

# Some Challenging Questions (2) — Lesson 19

Elders: Household Limits, Marriage Questions, and the Leadership Crisis in the Churches

## Thesis

---

God's qualifications for elders are both firm and merciful. They are firm because the flock must be protected. They are merciful because God does not require perfection—He requires proven faithfulness, stability, and spiritual maturity. Some cases are settled by direct Scripture. Other cases demand wise judgment by the local church, because the local church must live with the outcome.

---

## Question 1 — Is a Man Automatically Disqualified as an Elder by Adult Unfaithful Children?

---

Two key texts must be kept together:

- “having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion” (Titus 1:6)
- “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?)” (1 Timothy 3:4–5)

### The controlling phrase: “his own household”

Paul ties the qualification to **a man's ability to rule what is actually his to rule**—his household.

That matters because God built adulthood on separation and accountability:

- “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife...” (Genesis 2:24)

When a son becomes a husband, he leaves his father's house.

When a daughter establishes her own home, she is no longer under her father's authority.

That is not rebellion—it is God’s created order.

So the question must be asked honestly:

### **Over whose house does the man rule?**

Scripture answers: **his own.**

Not his adult children’s.

## **What the local church must not do**

The church must not turn this qualification into a superstition:

*“If an adult child falls away, the father must have failed, therefore he is disqualified.”*

That kind of reasoning goes beyond Scripture and becomes a cruel, man-made law.

The Bible teaches personal accountability:

- “So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.” (Romans 14:12)
- “Each one will bear his own load.” (Galatians 6:5)
- “The soul who sins will die.” (Ezekiel 18:20)

A father is responsible to lead, teach, correct, discipline, and model righteousness.

But he cannot override free will.

No human parent can “convert” a heart by force.

## **What Scripture does allow the church to consider**

Saying “not automatic” does not mean “never relevant.”

An adult child’s unfaithfulness may still raise legitimate questions, depending on what it reveals.

### **1) The father may have ruled harshly, not righteously**

Some men rule with intimidation, not dignity.

They produce outward compliance and inward resentment.

God warns fathers:

- “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4)
- “Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.” (Colossians 3:21)

If a man’s home was ruled by temper, hypocrisy, instability, or cruelty, the church must not pretend the house was “managed well.”

## **2) The adult children’s public conduct may destroy his influence locally**

An elder must have credibility:

- “He must have a good reputation with those outside the church...” (1 Timothy 3:7)

Sometimes adult children live in the same area and bring constant scandal to the family name. That may limit the man’s effectiveness, even if he did right.

This is not a formula.

It is a judgment matter for the local church.

### **Bottom line answer**

No, a man is **not automatically** disqualified by adult unfaithful children.

But the local church must evaluate:

- what kind of father he truly was
- what the household demonstrated while the children were under his authority
- whether his present influence is strong enough to shepherd effectively

Some lines are clear.

Some cases require wisdom.

---

## **Question 2 — Is an Elder Automatically Disqualified When His Wife Dies?**

---

The qualification is repeated:

- “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife...” (1 Timothy 3:2)

- “If any man is above reproach... the husband of one wife...” (Titus 1:6)

## **What Scripture states plainly**

Paul does not say, “must have been married once.”

Paul says the man **must be** the husband of one wife.

That makes widowhood a serious question, because the qualification is not presented as optional.

## **Why this requirement is wise**

The Bible does not explain every reason for every qualification, but wisdom is not hard to see.

A faithful wife often provides essential strength to the work of shepherding:

- balance under criticism
- insight into people and situations
- support in emotional burdens
- protection in delicate circumstances
- stability when decisions are attacked

The work of an elder is not light.

God’s requirements are not random.

## **What the local church must decide**

Scripture gives no detailed “policy” for every circumstance:

- how a widowed elder should transition
- what temporary adjustments are needed
- how the church should support him
- what role he may still play in teaching and mentoring

But Scripture does define the standard.

A church should not treat the qualification as meaningless.

## **Bottom line answer**

Widowhood raises a real Scriptural issue because the text says the elder **must be** the husband of one wife.

The local church must handle it with both firmness and compassion—never twisting Scripture, never treating a man as disposable, and never endangering the flock.

---

## **Question 3 — Does a Man With One Child Meet the Qualification of Having “Children”?**

---

The qualification refers to children like this:

- “keeping his children under control with all dignity” (1 Timothy 3:4)
- “having children who believe” (Titus 1:6)

### **The issue is not quantity, but household leadership**

The qualification is not about how many children a man has.

It is about whether his home demonstrates:

- order
- discipline
- respect
- submission
- spiritual credibility

A father, a mother, and one child is a household.

That household can be ruled well or ruled poorly.

### **Scripture uses plural “children” to speak of offspring generally**

The Bible itself proves that “children” can refer to offspring without requiring multiple children.

#### **1) Sarah spoke of “children” though she had one son**

“Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son...” (Genesis 21:7)

## **2) Levirate law shows “children” fulfilled by one son**

The question was raised: “if a man dies, having no children...” (Matthew 22:24)

But the law shows fulfillment through “the firstborn son” (Deuteronomy 25:5–6).

One child satisfies the issue of offspring.

## **3) Fathers are commanded about “children,” even if they have one**

“Fathers... do not provoke your children to anger...” (Ephesians 6:4)

No father is exempt because he has only one child.

## **4) 1 Timothy itself proves the point by parallel wording**

“But if any widow has children or grandchildren...” (1 Timothy 5:4)

A widow with one child still “has children” in the sense of offspring, and that changes her situation entirely.

## **Bottom line answer**

Yes, one child can meet the Scriptural idea of “children” as offspring.

The church must evaluate what the home demonstrates, not invent a rule about family size that God never gave.

---

## **Question 4 — Is a Man Who Divorced and Remarried With the Lord’s Approval Disqualified to Serve as an Elder?**

---

The requirement again is:

- “the husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)

## **What the qualification demands**

The elder must be:

- married

- lawfully married
- devoted to one wife in God's sight

A man must not be living in adultery.

A man must not be bound to a former covenant while living in another.

## Scripture's rules for lawful remarriage

Marriage is binding:

- "For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living..." (Romans 7:2)

Death ends the bond:

- "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free..." (1 Corinthians 7:39)

Jesus named sexual immorality as the ground that permits putting away and marrying another:

- "Whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9)

So the real question is not, "Has he been married before?"

The real question is, "Is his present marriage lawful before God?"

## What the church must never do

Some try to change the phrase "husband of one wife" into:

*"married only once in his lifetime."*

But that is not what the text says.

The Bible does not use those words.

Other qualifications are clearly present-tense realities:

- not pugnacious
- not greedy

- temperate
- respectable
- hospitable
- able to teach

The church does not demand a man “never struggled in the past.”

The church demands that his life now demonstrates the required character.

The same honest reading must be applied here.

## **Bottom line answer**

If a man is lawfully married in God’s sight—one wife, pure covenant, no adultery—then he is not disqualified simply because he has been married previously.

If his remarriage is unlawful, the issue is not “elder qualification.”

The issue is repentance and fellowship with God.

---

## **The Leadership Crisis — And Waupaca Will Not Be Exempt**

---

Churches do not collapse overnight.

They collapse slowly when leadership dries up.

Some churches have no elders because there are no qualified men.

Some have no elders because qualified men were opposed, stalled, or destroyed by carnal resistance.

Some have elders in name, but not in shepherding labor.

And many churches are living on borrowed strength from another generation.

We are watching a time when:

- discipline is avoided
- holiness is treated as harsh
- conviction is labeled as “unloving”
- strong men are discouraged

- faithful women are undervalued
- and children are raised without a serious expectation of godliness

The church cannot survive like that.

Waupaca will not be exempt unless we take leadership training seriously, early, and constantly.

- “but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:15)

## **Leadership is not born in a meeting — it is formed in a home**

If we want elders tomorrow, we must build men today.

That starts when boys are small enough to sit at a kitchen table.

A boy must be taught:

- how to respect truth
- how to repent
- how to control his tongue
- how to lead without pride
- how to serve without recognition
- how to love holiness more than popularity
- how to endure hardship without quitting

That is not automatic.

That is trained.

And if we want strong churches, we also need women who are deeply grounded, fearless in faith, and skilled in righteousness.

God honored women throughout Scripture, and the church will suffer if women are treated like spectators instead of workers.

Titus commands older women to train younger women:

- “Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior... teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women...” (Titus 2:3–5)

Women shape homes.

Women shape children.

Women strengthen the entire church when they are taught the Word deeply and live it boldly.

## **The church must prepare leadership from the cradle**

We cannot keep waiting for “someday.”

If we do, we will wake up with empty pulpits, no shepherds, and drifting sheep.

This is how faithful leadership grows:

- Scripture in the home (Deuteronomy 6:6–7)
- disciplined parenting (Proverbs 22:6)
- reverence in worship (Ecclesiastes 5:1)
- accountability among Christians (Hebrews 3:13)
- training faithful men to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2)

If churches want shepherds, churches must raise them.

## **Closing plea**

We do not need celebrity leaders.

We need Bible men.

We need elders who fear God more than people.

We need deacons who serve without ego.

We need women who love truth, teach good, and model faith.

We need children who grow up believing that holiness is normal Christianity.

The flock is too valuable for lazy leadership.

Souls are too precious for human traditions.

The church is too sacred for compromised men.

May Waupaca decide that leadership is not something we talk about—it is something we build.

And may God give us the courage to start now.