Paul chooses a word with broad-range meaning to show the comprehensiveness of the requirement. “good” encompasses every imaginable virtue while ruling out every possible vice.

- Just because an item on Paul's list does not appear—for instance, Paul never says an elder must have emotional intelligence or gratitude—does not mean Paul excludes them. Loving what is “good” includes every virtue.
- Likewise, to love what is good would rule out anyone who possesses unlisted vices like cynicism, laziness, or self-righteousness.
- Paul's list of elder qualifications is not meant to be *comprehensive* but *representative* of the sorts of traits we should look for.

—“self-controlled”: see 1 Tim. 3:2.

—“upright”: “just” (NKJV), “righteous” (CSB, NASB).

- This word for “upright” is normally translated in Scripture as “righteous”.
- This is a general word for belonging to the people of God (“the righteous” throughout Psalms and Proverbs) and living a lifestyle that matches the label.
- Joseph “was a righteous man” for not publicly shaming Mary when he thought she’d cheated on him.
- Jesus labels Abel as “righteous” for his innocence and sacrificial worship.
- To be “righteous” rules out hypocrisy: “So you too, outwardly appear righteous to people, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matt. 23:29). To be “righteous” applies to both our inner and outer life.
- One can have “righteous” judgment (Jhn. 5:30). To be righteous is to discern between good and evil, justice and injustice, God and the devil.

—“holy”: God says, “Be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). God’s holiness speaks of His being set apart in every way. Elders must likewise be set apart unto God from the world. They must clearly reflect that their citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), not earth. They are in the world but not of it. They stand out.

—“disciplined”: Liefeld says that this word “does not appear in the New Testament but its cognates do, including the aspect of the fruit of the Spirit translated ‘self-control’ (Gal. 5:23).

9 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.

—Having addressed the elder’s household and character, the apostle now shifts to his handling of doctrine.

—His “handling of doctrine” breaks down into three categories: (1) holding right doctrine, (2) teaching right doctrine, (3) rebuking false doctrine.

—Paul’s instruction to Titus expands on what he told Timothy, namely that an elder must be “able to teach.” This trait exhibits itself by the three categories above.

—“able to teach” therefore requires not just believing and articulating right doctrine, but also courage—to rebuke false doctrine. You cannot be an elder without courage.

—In the charismatic church, “honor culture” has taken root, which sounds good on the surface but really isn’t. “Honor culture” churches eschew rebuking people for sinful behavior and doctrines. If they do rebuke, it occurs in a backroom to “honor” the person. There is a place for private rebuke (Matt. 18:15), but honor culture takes this to an extreme, allowing public ministers to publicly sin and publicly espouse false doctrine... but only receive private rebuke. Paul never hesitated to call false teachers by name, instructing us to “mark and avoid” them. Whether in the area of doctrine or in practice, public sin deserves a public response. This requires courage.

—Paul expands on the necessity of for rebuking false doctrine in the subsequent verses, where he depicts “many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially of the circumcision party” (1:10). These were morally corrupt Jews who sought to corrupt the gospel by adding to it, probably by requiring circumcision (cf. Acts 15). Paul says, “They must be silenced” (1:11)—not only because of the doctrine itself but because they are peddling their false gospel for “shameful gain” (1:12). These heretical disruptors mirrored their bankrupt Cretan culture of deception, evil, laziness, and gluttony (1:12). Paul says it’s not enough to softly push back against them; Titus must “rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (1:13)—not hyper-fixating on speculation and extra-biblical practices that lead people astray (1:14).

—In American church culture, we might incorrectly deduce that only seminary-trained men with a robust catalogue of memorized Scripture can qualify as elders. I disagree. Neither Jesus nor the apostles had formal education (Jhn. 7:15; Acts 4:13).

—At Convergence, we will train potential elders theologically and pastorally to prepare them for meeting this qualification before they are appointed.