

# **ELDERS: WHO THE LORD IS SEEKING**

## **Lesson Three: Negative Qualifications**

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### **Introduction:**

- A. Before we move on in concluding our look at the qualifications we must be looking for in men to serve as elders, let's remind ourselves of the nature of these qualifications:**
1. First of all: These are the Lord's qualifications, they are not ours to manipulate!
    - a. Even if we feel they are so difficult to meet that we'd never have elders, we must never so reason them away that we alter their force and meaning
    - b. We must take the list of qualifications as a whole – Not picking and choosing which ones we feel are important and which ones we will let slide by.
  2. These qualifications must be presently true of anyone we'd consider appointing as elders:
    - a. Paul said "An elder **MUST** be..." → "Not must have been" or "Someday will be..."
    - b. While there will be varying degrees to which the different men have developed these qualities, they all must be characteristic of them and their lives!
  3. No man is perfect, and we must realize that; however, let's not allow that fact to cloud our thinking in the application of these qualifications! They still mean the same thing!
- B. Now let's consider the type of men the Lord seeks by seeing their family qualifications:**

### **I. THE QUALIFICATIONS IN RELATIONSHIP TO HIS WIFE:**

- A. Must be married & in a right relationship: The husband of one wife (I Tim 3:2, Titus 1:6)**
1. Certainly a man who's living in a sinful marriage is not qualified to be an elder!
    - a. A man who is a polygamist obviously is not the husband of one wife
    - b. A man who is living in an adulterous marriage is not the husband of one wife!
    - c. With either case, they are not only not qualified to serve as an elder, but they need to repent, turning away from those relationships, and back to the Lord!
  2. Not only that, but a single man is not qualified to serve as an elder:
    - a. Some think Paul means "If a man is married he must be..." – Not what Paul said!
    - b. The defense is made that the number ONE is the important word, limiting the number of wives not the state of being married!
    - c. If Paul was just wanting to prevent a polygamist from being an elder why would he not say, "If any man... not guilty of polygamy!" → He didn't say that!
    - d. Is it possible for a man to be the husband of one wife and not be a married man?
    - e. In order for a man to meet the other qualifications scripturally, he must be married!
  3. Just as with a single man, a widower would no longer be qualified to serve as an elder!
    - a. Yes, he may have been the husband of one wife for 50 years; however, his wife has died → He is no longer the husband of one wife!
    - b. The marriage bond ends at death of either party! (**Matt. 22:24-30; Romans 7:2-3**)
    - c. Paul did not say, "If a man has been..." or "If a man was..." but "If a man is..."
    - d. If a man is no longer the husband of one wife, he longer meets the qualifications set forth by Paul he must step down or be required by the church to resign!
      - 1) If you hold the position that if he was the husband of one wife in the past then he is qualified, the same would be true of ANY qualification!
      - 2) "He once was a blameless man..." or "There was a time when he wasn't given to wine..." → That's the logical conclusion of such reasoning!
  4. A good wife is not only a great asset to an elder and his work, but plays a vital role!
    - a. From a bachelor's point of view it is possible to be hospitable to others with the home; however, it is much more difficult to do so without a help-meet
    - b. A wife proves to be essential in giving her husband the much needed support and encouragement as he faces a very difficult work
    - c. Also, having a wife is vital because of the help she can offer as they together counsel married couples and help people with their other problems

- B. Question: Is it possible that a man be married twice, or even more than that, and yet still**

### **be qualified to serve as an elder?**

1. Someone might say, "He's been married twice! He's been the husband of two wives!"
  - a. First of all notice that they've got the wording wrong – It's not "been" but "is"
  - b. If there is a way that he can be married more than once without being the husband of multiple wives, then he would still fit the qualification
2. A widower who remarries would surely still be the husband of one wife!
  - a. We've already noticed how marriage is a relationship that exists only as long as both parties are living → At death they are no longer married!
  - b. When a spouse dies the bond that is created at marriage is broken; therefore, a person can be married twice and only be bound to one person! **(Rom. 7:2-3)**
  - c. If a man does this, he would presently be the husband of one wife which is in perfect harmony with what Paul taught!
3. A man who divorced his wife for the cause of adultery and has married another would still be the husband of only one wife!
  - a. In divorces there may be innocent parties with a right to remarry **(Mat. 19:9)**
  - b. Like with the case of the widower, he would not be bound to his first wife or else his second marriage would be considered adultery – So he can rightfully remarry!
  - c. He too would still be the husband of one wife, not two wives, and thus he would be just as qualified to serve as the man who'd only be married once!
4. In each of these cases a man considering serving as an elder needs to consider...
  - a. If I am divorced, even if she was unfaithful... was I blameless in that situation?
  - b. Also, will the congregation be willing to follow me? Even if a man is fully qualified to serve, if the congregation won't follow him there's no way he can shepherd!

### **C. While this qualification speaks nothing of the man's relationship with his wife, let's make a few observations about that as well:**

1. Don't be fooled into thinking that just as long as a man is the husband of one wife, that the kind of relationship he has with his wife is of no importance! **(I Peter 5:2-3)**
  - a. He must lead the congregation by example – People need to look to how he treats his wife and be able to follow that in their own marriages!
  - b. Elders will help others with their marriages – Impossible to adequately do so if he is not implementing the same instructions in his own marriage relationship!
2. One of the first places we look for the qualifications is in their home! **(I Tim. 3:4)**
  - a. Ruling his house well would include his exercise of headship over his wife!
  - b. In his relationship with his wife is he a brawler? Is he self-willed? Is he covetous? Is he a striker? Is he soon angry with her?
  - c. Does he exhibit good behavior toward her? Is he patient, just, and temperate?

## **II. THE QUALIFICATIONS IN RELATIONSHIP TO HIS CHILDREN:**

### **A. In order to be an elder, he must have children that are faithful **(I Tim. 3:4-5; Titus 1:6)****

1. First of all, he must be a man who rules his own house well:
  - a. The common every day decisions he makes show he is looking out for their best interests! His spiritual decisions bring them closer to God! He leads the entire family in a way that shows his commitment to their salvation is first priority!
  - b. As he guides his children, he makes sure they are making godly choices as well
  - c. Whether or not a man does this would certainly involve a degree of judgment
2. His children must be submissive – Not accused of dissipation or insubordination:
  - a. Dissipation: Living in excess, prodigal living, indulgence in sensual pleasure
  - b. Insubordination: Means disobedient or unruly, not submitting to authority
  - c. Children who possess such attitudes & behavior would bring shame upon the
3. His children must be faithful – Say more about this in just a moment...
4. With these qualifications, Paul gives a reason! His ability in ruling his house well is a reflection on his ability to lead and rule the church of the Lord!
  - a. His ability to get emulation and obedience from his physical children shows he can do so with the children of God!

- b. If a man doesn't fulfill these qualifications, he can't properly shepherd the church!
- c. Someone says, "But that's not fair! He's a good leader & strong Christian but his children..." → If you don't think it's right, remember, it's God's instructions!

**B. Question: Does this mean a man must have more than one child to be qualified?**

1. The word employed here by Paul "TEKNON" literally means more than one child
2. It would not be strange for the Bible to refer to the singular by using the plural!
  - a. Sarah had ONE child, yet, she is spoken of as having nursed children (**Gen. 21:7**)
  - b. Genesis records that God destroyed the cities in which Lot dwelt; however, we know that Lot dwelt in one city, the city of Sodom (**Gen. 19:29**)
3. There are other examples where the plural is stated but it obviously includes the singular:
  - a. Under the old law, if a man died and had no children, his brother would marry his wife and bear children (**Mt. 22:24**)
    - 1) Like with elders, this is a condition that must be met to fulfill a role
    - 2) If the plural forbids the singular - A man with one child has no seed!
  - b. **Acts 2:38-39** → If the plural forbids the singular, then the promise is only for those who have multiple children! Would having only one child negate the promise?
  - c. **I Tim. 5:4** → Would a widow's family be relieved of the obligation to care for her if she has only one child or grandchild? Why?
  - d. If we understand that the plural includes the singular in these cases, why not apply the same rules of language and interpretation to the elder's qualifications?
4. There may be some advantages we could think of for a man having raised more than one child to be faithful; however, could we forbid the man who has only one child?

**C. Question: Do his children, all of his children, have to be faithful Christians?**

1. Some people believe these passages only require the children's faithfulness to their father
  - a. The assumption is made that, "In submission with all reverence" is about their relationship to their father, yet why can't this be in their relationship to God?
  - b. However, consider the reason Paul gives for this qualification: (**I Tim. 3:5**)
    - 1) An elder's job is not to get the members to be subject to him!
    - 2) An elder's work is to feed, lead, and protect a congregation spiritually... to bring them into subjection to Jesus Christ!
  - c. Why would Paul's concern be about submission to the man only & not to God?
2. There's a difference in the qualifications of elders & deacons with regard to their children!
  - a. Deacons are told that they must have children and rule them well (**I Tim. 3:12**)
  - b. Elders must have children that are in subjection & faithful (**I Tim. 3:4; Titus 1:6**)
  - c. If all that was necessary was that his children are kept "in check" to his rule, that they are submissive to him, then why such a difference in the wording?
3. When the Bible refers to a person as being "FAITHFUL" what is it most often referring to?
  - a. It means that they trust in God, seek to please God, and obey God (**Hebrews 11:6**)
  - b. This means more than just acknowledging his existence or having been baptized!
  - c. What if a man had demons for kids? They do believe, but faithful? (**James 2:19**)
  - d. For one to be considered faithful, they have a current and active faith
4. To be consistent how many of his children would need to be faithful to be qualified!
  - a. If not, then what is the percentage? 6 out of 7? 5 out of 7? 4 out of 7? 3 out of 7? 2 out of 7? 1 out of 7? → All can say they have faithful children!
  - b. By the same rule that a man could answer yes to having believing children, he would also have to answer yes to having unbelieving children!
  - c. When we read instructions where it's possible to understand ALL, MOST, or SOME, we take the position that all is required! (**Exodus 20:8; I Cor. 16:2**)
  - d. **Illustration:** Would a plank of oak in the ark been okay? Most were gopher wood! By specifying gopher wood, all other types of wood is excluded!

**D. Question: What if one or more of the children become unfaithful later in life?**

1. Some reason that when a child leaves the home, the father is no longer accountable

- a. The basis for this idea is **Genesis 2:24** → A child leaves father and mother
- b. The question is not “is a man accountable for his child’s actions” – but has he ruled his house in such a way that he is prepared for ruling the church of the Lord?
2. Does a father’s impact and relationship with his child end when the child moves out?
  - a. The child/parent relationship continues on throughout life (**Eph. 6:4; I Tim. 5:4, 8**)
  - b. Even when grown, some are painted as being disobedient to parents (**I Tim. 3:2**)
  - c. It seems that a father’s ability to spiritually lead his children out of the home more closely resembles his leadership in the church than when in the home
3. Consider the implications of the argumentation, “Once a child leaves the home, his father no longer has control over what he does”
  - a. This makes the reason why they are Christians due to being under his control
  - b. Once out from under his control, they decide to not be faithful to Lord!
  - c. If the only reason why they are Christians is because of their father’s control, are they really Christians? Are they really faithful?
  - d. It goes against the very nature with which an elder is supposed to rule! (**I Pet. 5:3**)
4. As noted before, the qualifications are in the PRESENT tense! (**I Tim. 3:4; Titus 1:6**)
  - a. It says, “Having faithful children...” → Not “having had” or “once having”
  - b. Certainly there were some men who would be appointed elders whose kids no longer lived at home → If only while at home was intended, that’d been said!
  - c. If you put this qualification in past tense – You can equally put ANY of them there!
5. No one would doubt a man’s qualification if his children are faithful at home and when they move out of the house! To me, that is the point!

### CONCLUSION:

- A. A man’s family must be examined when he is under consideration for serving as an elder.**
- B. Questions and doubts may remain in our minds in the application of some of these:**
  - In questions and doubts it is never wrong to take the path that we know for sure is right
  - Where questions do linger, every congregation should strive to solve the issues to the satisfaction of its members while never compromising the qualification itself!
  - It is not easy for a man to be qualified to serve an elder! Just because a man does not meet all of these qualifications doesn’t mean they aren’t a good Christian!
  - The bar is raised high and it is raised high for a good reason!