

# Coach's Corner



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## “Elder Qualifications: The Other List”

Walter Wright, writing in the summer 2002 issue of *Fuller Magazine*, asserted: "Leadership is not about position or achievement. It is a relationship of influence that flows from a person's character. Leaders are people who influence others. Leadership is not just a job--it is a way of living." I believe most of us would agree with Mr. Wright based upon our experience. We know that the very best leaders we have seen do not merely have some skills, they lead out of who they are—their courage, their integrity, their sincerity, their godliness, their passion, their vision, and a good grasp of what they are doing.

To understand these truths is very important for any congregation in the selection of its pastors/elders (whether we are talking about paid staff or volunteers on an elder board). A church will be only as strong as its elders/pastors. That is why we spent several months at the end of last year and beginning of this year going over the biblical teaching about elders. One of the things we covered in that series of **Coach's Corner** articles was the biblical qualifications of elders. We sought to cover what Paul taught on the subject to Timothy and Titus.

There is, however, another list of qualifications we must consider for our selection of elders. This list is more subtly taught in the Bible. Yet, they are no less important. Since we are quickly approaching the last quarter of this calendar year and the need to nominate men for eldership, let's look at these remaining qualifications in preparation.

First, there must be reasonable theological and philosophical agreement with the rest of the board. Christians are quick to say that “unity is not uniformity.” And, this is true. Not everyone must be alike, think exactly alike, or believe exactly the same things in order to have unity. Sometimes, the most powerful unity is when Jesus Christ knits our hearts together despite differences. However, the closer people work together and the more they try to minister together, the more agreement there needs to be. Not only does “being of the same mind”(Philippians 2:2) help, but it makes sense that if differences grow too large, they become counterproductive. For example, let's consider a church board committed to baptizing only believers by immersion and also to educating through Sunday School. If a man joins their elder board whose primary objectives are to practice infant baptism and to create a small group-centered church, this will probably only end in frustration for everyone concerned. Every elder does not have to dot every “i” and cross every “t” the same, nor do they need to be “on the same line” always. However, they should be “on the same page” when it comes to their doctrine, what they value, and what they believe about how to carry out their mission. This means that anyone who is nominated for the elder board should agree with our doctrinal, purpose, and mission statements.

Additionally, a prospective elder must demonstrate elder qualities in and through ministry before nomination. I have already touched upon this in other articles on eldership. The tenor of the

qualifications for elders/overseers in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9 is that an elder must first be proven in the Christian life (including ministry and leadership) before he becomes an elder. Many believe that, to a large extent, he should be serving as an elder in the church (in other words, he should be leading and shepherding) before he ever becomes an official elder. This second qualification leads directly to the third.

A good prospective elder understands that this office is about ministry and leadership, it is not only about board decision-making. There are many boards of organizations where a person can serve sufficiently by only going to the board meetings and helping to make decisions. However, an elder board is not one of those. By definition, a strong Christian is one who not only hears, but also does the Word of God (James 1:22). This is much of the thrust of the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. If a man is not serving, leading, and teaching already in some fashion, it does not matter how nice a guy he is, he should not serve as an elder. The leadership given and decisions made must come out of a strong biblical foundation, as well as from a lifestyle of being “in the trenches”. If it does not, the leadership and the decisions will most likely be at least somewhat skewed.

Finally, an elder must be largely self-initiating. I say “largely,” because I am not suggesting he will never need a reminder or will not need some kind of accountability. More specifically, what I mean is that an elder should be a man who:

- Wants to be regular in God’s Word, prayer, outreach, and service—and largely is. He is not a man whose arm needs to be twisted merely to get involved, to be faithful, or to grow in the knowledge of God. Again, this does not mean he will never struggle in these areas. It does mean that if he does not struggle because he doesn’t have the drive and desire, he should not be an elder.
- Seeks out ways to carry out his area of ministry. Paul makes it clear that the person who has presented their body as a living sacrifice and is living to God’s glory is one who is not slothful in their zeal. Instead, they are fervent in spirit (Romans 12:11). A good elder candidate is a man who knows how to plan ministries, meetings, carry out his ministry without someone looking over his shoulder (and if he doesn’t know how to do one of these, he will find out), and is disciplined enough to get most things done he really needs to do. After all, this must at least minimally be true if he is to manage well the church (1 Tim. 3:5)
- Understands that if he does not give leadership in his area of ministry, it will suffer. If he seeks, in the grace of Christ, to be faithful, his area of ministry will most likely flourish, bring God glory, and greatly benefit others.

It is true that no one of us will perfectly measure up to these qualifications or the ones we looked at last year out of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Nevertheless, they will mark the basic direction of a good prospective elder’s life.

Let’s pray that God will continue to raise up men in our church who have these qualifications. And let’s be thankful that He has already given us so many who have them and lead so well. I know I thank Him for this all the time!

Joyfully leading the congregation with you,  
Tom