

Why Do Experience and Reputation Matter?

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:4–7; Titus 1:6

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Leaders gain credibility through consistent victory. We naturally gravitate to people with the longest track records of success and expertise in the areas we need it most.

That said, if you're looking for advice on marriage and parenting, you wouldn't turn to the person whose home life is perpetually in shambles. Nor would you seek help in controlling your words and cultivating holiness from someone known for foul language and crude humor. When it comes to godliness, spiritual growth, and life in the body of Christ, a man must practice before he can lead.

First Timothy 3:4–5 says that an overseer must be “one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?).” An elder's home life is an essential consideration. Before he can lead in the church, he must demonstrate his spiritual leadership within the context of his family.

Many men lead their homes but don't lead them very well. By implication, a man's home includes his resources. A man may be spiritually and morally qualified to be an elder, be skilled in teaching, and have a believing wife and children who follow his leadership in the home, but if he doesn't rule his household well in the financial realm, he is disqualified from spiritual leadership. Stewardship of possessions is a critical test of a man's leadership. His home is the proving ground where his leadership capabilities can be clearly demonstrated.

Furthermore, a leader in the church must keep “his children under control with all dignity” (1 Timothy 3:4). That qualification is not meant to exclude men without children, but merely assumes children will be present. The Greek word translated “under control” is a military term that refers to lining up in rank under those in authority. “Dignity” includes courtesy, humility, and competence. It could be translated “respect” or “stateliness.” An elder's children are to be respectful and well disciplined, bringing honor to their parents.

In Titus 1:6, Paul adds that an elder must have “children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.” The Greek word translated “believe” refers in that context to believing the gospel. An elder's children must believe the message he's preaching and teaching. If they are unbelievers, they rob his ministry of credibility.

In addition to being experienced in leading his home, an overseer must be experienced in living the Christian life. He must not be “a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6).

The Greek word translated “new convert” means “newly planted.” An elder should not be a new convert or newly baptized. Instead, he must be mature in the faith. Since maturity is relative, the standard of maturity will vary from congregation to congregation. But the point is that an elder must

be more spiritually mature than the people he leads.

The word for “conceited” means “to wrap in smoke” or “to puff up.” In its figurative sense it refers to being clouded with pride. New Christians must guard against pride that is concealed by a false sense of spirituality. Elevating spiritually immature believers to leadership alongside mature godly men will cause them to battle with pride.

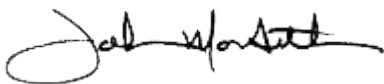
An elder must also “have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:7). A man chosen to lead the church must have a reputation in the community for righteousness, love, kindness, generosity, and goodness. All people won’t agree with his theology, and he will no doubt face antagonism when he takes a stand for God’s truth. Nevertheless, those outside the church must recognize him as a man of impeccable reputation. How can any man have an impact on his community if that community does not respect him? Such an individual can do nothing but bring “reproach” or disgrace on the cause of Christ.

I can’t count how many men have disgraced the Lord and His church because of their sins. That’s why an elder must be blameless in his reputation. Incidentally, this qualification isn’t limited to sins committed as an elder; it also takes into account any sins in the past that result in a bad reputation. A man’s *ongoing* reputation in the community must be considered before he is placed into spiritual leadership.

Elders need a good reputation with those outside the church so they don’t fall into “the snare of the devil.” Satan tries hard to entrap spiritual leaders to destroy their credibility and integrity. Like all Christians, elders have areas of weakness and vulnerability, and they will sometimes fall into one of his traps. Elders must be particularly discerning and cautious to avoid the snares of the enemy so they can be effective in leading others away from his traps.

Let me remind you that elder qualifications don’t just apply only to elders. As we saw in the last post, church leaders are examples for other believers. Except for those qualities specific to church leadership, the character traits of elders are required of all Christians. And as ordinary Christians work out holiness in their private and public lives, God will call some to lead in the church. But only those who already practice good character are useful to Him in a leadership role.

Now let’s hear from you. From the congregation’s point of view, what are the most important character qualities a church leader should have? Why are those qualities particularly important to members of the church? Does the lack of them always have a negative impact?



(Adapted from [Divine Design](#). All Scripture quotations are from the [New American Standard Bible](#).)

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