

OUR ATTITUDES REGARDING THE QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS

From an outline by Ronny E. Hinds

The Holy Spirit makes men elders. *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood”* (Acts 20:28). This is not done in a miraculous way, but through the qualifications that the Holy Spirit has revealed in His word. Elders are appointed according to His standard, not ours.

Elders do not drift into this position automatically. It is the church’s responsibility to recognize those men who are qualified and appoint them to the work. This is what Paul did (Acts 14:23), and what he commanded Titus to do (Titus 1:5).

Appointing elders must be done without partiality. *“I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality”* (1 Tim. 5:21). Any man who desires to serve as an elder (1 Tim. 3:1), and is otherwise qualified, should be appointed. Likewise, no amount of “politicking” can qualify a scripturally unqualified man. There is to be no partiality shown in this process.

The qualifications do not demand a perfect, sinless man. If so, no one would qualify, because all sin (Rom. 3:23). The fact that God has given qualifications necessarily implies that men can qualify. If not, these qualifications are meaningless. This warns us to not so interpret the qualifications as if they require perfection. Instead, we should see whether a man possesses and demonstrates them in an above average way. Observe that the majority of the qualifications are relative; that is, they are degrees, not absolutes. One may be more apt to teach than another. One may possess greater self-control than another. Yet, it should be obvious that every elder must possess these qualities to a high degree, or above the average, before he can qualify. One who often makes serious mistakes, or lacks proper judgment or wisdom in action, is not one who possesses these qualifications to a high degree. Although he may possess them to some degree, he is not qualified to serve (or to continue to serve).

The qualifications are musts. *“A bishop then must be...”* (1 Tim. 3:2). These qualities cannot be dismissed as expedients or substituted with our own ideas of what makes a good elder (being a good family man, successful businessman, long-term member, etc.). All qualifications are before one can be appointed to serve as an elder. Just as all of the commands to become a Christian are necessary, so all of the qualifications for an elder are necessary. We cannot set aside a certain qualification just because a man has difficulty meeting it. If it is all right to ignore one or two qualifications, then we have the right to ignore all of them.

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