

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. ²A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; ³not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; ⁴one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence ⁵(for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); ⁶not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil. ⁷Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Introduction

Before we expose the passage today we need to be educated about Elders.

What is God's purpose for Elders?

What is their function, what should they be doing?

What is the historical background of Elders from the Bible?

If we study the first 5 books of the Bible we will discover that Elders were **men** who were appointed for **leadership roles with God's chosen nation of people, the Israelites.**

Israel's Elders are mentioned **about 100 times** in the Old Testament.

Even when the children of Israel were in slavery in Egypt, the Elders still operated in a **leadership position over the people.**

(Exodus 3: v. 16-18.)

The Elders were responsible for **supervising the Passover in Egypt.** (Ex. 12:21)

Moses first of all **communicated to the Elders** after he had **met with God** on Mount Sinai.

(Ex. 19: v. 1-7)

Seventy of the Elders of Israel met with God on Mount Sinai. (Ex. 24: v. 9-11)

The Elders were always included when Moses wanted to communicate anything important.

God Himself told Moses to gather 70 men from the Elders of Israel so that He might put the Holy Spirit upon these men in order to help Moses to lead the people.

God realised that Moses could not bear the burden on his own.

The problems involved in leading Israel were too much for one person.

(Numbers 11: v. 11-17)

¹¹ So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? ¹² Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers? ¹³ Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' ¹⁴ I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden *is* too heavy for me. ¹⁵ If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now—if I have found favor in Your sight—and do not let me see my wretchedness!"

¹⁶ So the LORD said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. ¹⁷ Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that *is* upon you and will put *the same* upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear *it* yourself alone.

So we see that the Elders were **responsible for supporting Moses**, God's chosen leader.

Elders were even responsible for **hearing murder cases and judging the most intimate family matters.**

When we come to the New Testament we discover that all of the Churches were run by men, called Elders.

(Acts 14: v.23)

²³ So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

They had a similar role to the Old Testament Elders, but with added responsibility, as we will see in a moment.

1. **They received and administered money** – Acts 11: v. 29-30.
2. **They judged doctrinal issues**; these were matters concerning Bible truth. (Acts 15: v. 1-24)
3. **They provided counsel and resolved conflict.** – Acts 21: v. 18-25
4. **They were commissioned to protect the Church from false teaching.** – Acts 20: v. 20-28
5. **They had to work hard and help the needy.** Acts 20: v. 33-35
6. **Their main role was that of a teacher of God’s word and had to spend lots of time in prayer. (Acts 6: v. 1-4)**
7. **There was always more than one Elder in a Church.** God felt that this was the best way of having **accountability, encouragement, and avoiding burn out for the Elder.**

In the New Testament there was **no such thing as committee Elders.**
They were all “**Active**” doing the work that I listed above.

With this background about Elders in mind, we now proceed to expose the text in 1 Timothy Chapter 3: v. 1-7.

The first thing that we need to do is to understand the context of the passage.

False teachers had arisen, probably from within the Church at Ephesus as Paul had warned in **Acts 20: v. 29-30.**

This false teaching resulted in **ungodly behaviour and the dismissal of two of the leaders. (1 Tim. 1: v. 18-20)**

As a result of this, the reputation of the Church at Ephesus was badly damaged.

The community would have noticed what had happened in the Church.

Paul wanted Timothy to **appoint new leaders** who would be **mature Christians, noted for their godly behaviour.**

The two passages that we will study concerning Church leaders, which the Bible calls, Elders and Deacons, lay down the **qualifications needed for these positions.**

If these qualifications were met, then it was much less likely that they would have problems with future Elders or deacons.

I would like to stop for a moment and explain something important.

At O.I.C. we don’t use these Biblical terms for people in leadership, or in a servant role, either practical, musical, or administration.

Although we should use these Biblical terms, we could change this in the future.

However, the qualifications for these positions, whatever you might call them is still very important, and **these qualifications should be used for anybody in ministry at O.I.C.**

I say this because I don’t want you to think that these messages over the next two weeks don’t apply to you.

These qualifications apply here at O.I.C. because our constitution says that

“We believe the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, to be the inspired word of God without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for the Salvation of men, and the divine and **final authority for all Christian Faith and life**”

This means that these two passages about Elders and Deacons apply to all Church members at O.I.C.

It is important to note that there are different English words used for Elder.

Sometimes the word **Bishop** is used and sometimes the word **Overseer**, or **Manager** is used. These words have their root in the word “Elder” and they mean the same person.

I am going to divide our passage into three sections.

1. The Calling of Elders. – **Chapter 3: v. 1.**
2. The qualities of Elders – **part one** – 3: v. 2-3.
3. The qualities of Elders – **part two** – 3: v. 4-7.

1. **The Calling of Elders - Chapter 3: v. 1.**

- a) **It is an important calling** - The phrase “this is a faithful saying....” In the N.K.J. translation is unique to the pastoral letters. It appears 5 times and it always introduces a **basic truth of great importance.** Whether it is the call to be a full time paid Elder/ Pastor/ Teacher or an Elder who continues his secular work and gives his free time to ministry, the **calling** is very important. **The ministry effectiveness, and the testimony of any church is usually a reflection of its leaders. (Hosea 4: v. 9)**
When somebody is called to be an Elder it is a serious calling.
- b) **It is a limited calling** - In the N.K.J. translation it says “if any man desires the position, in the N.L.T. it says “if any man aspires.....” There is a sense that both of these English words are correct. However, by understanding the original writings in Greek we will fully understand what God wants us to know here. The first Greek word is “**orego**” which means to “stretch oneself to reach out” There are **no internal motives** in the meaning of this word. The second Greek word is “**epithumeo**” which means a **compassionate compulsion.** This is an inward desire and an **inward feeling, coming from the heart.** Putting these two words together we can say that the best people to take up the position of an Elder are those who have an **inward calling from God and are prepared to reach out and stretch themselves beyond what they could normally do.** I believe that the **call of God is the most important thing.** This applies to either full-time ministry, or as a lay Elder who is only paid his expenses, and preaching fee. Jesus calls people who are **available and willing.** The Holy Spirit will equip you for the task, just as He equipped the early disciples.
- c) **It is a responsible, sober and worthy calling** - **Hebrews 13:17** tells us that the oversight of a Church is a big responsibility and that Elders face a stricter judgement from God. (**James 3:1**) Because of the responsibilities of Elders to **lead, teach, discipline, care for people, pray for the sick, be examples to follow and raise up other leaders, it is not something to be taken lightly.** The N.K.J. calls this a “**good work**”. Although the work is a good work, it is very demanding, it demands hard work, and is subject to attacks from Satan and his agents. Sometimes these attacks include people **who profess to follow Jesus!!!**

1 Tim. 5: v. 22 here.

²² Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.

The warning here is to be very careful who you ordain as an Elder or Pastor.

If you choose the wrong person, you share in their sin.

This is a serious charge.

This is why the early Church took ordination of an Elder seriously.

Acts 13: v. 1-3

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.

Acts 14: v. 23.

²³So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

2. The qualities of Elders – part one. – 3: v. 2-3.

In v. 2-3, except for the ability to teach, and being hospitable, all the other qualities mentioned concern **moral behaviour**.

- a) **Blameless** (N.K.J). **Above Reproach** (N.L.T.) - This Greek word means that the person must not be able to be accused of doing something against God's word.
What it really means in the Greek is that there **must not be a sin in the person's life that binds him or holds him captive.**
Paul then goes on to list the things that an Elder must Not be held captive by.
- b) **A one- woman man** - This has nothing to do with whether a person is married or divorced. It has to do with **sexual temptation.**
More Pastors have left the ministry because of being sexually unfaithful than any other sin.
Therefore, this qualification is of **prime-importance.**
The most recent high profile Pastor to resign is Bill Hybels, the founder of the Willow Creek Church in America. If the allegations are true about him, then this is sad for the Church and for the organisation.
This Willow Creek Church movement started the "seeker sensitive movement".
Although I don't agree with all that they did, it nevertheless had a big impact in America and in the U.K.
- c) **Temperate** – this means being in control of yourself.
- d) **Sober Minded / Good Behaviour** - In Britain if a person is regarded as "sober" it means that he is no longer drunk. He was drunk but now the alcohol has gone through his body, he is now sober. In other words, he is in full control.
Being sober minded is being controlled by the Holy Spirit.
In Ephesians 5: v. 18 Paul says "**do not be drunk with wine.... But be filled with the Spirit.**" When the Holy Spirit controls our behaviour **it is always godly.**
- e) **Hospitable** - The Greek word means to "**love strangers**".

(Luke 14: v. 12-14)

¹²Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. ¹³But when you give a feast, invite *the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.* ¹⁴And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

The Pastors in the early Church had to be prepared to provide lots of hospitality to people.

There were no hotels like today and the Inns were full of unsuitable people who were likely to rob you.

Therefore, some Elder's homes became like Hotels to the traveling Christian, especially Christian workers.

Today I still think there is a need for Elders/Pastors to do the same thing.

This Summer I stayed with Wendy in an Elder's home for 8 nights in order to visit my daughter Charis and her twin boys. (show slide of house)

This was the most wonderful hospitality experience that I think I have ever experienced through an Elder.

He had a lovely home and garden, he gave us the best guest room, with a bathroom and toilet next to it. He even lent us his 7 seater big car to travel about so we could all go together as a family.

One day he took us to a restaurant for breakfast.

This man and his wife were about 70 years old. What a wonderful advertisement for hospitality.

Wendy and I have opened up our home many times for hospitality; sometimes it has been quite difficult for us.

Therefore, the experience in England this year was a double blessing to us both.

This doesn't mean that you can all come to the McKenna Hotel in Ikoma, but if you need to, you are welcome.

(show slide of our home)

Some members of O.I.C. have done this and we were delighted to support them for a night or two.

- f) **Able to teach** - There is a difference between **having knowledge** and **being able to teach**. Of course you must have the knowledge, but also be able to communicate that knowledge in **a simple way**, so that **everybody can understand**.
I hope that I am quite simple in my teaching, because I want everybody to understand Biblical Truth.
The ability to communicate difficult things in a simple way is important.
- g) **Not given to wine** - Although this instruction doesn't say that an Elder can't have a glass of wine, it is probably best if an Elder doesn't drink alcohol in a public place, because he is likely to offend somebody, and this would be wrong.
In these ancient times water was not pure, so everybody mixed wine with water to try and destroy the germs.
Although Timothy was reluctant to take wine with his water, his stomach was so bad that Paul instructed him to do this for his health.
In fact, there is some evidence that a little red wine is actually good for your stomach.
(1 Tim. 5: v. 23)
²³ No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.
- h) **Not Violent** - This is self-explanatory. An Elder must never revert to violence.
- i) **Not greedy for money /Covetous**. We can link these two together.
To Covet means to want what you can't have. This can mean money or things, anything in fact.
- j) **Not quarrelsome** - In the Greek this literally means not somebody who **results to violence to solve a problem**. Although **some Pastors might like to knock somebody out**, that is not the way to solve problems.

3. The Qualities of an Elder – Part Two. – v. 4-7.

This section mainly involves the home life of an Elder, his spiritual maturity and also public reputation.

- a) **An Elder must manage his family well.** - Before I was appointed as the Pastor of my last two Churches in the U.K. the leadership team and the congregation **wanted to meet my 4 children.** They wanted to see how they behaved and how I managed my family. Both Churches were very thorough and examined me on all areas listed in this passage.
Paul says that managing a family is like managing a Church.
He was not wrong about that !!! Bringing up children is a great training ground for Pastoring Church members!!
- b) **An Elder must not be a new convert** - Paul says that if a new convert was to take on responsibility as an Elder then **“PRIDE”** would be an issue.
There are many other issues that you could add to pride, if a young convert was to have a leadership responsibility, but Paul highlights pride.
In Bible times it is unlikely that any body under 30 would be considered as an Elder. And he would need to be a mature Christian.
- c) **The final qualification was to have a good reputation with outsiders** - This would perhaps be difficult to find out today.
I have heard of Church leaders contacting previous employers, before a Pastor went into Bible College or seminary training to find out about his reputation at work.
Although you would need to be careful about this, it is nevertheless one of the qualifications needed. If people who know you at work are not happy with your behaviour, then this would be a matter for concern.

So what about Application at O.I.C. today?

1. **All Pastors and Elders must go through a screening process based upon this passage.**
If Churches or leadership teams do not go through this process, then I am sure that they will get problems with people later.
It is not good enough to have a personal recommendation about a friend, **everybody needs to be screened in the correct way.**
If the person is called of God and checked out fully, then you are less likely to have problems with Pastors and Elders.
As you all know it took about 6 months to check me out before I came to O.I.C. and the Church Council at that time are to be congratulated on their checking out of my qualifications, family, and references etc.
2. **Wherever possible, Pastors/ Elders in a Church must not work alone. There needs to be more than one Elder.**
There are lots of reasons for this. These other Elders need not be paid workers, but they do need to be suitably qualified, and to be screened in the same way.
This is a challenge for O.I. C. but it is not impossible to appoint one or more persons to support the Pastor/Elder.
In many Churches around the world, mainly in Presbyterian, Congregational, or Independent Evangelical Churches, there are a team of Elders as well as the Pastor.
This seems to work well in most cases where the selection of Elders is linked to the passage that we have studied.
All of these Elders are doing some kind of work in the Church.
This means some teaching, some pastoral care, some checking for false teaching, some visiting the sick, but ALWAYS, praying together.

It is always a challenge to apply Biblical teaching to practical situations in a Church. However I think that this is an important principle and needs serious consideration by the Church Council and the Church members.

Prayer.