

A Biblical Church – Part 1: The Office of a Pastor, Bishop, or Elder 1 Timothy 3:1-13

Introduction: God's Design for Church Leadership

In a world full of man-made titles and religious confusion, we must go back to the Word of God to define what a **biblical church** truly is. The foundation begins with **church leadership**—specifically, the office of a **bishop**, also referred to as **pastor** or **elder** in the Bible.

The New Testament outlines exactly **who can serve** as a bishop, **what they must be**, and **what they must do**. Any deviation from this divine blueprint is rebellion against God's order.

This sermon will focus solely on the office of a bishop, in full detail.

I. The Title: Bishop, Pastor, or Elder—One Office, Three Terms

The Bible uses the terms **bishop**, **pastor**, and **elder** interchangeably.

- **Bishop** = Overseer (1 Timothy 3:1)
- **Pastor** = Shepherd (Ephesians 4:11)
- **Elder** = Spiritual Maturity and Office (Titus 1:5, Acts 14:23)

Paul, through the Holy Ghost, in Acts 20, is giving instruction to the elders of the church in Ephesus. And elders is more than one. The church at Ephesus is one church with more than one pastor. Listen to what Paul says to the elders of this church.

""Acts 20:28

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.""

All three (Bishop, Pastor, Elder) refer to **the same biblical office**—a spiritual leader of one local church. The Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. The church is the church of Jesus Christ. A pastor is an overseer. It is not his church. Jesus owns this church.

And we're going to do it the way Jesus told us to do it. He's in charge and far above all men anywhere. I am going to do my absolute best to look at His words and follow His instructions.

II. The Qualifications of a Bishop

Each qualification within the Bible is essential for a man to serve as a pastor (bishop/elder). These are not ideals—they are divine requirements from the Word of God. They are not optional. Any man who does not meet these qualifications is not fit to lead God's flock.

We're going to go over the complete list of the combined biblical qualifications for a bishop (pastor/elder), taken from both **1 Timothy 3:1–7** and **Titus 1:5–9**, with each requirement tied to its Scripture reference:

1. **Blameless** (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6) – He must be free from scandal or disqualifying sin. This does not mean sinless, but that he is not guilty of anything that would cause reproach or disgrace. He lives above reproach, with a reputation for integrity.
2. **The husband of one wife** (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6) – He must be faithfully married to one woman, never divorced and remarried while the former spouse lives. He is a moral example of purity and faithfulness.
3. **Having faithful children** (Titus 1:6) – His children must be believers who follow Christ. A man's leadership is first proven in the home, and if his children reject the faith, he is disqualified.
4. **Not accused of riot or unruly** (Titus 1:6) – His children must not be living in open rebellion or sin. If his household is disorderly, he is not fit to lead the church of God.
5. **Vigilant** (1 Timothy 3:2) – Spiritually alert, discerning, and attentive to danger. He watches over his life, family, and flock to guard against compromise and corruption.
6. **Sober** (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8) – He has sound judgment and discipline over his emotions and behavior. Not careless, silly, or unstable.
7. **Of good behaviour** (1 Timothy 3:2) – His life is orderly and decent. He is modest, disciplined, and consistent in Christian living.
8. **Given to hospitality** (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8) – He shows love and kindness, especially to strangers or those in need. His home and heart are open.
9. **A lover of good men** (Titus 1:8) – He enjoys the company of godly men and surrounds himself with those who love and serve the Lord.
10. **Apt to teach** (1 Timothy 3:2) – He must be skilled and confident in explaining and defending biblical doctrine, both in public and private.

11. **Holding fast the faithful word** (Titus 1:9) – He clings tightly to the Bible as his authority. He doesn't compromise the truth, even when it's unpopular.
12. **Able to exhort and convince the gainsayers** (Titus 1:9) – He must be able to persuade and correct those who contradict Scripture. He defends the truth boldly and skillfully.
13. **Not given to wine** (1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7) – He abstains from alcohol. He is not controlled by drink or any substance, and avoids all appearance of evil.
14. **No striker** (1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7) – He is not violent, abusive, or physically aggressive. He deals with people gently and respectfully.
15. **Not greedy of filthy lucre** (1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7) – He does not love money or use ministry for financial gain. His heart is in the Gospel, not greed.
16. **Patient** (1 Timothy 3:3) – He bears with people patiently. He doesn't explode in anger or make rash decisions. He reflects Christ's gentleness.
17. **Not a brawler** (1 Timothy 3:3) – He is peaceable and not combative. He stands for truth without being combative or obnoxious.
18. **Not covetous** (1 Timothy 3:3) – He doesn't chase wealth, possessions, or status. He lives for eternity, not for earthly gain.
19. **One that ruleth well his own house** (1 Timothy 3:4) – His household is in biblical order. His wife and children respect and follow his spiritual leadership.
20. **Having his children in subjection with all gravity** (1 Timothy 3:4) – His children are obedient and reverent. They respect his authority and live under his godly example.
21. **Not selfwilled** (Titus 1:7) – He is not arrogant or self-centered. He submits to God's will above his own preferences.
22. **Not soon angry** (Titus 1:7) – He is not easily provoked or hot-tempered. He keeps a calm and Christlike spirit under pressure.
23. **Just** (Titus 1:8) – He is fair, impartial, and committed to what is right in the eyes of God.
24. **Holy** (Titus 1:8) – He is set apart to God, living a life of moral purity, prayer, and obedience to the Lord.
25. **Temperate** (Titus 1:8) – He keeps himself under control. He avoids excess, extremes, and uncontrolled passions.

26. **Not a novice** (1 Timothy 3:6) – He is not a new Christian. He has grown in faith, endured trials, and proven himself grounded in the Word.
27. **Must have a good report of them which are without** (1 Timothy 3:7) – He is respected in the community. Even unbelievers recognize his honesty, humility, and faithfulness.

These qualifications are non-negotiable. They are the divine standard for anyone who would lead God's flock. If a man doesn't meet these qualifications, that man cannot be ordained as a pastor to lead a church. Pastors who are already ordained must continue to meet these qualifications.

And pastors need to know them well so they aren't ordaining men who are not qualified to be pastors.

III. What Disqualifies a Man from Being a Pastor?

- Being a woman (1 Timothy 2:12). A pastor, bishop, or elder is a man. Period. No exceptions.
- Being divorced and remarried while the former spouse is alive. A pastor cannot be divorced. I don't care what any man says. The Bible says so and God is the authority.
- Having no children or children who are rebellious, unruly, or unbelieving. I believe children means at least one child. If you ask someone who has one child, "Do you have children?" they would say yes.
- Being a new convert. You must have experience. People learn and gain experience at different rates and levels. A pastor must be experienced.
- Being unable to teach or handle sound doctrine. A pastor must have sound doctrine from the Bible. Salvation by grace through faith. The Trinity. Eternal security.
- Being angry, prideful, greedy, violent, covetous, or worldly. A pastor must be a giving person. He must care for others more than himself.
- Lacking a good testimony among those outside the church. You can't be a man that is currently doing wicked things outside the church. Every man has a past that might not be so great. But those things must be in the distant past.

The office of a bishop is not open to interpretation—it is a sacred trust. The office is ordained by God himself. There are only two offices in the New Testament church and that is pastor and deacon. So, this is a very important office that God set forth himself. We take it seriously.

IV. Conclusion: God's Standard Must Not Be Lowered

""Matthew 16:18

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.""

Jesus is the rock and will build the church upon Jesus Christ.

When we follow God's pattern, we see God's blessing. Jesus promised to build **His** church—not ours, not man's version—but His. And He does so as we follow **His Word** and obey **His instructions**.

God's church grows in power, purity, and purpose when it's led by qualified men, governed by truth, and submitted to Christ. Real revival doesn't come through personality, performance, or programs—it comes through obedience.

When we do things God's way, we don't have to beg for results. He said He will build it.

""Psalm 127:1

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.""

If we want lasting fruit, we must get out of the way and let Christ be the head by honoring **His structure, His Word, and His Spirit**.

""1 Corinthians 14:40

Let all things be done decently and in order.""

""1 Peter 5:2-3

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.""

God has given us a clear blueprint for pastoral leadership. Churches must stop lowering the standard, compromising the qualifications, or inventing new offices. There is no office of minister, prophet, prophetess, reverend, evangelist, or any other title you can come up with. Two offices: pastor and deacon. And they are held by qualified MEN – not women or children.

We need men who meet **every** biblical qualification and lead with truth, humility, and conviction. If you are a man out there who meets these requirements, and you want to be a pastor to lead a church anywhere out there, contact me. We need more Biblical churches with men who go out soul winning, get people baptized, and teach the Bible.

Let us return to God's pattern and raise up a generation of pastors who truly honor His Word.

Now, let's go over some frequently asked questions. And this is where it can become more difficult. But let's answer these the best we can according to God's word.

V. Frequently Asked Questions About Being a Pastor

Q: Can a single man be a pastor?

A: No. A bishop must be "the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2) and "have faithful children" (Titus 1:6). These are not symbolic—they are literal qualifications proving his leadership.

Q: How many children must a man have to be a pastor?

A: The word children, in the dictionary, is used to refer to one or more young people. One or more. We can argue about this all day, but I believe the term children in the Bible, at times, refers to one child. Do you have children? Parents with one child would say, "Yes, we have children." One child meets the qualification but that one child must be faithful, not unruly, and be in subjection with all gravity.

Q: What if a pastor's child rebels later in life?

A: If the rebellion happened under his authority in the home, it disqualifies him. If the child departs after adulthood but was raised faithfully, discernment and case-by-case judgment applies.

Q: Can a divorced man serve as pastor?

A: No. "The husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2) excludes those who have divorced and remarried while their former spouse still lives. A pastor must be an example of covenant-keeping. And being divorced shows that the house wasn't ruled well. A man that has been separated from his wife for months and years is also showing that he doesn't rule his house well. He shouldn't be in a leadership role within a church.

Q: What if a man meets most but not all qualifications?

A: Then he is **not qualified**. These are not suggestions or ideals—they are mandatory requirements (1 Timothy 3:2 “must be...”). One failure is enough to disqualify.

Q: Can a man become qualified later in life?

A: Yes—if he repents, meets all qualifications, and has a proven testimony over time. But former disqualifications (like divorce) may remain permanent.

Q: What if the community respects a man, but he’s not biblically qualified?

A: Respect from people does not override Scripture. We must “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). The word of God stands.

Q: What if a man is gifted in preaching but lacks some of the traits?

A: Gifting is not the same as qualification. Many gifted men are not called to the office if they do not meet the requirements. Some men only want to preach. Can you imagine if I only preached here? Do you realize what would happen? Do you all think that I only preach? I take care of many, many things that you might not realize. Preaching alone doesn't qualify a man.

Listen, we could go on forever with different cases. Every ordination here will be on a case by case basis. And we will go by the Bible, by the Scriptures. A man must not be a novice in order to be ordained a pastor. He must know how to take care of things and get things done.

Let's pray.