

# Coastal Teaching Notes: 1 Timothy 3:1-7: Elders: Whom to Choose?

## December 1, 2024

### I. A Heart to Lead the Church

#### 1 Timothy 3:1

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

A. **The Saying is Trustworthy:** This term used five times exclusively in the pastoral epistles. (Titus 3:8; 1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11). It is often used in doctrinal truths that are weightier in nature. Ultimately, this illustrates how important elders are to the church.

1. **1 Timothy 1:15** “Here is a **trustworthy saying** that deserves full acceptance: **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**—of whom I am the worst.”
2. **1 Timothy 4:8-9:** ...For physical training is of some value, but **godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come**. This is a **trustworthy saying** that deserves full acceptance.”
3. **2 Timothy 2:11:** “Here is a **trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him;**”
4. **Titus 3:8:** “This is a **trustworthy saying**. And I want you to stress these things, **so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.**”

B. In 1 Timothy 3:1, the term focuses on the goodness of being an elder.

1. **A Potential elder must “aspire” to be an elder.** In other words, one should not choose to become an elder out of duty. One should NOT feel pressured into this office by others. There must be something intrinsically inside a candidate that makes him to eagerly desire to help lead the Church. What if he has an unhealthy desire to lead a church? That is what the next section is about Character and Heart qualifications.
2. The term **overseer** can be used interchangeably with the terms **elder** and **shepherd** (pastor). The terms often overlap, as seen in Acts 20:17-28
  - a. **Paul calls for the elders (presbyteros)** of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17).
  - b. **He then refers to them as overseers (episkopos)** and instructs them to *shepherd* (poimēn) the church (Acts 20:28).
  - c. Similarly, 1 Peter 5:1-2 also connects all three roles: **Elders** are encouraged to “**shepherd the flock**” and “serve as **overseers.**” This passage uses shepherd as a noun, not a verb. Elders are to oversee, they are to govern, they are to shepherd and instruct.

### II. A Heart for Character over Gifting

#### 1 Timothy 3:2-3

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**.

A. As we look over the qualifications, one thing worth mentioning is that with all the character qualifications to be an elder, there was only **one gift** required to be an elder, that being **able to teach**. That is an important lesson because while one may have special spiritual gifts, this does NOT mean they can automatically lead the church. Gifted people are still to be in submission to the elders as they do their best to govern the church. There should never be any CEO pastors / leaders.

- B. Self-Control is an umbrella term** for terms like being above reproach, sober-minded (temperate), respectable, not a drunkard, not prone to violence but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. All these areas involve discipline and self-control.
- 1. The phrase “above reproach”** refers to a person who has a reputation for integrity, making them free from credible accusations of wrongdoing from within the church. Being above reproach is distinguished from someone who’s thought of well by outsiders, mainly because it focuses on people within the church; while the other refers to those outside of it, mainly unbelievers.
  - 2. Not a Lover of money.** This doesn’t mean an elder cannot be rich or make money; it just means that making money cannot dominate a candidate’s mind. It cannot be more valued than serving Jesus and leading the church. Elders should be lovers of people, not money.
  - 3. Hospitable focuses on hospitality,** and it is where we get the word hospital from. A hospital is a place that cares for strangers from all walks of life. In a similar way, God’s people should have a heart for caring for strangers, which includes showing care, even hosting others at your home.
- C. Husband of One Wife: One reason why most churches believe elders should be men is because of this designation, “husband of one wife.” Since term literally means a one-woman man. Over the centuries churches have used this this term to rule out potential candidates.**
- 1. People that are involved in polygamy, that is, have multiple wives.** Now this is the most obvious and the easiest when it comes to ruling out a potential candidates.
  - 2. Some churches interpret this passage to mean you cannot be an elder if they have been divorced.** The general thought is that such a person is automatically disqualified since they can no longer be a one woman man. There is no wiggle room to even consider this issue.
  - 3. Some churches allow a divorced man to be an elder if it happened before or his conversion.** The general thought is the candidate cannot be held to Christian standards before they were a believer.
  - 4. Some churches that allow for a divorced elder, if their divorce had biblical grounds, such as infidelity and abandonment (Matthew 19, 1 Corinthians 7).** They also factor in how long ago that happened and if since they have a spiritual life that has consistently in followed Jesus.
  - 5. Some churches say you cannot be single and be an elder because they haven’t had one wife, thus not being able to manage their family household well.** The difficulty with this position is that Paul the apostle was single and never married. Jesus of Nazareth was another example of someone who didn’t have a wife or kids, despite what Dan Brown’s *Da Vinci Code* claimed. Single me, as Paul stated, have more time to devote themselves to the things of God. Though they may not have had a biological family, they have a spiritual family.
  - 6. Some churches state that you can be divorced but not allowed to remarry and be an elder.** They insist one should remain single like Paul. As you can see all these interpretations can become murky. In the end, churches appeal to their by-laws which govern their understanding of what constitutes a one-woman man. What makes this difficult is every case is not the same.
- D. Able to Teach:** Once again, this is the only spiritual gift mentioned when it comes to elder qualifications. So, does an elder need to be a gifted public speaker? Not at all. The elder just needs to know the word of God and be able to use it to lead, instruct someone, correct, and if needed, rebuke. Paul shows us this reality as he addresses Titus, in Crete, about an elder and teaching. .

**Titus 1:9: He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and to rebuke those who contradict it.**

### III. A Heart to Lead His Home Well

#### 1 Timothy 3:1-9

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**?

**A. There is so much to say with regards to managing your household well. Perhaps the most important word I can think of is care.** How do you care for your family? How do you care for them spiritually? How do you care about what's going on in their lives? How do you care for them when they are in error? How do you care about them when they do something well. How do you care when you are in the wrong? Do you care enough to apologize? Do you sacrifice things you want to do for their benefit? Leading your household is about being careful how you care. It is showing respect, Children are more prone to be submissive if they know you respect and care for them.

**B. It is often, not always a reflection of how you will lead in the church.** That's why Paul addresses this issue regarding elder qualifications. If you cannot care for and lead your wife and children well, it most likely will reflect in how you manage the church. The Lord has given elders their own little flock to manage well in their homes.

Now this does not mean that the potential elder candidate must be **perfect husbands and fathers**, there is only one man who was perfect, but it does mean there should be growth, just as in Elders should be learning and growing in their leadership abilities in the church.

**C. Again, this does not disqualify a person who is single.** Singleness did not mean friendlessness or lovelessness for Jesus and Paul, though it did mean chastity. Both of them stayed single and stayed chaste, and both of them commended it for others. Jesus also mentions there are people who use their singleness to devote themselves to the Lord and his church.

For example, in [Matthew 19:12](#) Jesus spoke of those who "made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." In other words, they want to devote their focus to living a life to God and His people. You have more flexibility to be around more people to love as a single person.

**D. Jesus demonstrated what a spiritual leader looks like.** He is not someone who lords his leadership over people like the kings of the Gentiles, but rather he is the man that exercises servant leadership (Luke 22:24-27). Humility will no doubt play an important role in becoming and growing as a servant leader.

### IV. A Heart for Humility, NOT Pride

#### 1 Timothy 3:6-7

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.

**A. He must NOT be a recent Convert to some degree can also get Murky.** Not the fact that new converts are ill-prepared for eldership, but rather there is no time limit mentioned. How long is one considered a new convert? One year? Three years? Five Years? Are people who have been in the faith longer, more qualified to be an elder based on longevity? Based on my experience, people come to Christ at different stages in life. Some teenagers. Others young adults? Some married men with families.

Thankfully, most new converts are NOT interested in being an elder. They are too pre-occupied with their own newfound faith, and not about serving others. However, there are some churches that have been struggling and they get excited when a new convert, who has some gifts and charisma attends their church. In some cases, a church will do almost anything to keep them, including putting them in the leadership.

When you offer that kind of benefit to a new convert, it affects the whole church, and grumbling surely will follow. In addition, the newly appointed elder can become prideful. They might start pondering thoughts like, "I am a new Christian, these people have been here for a long time, and I am an elder not them." They might progress to believe that they are called by God to make changes in the church. New converts tend to want to make changes quicker, which can cause all kinds of ugly. When I first became a pastor, I was instructed by a mentor, the best change in the church is slow change. Think of a cruise ship turning not a hydroplane boat.

This allows the devil to trap his prey so that the new convert will fall into pride, and ultimately be condemned by the enemy. In this scenario, the flock will bicker, the new convert gets defensive, the leadership defending their decision, and Satan absolutely salivates because division in the church is happening to his satisfaction. He is scheming for another church to bite the dust.

**B. An Elder must be Thought Well of by Outsiders.** In these seven verses we have reviewed, there are two terms that are almost identical. To be "above reproach" (vs.2) and to be "thought well of by outsiders." What is the main difference? In my opinion it is the audience, above reproach focused on the congregation; while to be well thought of by outsiders is about those outside the local church, whether Christians or unbelievers.

Over and over again, people like Jesus, Paul, and Peter stressed the importance of loving and praying for your enemies, being on good terms with outsiders, and stressing the importance of gently giving someone who asks the hope that you have for being a Christian, with an attitude of gentleness and respect. We must keep God's big picture in mind, we are the bridge that can model Christ. We simply do NOT want to lose our witness.

**Illustration:** When I lived in Tacoma, there was a mega church in Kirkland, Washington that had recently constructed a brand-new church facility with an abundance of seating. However, when this was advertised in the Kirkland area, accusations against the senior pastor started to surface about inappropriate touching that happened with boys in the church baptisms. The pastor denied them.

These accusations continued to spread, even reports of some inappropriate activity in public park restrooms outside of the state of Washington. Like dominoes, one accusation led to another until too many had fallen. Eventually, the elders made the decision for the pastor to step down because he was not well thought of by outsiders. This was a hard decision because the senior pastor was a gifted man, and the church had grown tremendously.

Thankfully, these elders had the character and integrity to say enough is enough. Being an elder has its challenges. Sometimes it means making unpopular decisions. However, despite that reality, elders do what they do based on these qualifications to lead the church. The qualifications you see here are not exhaustive, even the book of Titus mentions others. However, these categories provide guidelines when it comes to leading the church. In the end character matters more than giftedness when it comes to leading a church. When it comes to the elders at Coastal, one thing no one can deny is their heart for the church and your spiritual growth. Make sure you thank them for taking on such a noble task.

