

Biblical Qualifications of a Pastor

The Bible specifically speaks about the qualifications for those who will lead a congregation of people. These qualifications have been the same for almost 2,000 years. Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of these qualifications as the “senior pastor” of the Church.

Above Reproach (Titus 1:6, 7; 1 Tim 3:2)

This is the overarching, summarizing characteristic. You will find similar (but not identical) lists in First Timothy and Titus. Living a life above reproach is the first requirement in both lists and Titus repeats it. The other items on the list explain what “above reproach” means. If we peruse the two lists, as well as First Peter, we find 17 qualifications of an elder who is above reproach.

1. A pastor must be devoted to his wife; one-woman man (Titus 1:6; 1 Tim 3:2). The pastor’s marriage illustrates Christ’s love for His church—His bride (Eph. 5:22 ff.). A Pastor must love his wife exclusively with his mind, will and emotions and not just his body.
2. A pastor’s children must be in submission, though not perfect (Titus 1:6; 1 Tim 3:4-5). If a man does not know how to manage his own family, he will not know how to take care of God’s church. The first flock for a pastor is his own family as Pastor Dad. A Pastor’s qualification for the church starts in his home management as he leads them up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).
3. A pastor is a faithful steward (Titus 1:7). Here the term used is overseer (Greek episkopos). It is not another office, but a functional title of the elder. It is what he does. He is a steward, a manager of God’s resources and Jesus’ flock. He takes responsibility, but not ownership.
4. A pastor must be humble — not arrogant (Titus 1:7). A pastor must constantly demonstrate the gospel by admitting when he is wrong and assuming responsibility and restoring relationships.
5. A pastor must be gentle — not quick-tempered (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3). No man will be of any use in God’s work that is quick-tempered. The difference between how Jesus demonstrated anger is that He was angry at the abuse of others in the name of religion and the dishonoring of God. We get angry at how it affects us.
6. A pastor must be sober — not a drunkard (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3). This is not just indulgence in alcohol but is idiomatic for any behavior that fuels addictive responses.
7. A pastor must be peaceful — not violent (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3). A pastor should not inflict violence through his words. He is to be a peacemaker.
8. A pastor must have financial integrity — not greedy for gain (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3; 1 Peter 5:3). A pastor is to be upright in his financial dealings and not accused of pursuing money over the building of God’s people.
9. A pastor must be hospitable (Titus 1:8; 1 Tim 3:2). A pastor’s home is to be open for others to enjoy. A pastor’s home is not a heaven on earth, but rather a place of ministry.

10. A pastor must be a lover of good (Titus 1:8). A pastor genuinely loves what is good. He does not just think he should love it.
11. A pastor must be self-controlled (Titus 1:8; 1 Tim 3:2). Self-control is a characterization of every area of a pastor's life: diet, time, mouth, exercise, relationships, sex, and money.
12. A pastor must be upright (Titus 1:8). He has integrity in his relationships with and treatment of others.
13. A pastor must be holy (Titus 1:8). His life is devoted wholeheartedly to Jesus externally and internally.
14. A pastor must be able to teach (Titus 1:9; 1 Tim 3:2). All of the other qualifications are character qualities. This is the only ability-based requirement. He is to be able to teach and defend the sound doctrine of the Word of God, not just communicate in an excellent manner. His teaching can be to one or two, to twenty, to a hundred or to a thousand. Most of the churches in Crete were house churches. The elders were to defend the faith once delivered to the saints against the numerous false teachers that arose.
15. A pastor must be spiritually mature (1 Tim 3:6). Positions of authority without spiritual maturity soon lead to the trap of pride. When pride grows in a man, sin abounds.
16. A pastor must be respectable (1 Tim 3:7). That does not mean that everyone must like him or even appreciate him. It means that there is no credible witness to an ongoing sinful behavior.
17. A pastor must be an example to the flock (1 Peter 5:3). Elders are examples of biblical expressions sexually, time management, marriage, parenting, worship, relationships and any other way. A pastor should be someone your sons could pattern their life after and the kind of man your daughter should marry.

Conclusion

What should you do if an pastor violates any of these requirements? 1 Timothy 5:19-20 warns not to accuse a pastor (*elder*) flippantly or irresponsibly. Matthew 18:15-18 gives the steps: 1) Go to the pastor alone. 2) If still unsatisfied, go with one or two another spiritual, discerning people. 3) If still unsatisfied, take the matter before the church for its determination. If accusations are verified and the pastor remains unrepentant, rebuking him before all is the next biblical step.