

# Back To Basics

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## SPECIAL EXPANDED EDITION: THE ELDERSHIP

*Johnie Edwards*

**T**he Bible teaches that elders are required in every church of Christ to make it Scripturally organized. To this end, this issue of *Back To Basics* is directed.

1) **ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH.** By apostolic example, we learn that every church is to have its own elders. “And when they had ordained them **elders in every church**, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 14:23). Local churches of Christ had elders in New Testament times. A good example is seen when Paul, “from Miletus sent to Ephesus, and called the **elders** of the church” (Acts 20:17). There is to be more than one elder in every church!

2) **ELDERS DEMANDED IN ORDER-SETTING.** Paul wrote the preacher Titus, “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest **set in order** the things that are wanting, and **ordain elders** in every city, as I had appointed thee” (Ti. 1:5). In New Testament days, elders were appointed in every city where the church was established, and so must it be today! Where there are no elders, something is wanting in the church.

3) **ELDERS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH.** Writing the local church of Christ at Philippi, Paul penned, “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi with the **bishops** (elders) and deacons” (Phil. 1:1). Elders are exhorted to, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

4) **ELDERS’ WORK GOES ON.** As long as churches need overseeing and feeding, the need for elders goes on. There is something “wanting” in churches who have no elders (Ti. 1:5). Certainly someone overseeing and flock-feeding are two things “wanting” in churches without elders, as elders are given charge, “to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God...” (Acts 20:28).

This special issue of *Back To Basics* is designed to help us get back to the basics in understanding what the Bible teaches about the eldership.

## ELDERSHIP TERMS

Johnie Edwards

To have a better understanding of the eldership, we need to have a good handle on some Biblical terms which describe the eldership.

1) **ELDER.** The Old Testament use of the word “elder” means an old man as seen in, “the elders of Israel” (Ex. 3:16). An elder is one who is advanced in years. He is not to be “a novice” (1 Tim. 3:6); that is, he is not to be a new Christian. Due to the lack of experience in being a child of God, he can be “lifted up with pride” and “fall into the condemnation of the devil.”

2) **BISHOP.** An elder is a bishop, in that the word is applied to elders. Acts 20:17 says that Paul “called the elders of the church.” Referring to the same men, Paul called them “bishops” (Acts 20:28, ASV). Paul called an elder a “bishop,” when he wrote Titus about their qualifications (Ti. 1:5, 7). The word “bishop” suggests the idea of oversight as elders superintend the work of the local church. Even though religious bodies have made a distinction between an elder and a bishop, the Bible makes no such distinction! Not knowing that a bishop and an elder are the same man, bishops have been placed over a number of churches; finally resulting in one being made head of the Roman Catholic Church!

3) **PASTOR.** Ephesians 4:11 calls elders “pastors.” The word “pastor” carries the concept of one who shepherds or tends a flock of sheep. In this case, the Lord’s sheep is the church (Acts 20:28). Most churches refer to their preacher as “pastor,” when he is not an elder. A preacher, who is also an elder, could be called a pastor. Otherwise, it is a mis-use of the term to use “pastor” in reference to a preacher.

4) **ELDERS.** One man cannot be an elder, for the Bible requires a plurality of men to make up an eldership. When Paul wrote the church at Philippi, he addressed the letter to “saints, bishops (elders) and deacons” (Phil. 1:1). When men were appointed to the eldership, they “ordained them elders in every church” (Acts 14:23). “Relief” was sent “to the elders” when there was a needy church (Acts 11:29-30). The church in Ephesus had “elders” (Acts 20:17). As Titus “set in order the things that are wanting,” he “ordained elders in every church” (Ti. 1:5). Peter makes mention of “The elders which are among you...” (1 Pet. 5:1).

5) **A MAN.** Paul stated, “If a man desire the office of a bishop (elder)...” (1 Tim. 3:1). This, at the start, eliminates women from being elders. Only men can be elders in the Lord’s church.

# Back To Basics

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P.O. Box 462  
Salem, IN 47167-0462  
(812) 883-4974

[BcktoBscs@edwardspublishers.com](mailto:BcktoBscs@edwardspublishers.com)

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# THE CHURCH AND ELDERS

Johnie Edwards

**J**ust as elders have God-given duties, so does the church to the elders. The church must:

1) **KNOW THE ELDERS.** The members are expected to respect and honor the elders as they recognize their office. Paul penned, “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you” (1 Th. 5:12). Invite the elders to your home with some old-fashioned Bible hospitality!

2) **ESTEEM THEM.** This means “to lead before the mind.” The kind of respect for elders must be “very highly.” The work they do demands our love. Be at peace, as no eldership can function well where members are fussing and fighting among themselves. Look at the passage: “And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Th. 5:13). 1 Timothy 5:17 says count them “worthy of double honor,” when they rule well.

3) **RECEIVE NOT AN ACCUSATION.** Some members are always just looking for something to accuse the elders with. Don’t do that. Paul said, “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19).

4) **REBUKE THOSE WHO SIN.** If an elder is guilty of sin, and will not correct it, he must be rebuked. Look at it: “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (1 Tim. 5:20). This rebuking is to be of a public nature.

5) **CALL ON THEM.** Often members call the preacher when they should have called the elders. James wrote, “Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church...” (Jas. 5:14).

It is important that members of the church meet their responsibilities to the elders.

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# THE WORK OF ELDERS

*Johnie Edwards*

The work of elders is outlined in the word of God. Thus, we are not left to guess as to what their work is. Paul called this office a “work” (1 Tim. 3:1). The work of elders involves:

1) **FLOCK-FEEDING.** As Paul called the Ephesian elders down to the little city of Miletus, to bid them good-bye, he said, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). The flock has reference to members of the church. Peter put it this way to elders: “Feed the flock of God which is among you...” (1 Pet. 5:2). To feed is to nourish as a shepherd provides food and water for his sheep. The Lord’s flock “live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4). Elders must see that the church is taught the word of God, as they are nourished with spiritual food. This is the reason elders are called pastors.

2) **OVERSEEING.** Paul charged elders in Acts 20:28 as overseers. Likewise, Peter admonished elders to take “the oversight” (1 Pet. 5:2). Elders must look carefully as guardians or superintendents of the souls they look over. Ezekiel made it clear that the duty of a watchman was to “hear the word” of God, and give “warning” to God’s people (Ezek. 3:17). This watch involves vigilance to prevent or regain straying sheep. Elders would do well to read and re-read the story of the lost sheep in Luke 15:3-7. This parable shows the value of just one lost soul. Elders must see that everything possible is done to find, and lead the lost one back to the flock. Qualified elders see to it that the

church is provided teaching to help prevent going astray. Elders must be aware that “grievous wolves,” in the disguise of false teachers, stand ready to enter the flock. Elders are to guard and protect the church against teachers of error. This work of oversight is limited to “the flock of God which is among you” (1 Pet. 5:2). Elders can oversee only the local church where they have been appointed to oversee - no one else.

3) **EXAMPLE-SETTING.** Not “being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3). The word “example” is like that of being a pattern to go by. Elders, being shepherds, go before the sheep. As John discussed the role of a shepherd, he uttered, “And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice” (Jn. 10:4). Elders must be men whose lives can be imitated by members of the church in every aspect of life. This includes practicing liberality in giving, keeping himself pure and above suspicion, given to hospitality, controlling his temper, behaving himself, being honest, being a Bible teacher, and a blameless reputation.

4) **SOUL-WATCHING.** It is written in Hebrews 13:17 concerning elders, “Obey them that have the rule over you; and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account.” What a duty! A man’s soul is his most valuable possession. Elders, as watchmen, guard souls against that which is false and must give account for such. Wise elders “winneth souls” (Prov. 11:30). When an elder sees a soul in some danger, he is not too timid to arise to his responsibility and address the issue imme-

diately. Soul-watching involves knowing the soundness of preachers who are invited to preach in gospel meetings. Classroom teachers must be observed as to their teaching, making sure only the word of God is being taught. An eye must be kept on “he that soweth discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:19).

5) **SELF-HEEDING.** Elders are first taught to “take heed unto yourselves” (Acts 20:28). Elders must first “examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:5). Then, they will be in better position to examine those they oversee! Elders would do well to heed the teaching of Paul to the Romans, “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself...” (Rom. 2:21). Elders must not have the philosophy, don’t do as we do, do as we say; for that will simply not work!

6) **RULING.** Elders are said to “have the rule over you” (Heb. 13:17). Paul’s discussion of elders involves, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5:17). This word “rule” expresses itself as a father “ruleth well his own house” (1 Tim. 3:4). A ruler is one who leads. That is, they are to lead as they guide the local church, even as a shepherd guides his sheep. Their rule requires that “he that ruleth” rule “with diligence” (Rom. 12:8). Elders must be alert and aware of the needs of the flock. Elders must “rule well” (1 Tim. 5:17). Elder-rule must be firm, yet kind and not a “lording over” attitude (1 Pet. 5:3). Rulers express good leadership. Good leaders have vision, realizing, “Where there is no vision, the people perish...” (Prov. 29:18). Such men are always looking ahead as they plan for the future. Good leaders surround themselves with other good men. Some men may not be qualified to be elders, but have sound judgment, that elders can draw on.

Good leadership looks to develop other leaders and in this case more elders. Elders must not be so power struck as to not want any others working with them. Humility characterizes good leaders (1 Pet. 5:6); as they are not too proud to admit to mistakes made. Good leadership communicates. One problem a lot of elders entertain is a failure to let the local church know what is going on. Elders need not have a hidden agenda!

7) **MOUTH-STOPPING.** As Paul gave Titus divine instructions concerning the work of elders, he stated, “that they may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake” (Ti. 1:9-11). Deceivers must not be allowed to work among the flock of God for souls are at stake. Qualified elders must know the truth like the back of their hand to be able to head off unruly and vain talkers. This ability requires “study ...rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Elders need to know the truth so well, that when false doctrine rears its ugly head, they can spot it a mile away!

8) **TEACHING.** Elder qualifications tell us that elders “must be apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2). As an elder is found “holding fast the faithful word” (Ti. 1:9), he is among those who have teaching abilities. Elders are men who are “able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Ti. 1:9). Faithful men “shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

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## GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS

Johnie Edwards

**E**lder qualifications are set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Please take the time to read and re-read these passages.

Contrary to the thinking of some, a man selected to be an elder, must have these spiritual qualities before he is appointed to the office, since the Holy Spirit said, "A bishop (elder) must" (1 Tim. 3:2; Ti. 1:7). The word "must" is the strongest word we have in our English language. The word "must" means, "Something that is absolutely required or indispensable" (*The American Heritage College Dictionary*). This does away with the false concept that a man can be appointed to the eldership in the hope that he may "grow into" these "must" qualifications. He may not!

The word "office" has led some to conclude that about all that is required of an eldership is a door in the church building with the word "office" on it. Not so! When the Lord referred to the "office" of an elder, he called it "a good work" (1 Tim. 3:1). The divine charge to do the work of elders is the basic concept of the "office" of elders.

Some hold the position, if the men appointed to an eldership meet the qualifications between these selected, then that will do it. That

will not work, for the Scriptures of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are dealing with each man and not a group of men! Each man has to meet the specified qualifications before being appointed.

Then there are those who teach that there is no need for elders today. They reason that the eldership passed away with spiritual gifts. Since the work of elders goes on, we must continue to appoint qualified men to serve as elders in the Lord's church. If not, why not?

Some qualifications for elders are more general than others. Some of these general requirements are:

1) **A MAN.** 1 Timothy 3:1 declares, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." It is further stated that an elder "must be...the husband of one wife..." (1 Tim. 3:2). It can be easily seen that a woman cannot qualify to be an elder!

2) **DESIRE.** "...If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Tim. 3:1). The word "desire" means to have the effort as one who stretches out for something he longs for. Yet, he must not be as a politician who campaigns for the office!

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## PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS

John Isaac Edwards

**T**hese qualifications deal with the elder in his relationship as a family man.

1) **THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE.** This “married man” qualification appears in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6. It excludes women, single men, and men with more than one wife at one time (polygamy) from serving as elders. Now you can see why the use of the term “elder” by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormon Church) is a mis-use, when young, unmarried men are called elders.

*Questions related to this qualification:*

(1) If an elder’s wife dies, can he continue as an elder or must he resign the office? (2) If a man’s wife died and he married another, would he be qualified to serve as an elder? (3) What about a man who put away his wife for fornication and married another? *Answer:* Is he the husband of one wife: yes or no?

2) **ONE THAT RULETH WELL HIS OWN HOUSE.** The work of elders involves ruling (1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17). “One that ruleth well his own house” presides over his family in an excellent and fine manner; not as a tyrant, but showing due consideration to his own. “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church...” (Eph. 5:23). A man demonstrates his ability to take care of the church of God by how he rules his own house (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

3) **HAVING HIS CHILDREN IN SUBJECTION WITH ALL GRAVITY.** “One that ruleth well his own house” has “his children in subjection with all gravity” (1 Tim. 3:4). This has reference to the

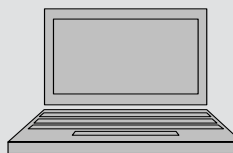
training done by the father who has commanded the respect of his children. The word “gravity” means with dignity, showing seriousness about life.

4) **HAVING FAITHFUL CHILDREN NOT ACCUSED OF RIOT OR UNRULY.** The American Standard Version says, “children that believe” (Ti. 1:6). The word “faithful” or “believe” is used to refer to one who is a Christian (Acts 2:44; 5:14; 16:34; 1 Tim. 4:12; 5:16).

*Questions related to this qualification:*

(1) Does a man have to have more than one child to be an elder? (2) Must all of his children be faithful Christians? *Answer:* Does he have faithful children not accused of riot or unruly: yes or no?

A man may meet all other qualifications, but if he is not the husband of one wife, does not rule well his own house, does not have faithful children not accused of riot or unruly, he is not qualified.



### BASIC-E

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## REPUTATION & EXPERIENCE QUALIFICATIONS

Johnie Edwards

**R**eputation has to do with the esteem in which a man is held. Paul put it this way, “Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:7). When looking at this attribute, please take note of how a man is looked upon by those who are not members of the church - “them which are without.” What do his fellow-employees, neighbors, relatives and others who know him say and think of him? If those without the church have nothing good to say about the man, you better not appoint him to the eldership. You are only asking

for trouble, if you do. You see, one’s influence, as an elder, must be for good; not bad.

A man who is to be appointed to the eldership must be a man who has been a Christian for a few years. Paul penned, “Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into condemnation of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6). The word “novice” literally means one newly planted, or a beginning Christian. A man, not being seasoned as a child of God and lacking in experience, can easily be influenced by the devil and pride interfere with his work as an elder.

### ELDER SELECTION

Johnie Edwards

**T**he selection process for elders is not specified in the Bible. A principle that undergirds this would be: “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). Some suggestions are in order:

1) **HOLY SPIRIT MADE.** Paul told the Ephesian elders that “the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers” (Acts 20:28). The Holy Spirit made the requirements for elders and, in that sense, they are made elders by the Holy Spirit.

2) **CHURCH SELECTED.** When men were needed to take care of neglected widows in Acts 6:1-6, the apostles told the disciples to make the selection.

3) **EVANGELIST APPOINTED.** Paul told Titus to “ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee” (Ti. 1:5). So, gospel preachers are to appoint Holy Spirit made men.

4) **NAMES PLACED.** After a detailed study of the eldership, names may be placed before the local church for a period, giving the church time to reflect in view of the men and required qualifications.

5) **IF NO SCRIPTURAL OBJECTIONS.** Unless there is a Scriptural objection, in writing, to the man involved, he will be appointed by the evangelist.

6) **WITHDRAWAL OF NAME.** A man should withdraw his name for consideration, if a Scriptural objection is raised.

Once the men have been appointed as elders, they need to get together, get to know each other better and learn how to work as elders for the cause of the Lord and the welfare of the local church. They need to consider men they would like to work with as deacons.



## ABILITY QUALIFICATIONS

Johnie Paul Edwards

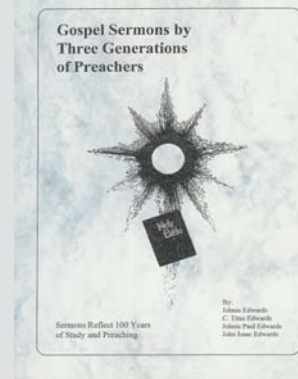
As one studies the Holy Scriptures, he is impressed with the fact that elders must meet certain qualifications (1 Tim. 3; Ti. 1). This article takes a look at some of the elders' ability qualifications.

1) **APT TO TEACH.** "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). Some are apt to teach and some are apt not to teach! An elder must be one who is able to teach others. As Paul wrote about the servant of the Lord, he stated that he must be "apt to teach" (2 Tim. 2:24). The Bible puts a great deal of emphasis on teaching. The word of God must be communicated to others so they can believe and obey the gospel of Christ. Paul told Timothy, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). To be the kind of teacher God would have us to be, we must not only teach God's word, we must live it! The Romans were taught, "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?" (Rom. 2:21).

2) **ABLE TO EXHORT AND CONVINCING THE GAINSAYERS.** The apostle and servant of God wrote concerning elders, "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Ti. 1:9). The gainsayers are those who "contradict" (NKJV). They contradict the truth and their "mouths must be stopped" before they "subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not" (Ti. 1:11).

An elder must be one who can both exhort and convince. To *exhort* means to admonish, entreat, urge. *Convince* carries with it the idea of convicting the gainsayers or false teachers of truth. They must be confuted and refuted. This is more than telling an offender his fault, it is convicting the offender of sin! Think of the harm that can be done by those who contradict the truth. We must "be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). Elders must hold fast the faithful word and be familiar with and use only sound doctrine. Some must be rebuked "sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" (Ti. 1:12).

Elders must have sufficient ability, and those lacking in these areas must not be appointed.



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## POSITIVE QUALIFICATIONS

Johnie Paul Edwards

**E**lders must meet certain qualifications. These qualifications can be broken down into positive and negative qualifications. Let's study some of the positive qualifications. First, let's read, "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous" (1 Tim. 3:2-3) and "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God...But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate" (Ti. 1:7-8).

1) **BLAMELESS.** *Blameless* carries with it the idea of being free of blame or guilt; innocent; not accused or called in. Paul spoke of being blameless in 1 Corinthians 1:8, "Who shall also confirm you to the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Even an elder's children are to be such that they are not *accused* of riot or unruly (Ti. 1:6).

2) **VIGILANT OR TEMPERATE.** The word "vigilant" could be rendered temperate, and is in Titus 1:7-8, which denotes exercising self-control. According to 2 Peter 1:6, temperance is to be added to knowledge. A man who cannot control himself, in whatever capacity, is certainly not qualified to serve as a bishop.

3) **SOBER.** To be *sober* is to be sober-minded; denotes of sound mind; discreet. An elder must always exercise self-restraint that governs his passions and desires. He must have the ability to make responsible, sensible, and prudent decisions. Being an elder is serious business!

4) **OF GOOD BEHAVIOUR.** An elder must be well-behaved or have a well-ordered life. Behaviour or conduct is an "every hour sermon."

5) **GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY.** An elder must be one who is hospitable, generous and loving toward guests. All Christians are to practice hospitality (1 Pet. 4:9). Open homes offer great opportunities.

6) **PATIENT.** *Patient* suggests holding up under evil; mild; gentle. Patience goes a long way in dealing with others and is one of the things to be added to our faith (2 Pet. 1:6).

7) **LOVER OF GOOD MEN.** Good and good men are to be loved and appreciated. Evil must always be rejected. Paul taught, "abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Rom. 12:9).

8) **JUST.** An elder must be just or fair in his dealings with others. *Just* means justly, righteous, and rendering to each his due. Elders, as all, must do "nothing by partiality" (1 Tim. 5:21).

9) **HOLY.** To be *holy* is to be pious, devout, and religious. God chose us in Christ that we should "be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4). Christians are to present their bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). The holy are those who do not follow a course of evil or wickedness. Elders are to be holy men of God.

These qualifications are to be found in the man before he is appointed to the eldership.

## NEGATIVE QUALIFICATIONS

John Isaac Edwards

The negative terms “no” and “not” express prohibition. From 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, we learn some things an elder must in no way or to no degree be or do.

1) **NOT GIVEN TO WINE.** The Lord never has approved of being given to wine, especially leaders among His people. The Lord spake unto Aaron, “Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee...” (Lev. 10:9). Proverbs 20:1 records, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.”

2) **NO STRIKER.** *Striker* is here used in the sense of a bruiser, ready for a blow. An elder must not be a pugnacious, contentious, or quarrelsome person. He exemplifies Colossians 3:13, “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

3) **NOT GREEDY OF FILTHY LUCRE.** He is not eager for base gain or greedy for money. Peter admonished elders, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” (1 Pet. 5:2).

4) **NOT A BRAWLER.** An elder does not look upon himself as one invincible. He is one who can be withstood. He is not to be contentious, but abstain from fighting. “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient” (2 Tim. 2:24).

5) **NOT COVETOUS.** Not loving money, he is not avaricious. The covetous often attempt

to justify themselves before men and deride (sneer and scoff at) others (Lk. 16:14-15). An elder recognizes, “But godliness with contentment is great gain...For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:6-10).

6) **NOT A NOVICE.** He is not a new convert, one who has recently become a Christian. The reason: “lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6). An elder must be humble (1 Pet. 5:5-6).

7) **NOT SELFWILLED.** An elder is not self-serving or self-pleasing. Peter spoke of the selfwilled in this language, “But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities” (2 Pet. 2:10). It is hard to work with a selfwilled, flesh-walking, government-despising, presumptuous, evil-speaking elder!

8) **NOT SOON ANGRY.** He is not prone to anger. “He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly...” (Prov. 14:17). Elders are “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (Jas. 1:19). Being a man of love, he “is not easily provoked” (1 Cor. 13:5). He has put away “all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking...with all malice” (Eph. 4:31), and is kind, tenderhearted and forgiving (Eph. 4:32).

These qualifications reach deep down into the very heart of the man. If he possesses any of these qualities, he is not qualified to hold the office of a bishop.

## EVEN SO MUST THEIR WIVES

*Melba Edwards*

Only one passage speaks concerning the wives of elders and deacons: 1 Timothy 3:11. A man could certainly qualify in all his areas, but his wife could disqualify him. Let's study each of these terms which denotes her character.

1) **MUST BE GRAVE.** *Grave* is not a word we commonly use. Some synonyms for grave are reverent, honest, holy, serious and venerable. Her character is one that commands respect. She has a sacred, God-fearing character, as the holy women, in former times, who trusted in God (1 Pet. 3:5). It is a quality that is obvious; not questioned. Her mind is set on heaven and she shows concern for the spiritual needs of others. She needs to be a pattern for other women to imitate.

2) **MUST NOT BE A SLANDERER.** *Slander* is falsely spoken statements. They are damaging, untrue, and even vicious statements that would damage another's character or reputation. Slander is something that is heard (Ps. 31:13). A slanderer finds faults with others and spreads those criticisms. She is a malicious gossip. As an elder's wife, she may know some troubles or problems concerning other members that she needs to keep to herself. She knows how to bridle her tongue (Jas. 1:26).

3) **MUST BE SOBER.** If a woman is sober, in this text, she is temperate, of sound mind, self-controlled. She has control of herself in every respect. As she demonstrates that God is first and fore-

most in her life, nothing else will take charge. She is also vigilant or watchful. Her husband has quite a task in overseeing the flock. She too needs to help watch. Some members may come to her for particular needs. She watches for signs of weaknesses in others and does all she can to help encourage those members.

4) **MUST BE FAITHFUL IN ALL THINGS.** *Faithful* here denotes trustworthy. She is one who can be relied on. She is faithful to carry out all her duties as a Christian. Others can come to her and know she is worthy to be trusted. Proverbs 11:13 tells us, "A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter."

5) **MUST BE HOSPITABLE.** This is implied in the fact that her husband must be hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2; Ti. 1:8). How can an elder fulfill his responsibility, if his wife is not hospitable? She may need to lodge strangers or prepare food at a moment's notice. She must make others feel welcome in her home and at the services.

An elder's wife is a wife that loves her husband and respects his leadership (Eph. 5:33). She is obedient and in subjection to him (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:6). She is a helper to him (Gen. 2:20). She is one the congregation can look to with respect and love. Though she is human and capable of making mistakes, she is one whose character is in every sense of the word a Christian.

# ELDERS AS LEADERS

Johnie Edwards

One thing lacking in many elders is that of leadership! It has been said, and no doubt true, “A church is no stronger than its leaders.” Paul said that elders are to “rule well” (1 Tim. 5:17). The word “rule” means to lead. Elders are to be leaders in the Lord’s church.

1) **LEADERS MUST BE STRONG.** A study of leaders among God’s Old Testament people were men who were to be strong. When God called upon Joshua to lead His people, He told Joshua to, “Be strong” (Dt. 31:6, 23; Josh. 1:7). Being an elder is not for weaklings! It’s like Paul told the Ephesians, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10). Joshua, being strong, made a great leader. When it came time for David to die, he “charged Solomon, his son, saying. I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man” (1 Ki. 2:1-2). Solomon’s great strength made him a great leader.

2) **LEADERS ARE COURAGEOUS.** Leaders like elders cannot afford to be afraid to lead. Some in Old Testament times had a “melting heart” (Josh. 2:11; 7:5). This, elders cannot have. As God chose Joshua to be the leader of His people, He charged Joshua to “be very courageous” (Josh. 1:7). Elders who lead must not be afraid to take a stand for truth and right!

3) **LEADERS MAKE GOOD USE OF OTHERS.** Show me a good and successful leader, and I will show you a leader who surrounds himself with other good and talented men. Otherwise, they are too limited to get much done. When leader Moses had a great job to do, he called on others for help (Num. 11:14-17). Good leaders give a

man a job to do, and let him do it! Elders need to make good use of the deacons.

4) **LEADERS MUST LEAD.** Good leaders soon learn that in order to lead, there must be those who follow. God’s flock, the church, cannot be driven, but must be led, as one would lead sheep. We need good elder-leaders, not drivers!

5) **LEADERS MUST NOT BE JEALOUS.** Some elders are so eaten up with jealousy of other leaders or the preacher, that they would not think about asking their advice. Such elders are doomed to fail!

6) **LEADERS HAVE VISION.** Remember these words? “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov. 29:18). Some elders have no plan for next Lord’s day, much less looking down the road for the future of the local church! Good leaders plan five to ten years beyond this time for the growth of the church, as they “watch for souls” (Heb. 13:17).

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# Kid's Activity Page

Paul Adams

**Memory Verse:** "...ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee" (Ti. 1:5).

## The Eldership

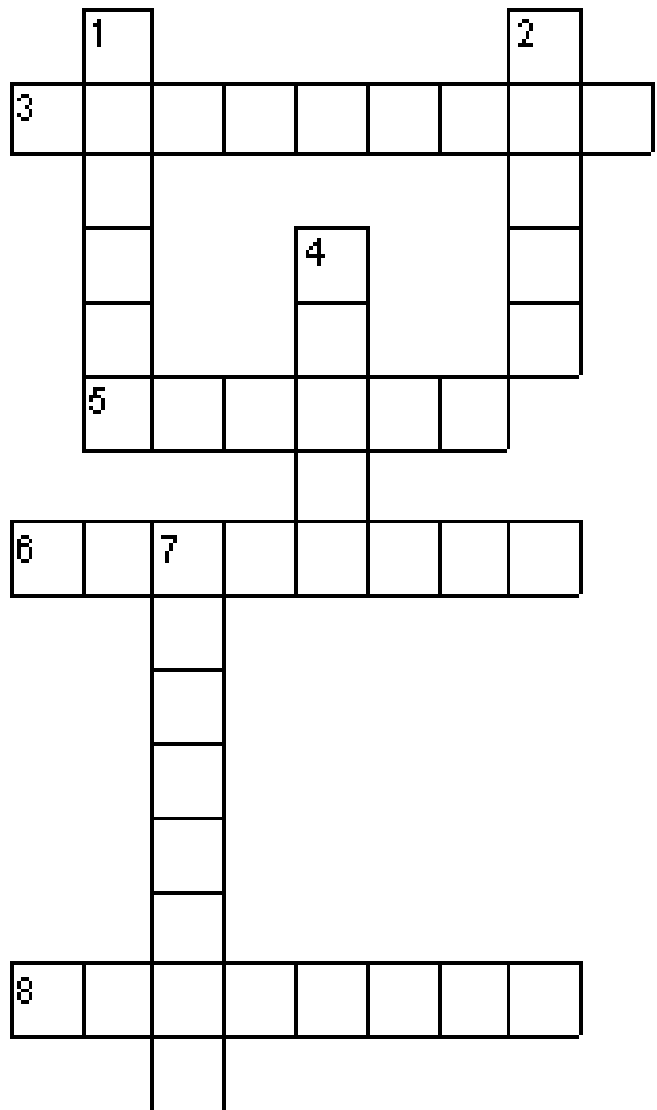
Fill in the puzzle using the clues provided. This will help you learn different Scriptural names for elders and what they do.

### Across

3. Elders are to serve \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 Pet. 5:2).
5. An elder can also be called a \_\_\_\_\_  
(Eph. 4:11).
6. In 1 Peter 5:1-4, elders are told to be examples to the flock of God looking forward to the appearing of the Chief \_\_\_\_\_.
8. An elder is also called an \_\_\_\_\_  
(Acts 20:28).

### Down

1. A \_\_\_\_\_ must be blameless (Ti. 1:7).
2. 1 Timothy 5:19 warns against receiving a frivolous accusation against an \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Elders are to be obeyed since they \_\_\_\_\_ for your soul (Heb. 13:17).
7. Elders are not lords, but \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 Pet. 5:3).



**"Suffer the little children to come unto me,  
and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14).**

**Q**uestion: *“What does it mean that an elder must be the husband of one wife, and does a man have to have more than one believing child to be an elder?”*

**A**nswer:

**“HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE”**

The Bible says that an elder “must be the husband of one wife,” and “deacons be the husbands of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2, 12). Let it first be understood that both elders and deacons must be married men. No single man can serve in these offices.

The divine command, “husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2, 12), excludes women from serving in these roles of elders and deacons. Furthermore, since elders have authority in oversight (Acts 20:28), and women are not “to usurp authority over the man” (1 Tim. 2:12), she cannot serve in the office of an elder or deacon.

The question often comes up, “can a man, whose wife has died, be an elder or deacon?” He surely can if he marries one he has the Scriptural right to marry. Romans 7:1-4 teaches that one can remarry after the death of a spouse. If a man’s wife dies, he has no wife. Now, when he remarries, how many wives does he have? One or two? Only one! When the Lord said, “Husband of one wife,” He has reference to a man not being guilty of polygamy. A man cannot be married to two women at the same time. The passage is both positive and negative: positive, in that marriage is required; negative, in that it prohibits polygamous marriages. An elder or deacon must be a one-woman man!

If an elder or deacon has a Scriptural divorce (Mt. 19:9), and he remarries one he has the right to marry, he is just the “husband of one wife.” Otherwise, he would be guilty of adultery and could not serve. So, in short, the passages of 1 Timothy 3:2, 12 require marriage and forbid polygamy!

**“BELIEVING CHILDREN”**

The Bible says that a man must have “his children in subjection with all gravity” (1 Tim. 3:4). The Titus 1:6 account says, “Having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.” The word “children” is often used to include just one child. If I were to say, “Bring your children to Bible class,” if you had only one child, would you be included? If you were asked, “How many children do you have?,” how would you answer?

The Bible often uses the plural for the singular. The ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat (Gen. 8:4), but it only rested on one mountain. Sarah was said to “have given children suck” (Gen. 21:7), but she only had one child. Jacob took his family into Egypt among whom were his “daughters” (Gen. 46:7), but he only had one daughter, Dinah!

*Have A Bible Question? Send To: Back To Basics, P.O. Box 462, Salem, IN 47167*

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