Chapter Thirteen

Elders

In this chapter we will examine the necessary scriptural qualifications for Elders. Some churches go far beyond the scriptural standard on such points as education, wife’s musical ability and many other such non-scriptural requirements. On the other end of the spectrum, there are churches which completely ignore the scriptural standards and lower the qualifications to such a degree that the quality of the ministry is brought to a place of reproach. Some make it so no man can fit the bill and other make it so that any man off the street could fit the bill.

There are definite qualifications found in the Scriptures for the man of God to attain before being considered for the office of Elder. These are found in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The Holy Ghost, through Paul, gave these qualifications to men who were responsible for setting the churches in order. These are not ideals to seek after but, rather, standards which MUST be attained before a man is even considered for the office. In I Timothy 3:1, Paul writes:

“If any man desire the office of a Bishop(Elder), he desireth a good work.”

“DESIRETH” means”to set your heart upon” or “to stretch out after”. It is literally an inward motivations that will cause and individual to study, labor, sacrifice, and to set his house in order, so that he can equip himself for leadership.

Paul refers to preparing for the ministry as a “good work”. I want to impress upon you that “the work of the ministry” is just that, “WORK”. Even the preaching is work. It has been said that one hour of preaching takes as much out of a man as eight hours of hard work. Yet, the preaching event is a small percentage of the work of an Elder or Bishop. We must remember that the burden or the weight of the flock is upon his shoulders.

Next, we will consider the qualifications of an Elder. These can be divided into both Positive and Negative moral, domestic and spiritual requirements. Paul lists five positive moral characteristics to describe the man of God. He must be blameless, temperate, sober, of good behavior, and patient. We will begin our discussion of the qualifications of Elders with these traits.

The first, shown in both I Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6, is that he must be BLAMELESS. This means that the man of God is to be living a life above reproach, not leaving himself open to attacks of the adversary. It is speaking of his general character. His character must be such that the enemies of righteousness will not be able to lay hold upon it. He will be a man who is not consistently or habitually indulging in sinful practices.

An Elder is also to be TEMPERATE as is seen in Titus 1:8 and I Corinthians 9:25. This characteristic refers to self-control. Any man desiring the office of Elder is the be free from extremes and excesses. There is to be a moderation in his personality, appetite, speech, moods, dress and in his entire life-style. In general, every instinct and passion is to be under reasonable control.

Temperance is also reflected in the term “vigilant” listed in I Timothy 3:2. It means that he is alert to and knowledgeable of the devices that Satan uses to ensnare the man of God. Anyone who expects to be in leadership in God’s program must be alert to the devices of Satan as he strives to ensnare him in extremes of lifestyle.

A man of God must also be SOBER, as seen in I Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8. Such a man is cautious and serious without being mechanical or dead. This does not mean that Elders must lead lives that are dull and mundane. On the contrary, he should have a good sense of humor and be excited about life.

Elders are to be men of GOOD BEHAVIOR as seen in I Timothy 3:2. This means that the life of an Elder is to be in good order. One wild burst of “temper” could ruin a man’s entire influence as a leader. He must have himself under control. If a man cannot control or rule himself, he certainly cannot rule the house of God.

The last positive moral qualification we find is that the Elder is to b PATIENT, as seen in I Timothy 3:3. This means that the man of God is not to give up on helping individuals too quickly. He must be one who is not easily discouraged when the “horse bites the hand that feeds it”. He must keep feeding. In his epistle, James teaches the necessity for quiet endurance under stress and annoyances (James 1:2-4). Elders must have the ability to maintain a calm condition while awaiting major events or changes.

Patience comes by trials and the Elder must be fully tried by God. All resistance and carnality must be purged out. The only way that this comes is through trials. The Elder must be willing to suffer wrongfully and release his “rights” for the sake of the flock (I Peter 2:19-21). The man of God must be “people” minded--he is not merely an executive. If he loves strongly enough, he will not notice the inconveniences that others often put upon him.