

Church Officer Qualifications

*This list of qualifications for officers in Christ's church is sourced primarily from 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. While all of Scripture is useful for informing the church's search for officers and consideration of potential officers, these are the **locus classicus** texts. The terms describing church officer qualifications are organized under six headings: Personal Piety, Relational Godliness, Family Piety, Giftedness, Christian Experience, & Reputation. An asterisk indicates that the qualification is listed for deacons (which necessarily implies that it is a qualification for elders, who function as deacons in the absence of deacons).*

I. Personal Piety

- a. Temperate (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8) - Can refer generally to careful moderation in lifestyle, but certainly can apply specifically to moderation in the use of wine. In this context, refers to spiritual alertness, vigilance, and clear-headedness.
- b. Prudent / Sensible (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8) – Refers to good sense of judgment, especially when under pressure or when a weighty matter is on the line.
- c. *Respectable / Dignified (1 Tim. 3:2, 8) – Officers need to command respect in their decision-making, counsel, and bearing as honorable men.
- d. *Not addicted to wine (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7) – Officers must have mastery over any substances they use, including alcohol, prescription medicines, and food. This does not mean that someone with a past history of alcoholism, drug abuse/addiction, or gluttony is disqualified. See 1 Cor. 6:11.
- e. *Free from the love of money / fond of sordid gain (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7) – Must not be pursuing church office for money, fame, power, control, personal influence, prestige, respect, flattery, honor from men, self-advancement in business, etc. He must not be seeking dishonest gain in any sphere of life.
- f. *Has Christian conviction and a clean conscience (1 Tim. 3:9; Titus 1:9) – “Mystery of the faith” refers to revealed truths of the Christian Faith found in Scripture and summarized in our doctrinal standards. He knows to whom he belongs, to whom the church belongs, and he is assured of his salvation.
- g. Not self-willed (Titus 1:7) – The Greek term here literally describes a delight in oneself and implies arrogance along the lines of “my way or the highway.” Church officers must be teachable and open to being persuaded by brothers of good faith and common convictions. They must be humble of heart and willing to yield and submit to their brothers. See James 3:17.
- h. Devout / Holy (Titus 1:8) – Refers here to sincere piety and purity of heart in service to Christ and His church. Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, “It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.” See 2 Timothy 2:21.
- i. Just (Titus 1:8) – Being fair-minded and righteous in rendering judgments when situations arise, church officers seek to keep and uphold God's law without partiality or personal favoritism. See James 2:1.

- j. Loving what is good (Titus 1:8) – Above even his personal affection for who people are, the church officer is committed to what God defines as good and pleasing in His sight. See Philippians 4:8.
 - k. Self-controlled (Titus 1:8) - Church officers need to be able to curb excesses and sinful habits. This does not mean that they are free of the occasional temptation to sometimes overindulge in otherwise lawful things and activities, but they should be men whom the church can count upon to exercise control over their appetites and any problematic dispositions when they realize them or are otherwise confronted about them. See 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.
- II. Relational Godliness
- a. Not pugnacious or quick-tempered (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7) – When confronted with conflict or disagreement, church officers must be able to control their emotions, speech, and physical reactions. One who gets into fights (other than in self-defense) or is physically abusive is not fit to serve as an officer in Christ’s church. See James 1:19, 20; Proverbs 14:17; 16:32.
 - b. Not quarrelsome (2 Tim. 2:23, 24) – This expands on the last category, but refers more to a disposition or desire to get into fights. Church officers must have backbone enough to wade into tense debates or engage in argument, but they must not be contentious or censorious. The kind of man who is always looking for a fight (i.e., physical, philosophical, political, theological) is not fit to serve as an officer in Christ’s church. John Calvin commented that the elder must be a man “who knows how to bear injuries peacefully and with moderation, who excuses much, who swallows insults, who does not make himself dreaded for his harsh severity, nor rigorously exact all that is due to him. The man who is not contentious is he who avoids disputes and quarrels...”
 - c. Gentle / Kind to all (1 Tim. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:24) – This is a quality that all Christians should possess and cultivate (Titus 3:1-2; Phil. 4:5). But the church officer especially needs to be gentle to those who are harsh (1 Pet. 2:18), able to overlook minor sins and transgressions against him, forbearing and patient with others, and able to exemplify gentleness even when criticized or when embroiled in sharp disagreement and controversy.
 - d. *Not double-tongued (1 Tim. 3:8) – Church officers must tell the truth and be free of contradiction. See 2 Corinthians 1:17, 18. Thomas Vincent defined being double-tongued as “saying one thing and meaning another, and making different representations to different people about the same thing.”
- III. Family Piety – *all four of these explicitly apply to both deacons and elders*
- a. *Husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6) – This does not mean that you have to be married in order to be an officer. This does not mean that you are automatically disqualified due to a divorce or remarriage (it depends upon the circumstances of your past and present situations). A polygamist cannot be an officer in the church. Men who are unfaithful or unchaste (includes the nurture of sinful

desires or self-conceptions or deviant sexual identities) cannot serve as officers in the church. Men who do not love their wives as they ought (e.g., Eph. 5:23-30) cannot serve as officers in the church for which Christ the church's bridegroom and head laid down His very life.

- b. *Manages his household well (1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12) – A church officer must be the ruler or manager of his home, and the management of his household cannot entirely (or primarily) devolve upon his wife. A church officer must be able to manage his household affairs well (as indicated by the last two Family Piety qualifications below), otherwise how can he possibly be expected to manage the affairs of the church with any aptitude? We are looking for men who manage their household in a manner that we would like to see scaled up or imitated in the church (i.e., in the church's affairs and in the other families of the church).
- c. *Obedient / faithful children (1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12; Titus 1:6) – This does not mean to that he must have any children of his own in order to be an officer. "Children" here specifically refers to those who are still living in the home and/or under the father's authority (i.e., dependent on their father). The term "believing" in Titus 1:6 should rather be "faithful" (as in, to their father's moral regulations) in light of the second half of the verse. Church officers must have their children under control in terms of outward obedience and submissiveness. The Lord alone is lord of the heart.
- d. *Wives must be dignified and not given to gossip (1 Tim. 3:11) – The wives of church officers must be committed to their husbands, godly (able to control their tongues and their attitudes), and active (as far as possible) as helpers to their husbands in the church where appropriate. See Titus 2:3-5.

IV. Giftedness

- a. Hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8) – An elder in particular must be one who loves to extend hospitality and to host people (typically, but not always, in his home). This is a quality that all Christians – and churches – should possess and cultivate (1 Pet. 4:8; Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2). We are to share our gifts and resources with one another, while maintaining a healthy respect for private property. We are to be kind, friendly, gracious, loving, generous, and helpful where we can be. Elders set the pace in the congregation in this area.
- b. Able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24) – This is a requirement for *all* elders, and not limited to pastors (i.e., *Teaching* Elders) to the exclusion of Ruling Elders. While all preaching is a form of teaching, not all teaching is preaching. Elders do not need great gifts of public speaking or preaching, but they must be able, in the words of Lawrence Eyres, to interact "with people on a one-to-one basis, applying the Word to the needs of the individual."
- c. Able to exhort and refute (Titus 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:25) – Elders must have a good working knowledge of Scripture and Christian doctrine. They need to have confidence to hold fast to the doctrines of the Christian faith and to confront error when necessary and appropriate for them to do so. They must be competent "both to exhort in

sound doctrine and to rebuke those who contradict.” In this, they need to have the ability to apply the Word of God to people, situations, circumstances, and controversies.

V. Christian Experience

- a. Not a new convert (1 Tim. 3:6) – Literally, this translates to “newly planted.” The church endangers new converts when it puts them into positions of leadership (ordained or otherwise), for they tend to “become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.” Pride and self-regard is deadly, dangerous, and fatal in the church (see Matt. 18:1-20). Pride kills our spiritual sensitivity to the truth, and God opposes the proud even as He stands against the devil. Physical age is no factor. An older man who is a recent convert is not yet fit to serve as an officer. Outstanding abilities and gifts (or learning) cannot cancel out or nullify this requirement. Consider the gravity of the warning!
- b. *Tested and beyond reproach (1 Tim. 3:10) – Church officers should be men who have demonstrated that they can function in the office to which they are called. Officer training and examinations by the session and the church itself are helpful (and in our polity, required) means by which we test men as congregations consider whom they ought to nominate and elect to office. Also, we frequently notice how certain men seem to function in officer-like leadership or service roles almost by nature or because of an unpretentious zeal for the church, and so should be considered for church office.

VI. Reputation

- a. Has a good reputation with those outside of the church (1 Tim. 3:7) – It is sadly the case that many men put on a facade of piety and religion in church that falls away when they operate in the “secular world” in the presence of unbelievers (or those who do not attend their church). A hypocritical or two-faced man is not qualified to serve as an officer in the church. If a man has suffered (even legal injury) in the world for the sake of Christ, that is very different than suffering for doing evil. The former is not disqualifying in the least, but the latter is certainly disqualifying, unless repentance and necessary restitution has been made (see Luke 19:1-10).
- b. *Above reproach / blameless (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6) – This does not require sinless perfection. A church officer, like Job (see Job 1:1), must be a man of exemplary Christian character and integrity. He must be a man who lives a godly and consistent life, and he must demonstrate repentance when appropriate and needed. He must be a man who is not living in habitual, unrepentant sin. When past sins (committed either before or after becoming a Christian) may be an issue, consider 1 Corinthians 6:11 as well as the reality that the promise of eternal life and present transformation does not nullify the persistence of *certain* temporal consequences. Consult with the pastors and current elders of the church for guidance.