

SERMONS ON THE ELDERSHIP

by Bradley Cobb

Cobb's collection of sermons on the biblical office of elder, examining the qualifications, duties, and authority of elders in the local church as taught in the New Testament.

18 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 01 - The Organization of the Church
2. 02 - The Descriptions of Elders in the Bible
3. 03 - The Authority of the Elders
4. 04 - The Responsibility of the Congregation Toward the Elders
5. 05 - Motivations for Becoming an Elder
6. 06 - Qualifications of Elders (part 01)
7. 07 - Qualifications of Elders (part 02)
8. 08 - Qualifications of Elders (part 03)
9. 09 - Qualifications of Elders (part 04)
10. 10 - Qualifications of Elders (part 05)
11. 11 - Qualifications of Elders (Part 06)
12. 12a - Qualifications of Elders (Part 07)
13. 12b - Qualifications of Elders (Part 07)
14. 13 - Qualifications of Elders (part 08)
15. 14 - Qualifications of Elders (Part 09)
16. 15 - Qualifications of Elders (Part 10)
17. Appendix - The Age of an Elder
18. Qualification of Elders - Chart

01 - The Organization of the Church

Introduction:

Over the years, there have been many misconceptions about the organization of the church.

Many believe in a clergy/laity setup where there are the “ordained” people (clergy) and there are those common people who are just the members (laity).

Others have a pyramid scheme in mind:

The Pope at the top, then a college of cardinals under him which are over certain areas, then bishops over smaller areas, and then priests over individual Catholic Churches.

Still others believe in a one-man (or in some cases, a one-couple) rule over a group of people.

This is sometimes called the “Pastor system” and it is very prevalent in many denominations.

All you have to do is look around at some of the religious groups and see whose name is plastered on the sign.

I saw one sign which said “we serve a risen savior Reverend. Jerry Smith”

You would think they would give some consideration to how that sign reads...

These people usually run everything in their group.

The rest of the group is viewed many times as simply the common people.

However, these (and many other) ideas are foreign to the Bible.

Exactly how is the church set up in the New Testament?

This is our study for today.

All Christians are members (I Corinthians 12:12-27) of the one body: the church.

A human body has many individual parts (members).

Eyes

Ears

Hands

Toes

Knees

Etc...

The church is the body of Christ, but has many individual members (I Corinthians 12:27).

Old and young

Male and female

Black and white

The various parts of the human body each have different roles to fulfill.

You cannot hear without your ears.

You cannot speak without a mouth.

You cannot walk without feet.

You cannot write without fingers.

The various members of the church each have different roles to fulfill.

Some are teachers or preachers.

Some are leaders (elders).

Some are encouragers.

Some are servants (deacons).

Some help with the physical work of the church (cleaning the building, mailing bulletins, recording lessons, correspondence courses, etc...).

Each part of the body provides a necessary function for the entire body.

The mouth eats; the stomach digests; other parts of the body deliver the nutrients to the rest of the body.

The lungs intake oxygen, and then that oxygen is delivered by the heart and veins to the rest of the body.

The "waste" carbon dioxide is delivered back to the lungs which exhales it out.

Each member of the church provides a necessary function to the entire body.

The song leader chooses songs to put the rest of the members in a right frame of mind as they worship; the members sing, encouraging themselves and others.

The one leading the prayer guides the thoughts and minds of the entire congregation as he offers up prayer to God.

The preacher encourages the members, who in turn also encourage him and others.

The elders lead the congregation so that they are safe from the influence of false teachers and are fed the spiritual bread they need to grow.

When a part of the body is missing or not functioning properly, the body as a whole suffers.

If someone breaks their foot, the entire body has to readjust to make up for the deficiency.

If the gallbladder stops working, it can bring on heart-attack-like symptoms as waste seeps into your system.

When part of the body does not function as it should, the whole body is less able to function as it was intended to do.

When an individual Christian stops fulfilling their responsibility, the whole church suffers.

When a Christian stops attending, they are no longer encouraging others to live faithfully.

When a song leader gives no thought to the songs he chooses, the service can lack continuity.

When the one leading prayer does not think about the words he is saying, he begins to offer up “vain repetitions” on behalf of the congregation.

When the elders do not fulfill their responsibility, the congregation will often drift into liberalism and fall under the control of false teachers.

When the preacher does not study and provide substantive lessons, the membership can end up with a superficial faith which has no depth to it at all.

Everyone who is “in Christ” is a member of the body of Christ.

In order to be “in Christ” where all spiritual blessings are found (Ephesians 1:3), one must be baptized “into Christ” (Galatians 3:27, Romans 6:3).

All who are baptized “for the remission of sins” are “added” to the church (Acts 2:38-47).

The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18, 24).

Therefore, all Christians are members and each has a role to fulfill!

From the members, some are chosen for leadership roles.

When the church first began, the apostles were seen as the leaders of the church.

After all, they had miraculous abilities (see Acts 3 and many other places).

They were promised the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth (thus their words were inspired).

They had been with Jesus personally (Acts 1:21-22).

This likely even includes Paul, though some disagree.

Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees, and trained at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (so Paul would have been in that area frequently).

Jesus came to Jerusalem multiple times during His ministry, at which times He was constantly bombarded by the Pharisees (possibly including Paul).

Some believe that after Paul saw Jesus on the road to Damascus, he spent three years in Arabia learning from Jesus personally.

They had the ability to pass on miraculous gifts (according to God’s will – Acts 8:15).

It was not much later, however, that elders were put in place in many (possibly most) congregations.

What is commonly referred to as the “Jerusalem Council” took place to address the issue of Gentile converts to Christianity and what was to be bound upon them (Acts 15).

During this event, the elders of the Jerusalem congregation were active participants.

Every mention of the apostles in Acts 15 says “the apostles and elders.”

The letter sent back with Paul was from “the apostles and elders.”

It is possible that the elders (or at least a part of them) were the apostles themselves, and that this is two ways of describing the same people.

Peter, James (the Lord’s brother), and John were seen as “pillars” of the church at Jerusalem.

Peter expressly states that he was “an elder” (I Peter 5:1).

John calls himself “the elder” (II John 1).

This may simply indicate he was old, but could also mean he was an elder of the church.

Paul and Barnabas specifically went back to congregations they had planted in order to make sure they were grounded in the truth, but also to ordain elders (Acts 14:23).

This was something they did not do when they first planted the congregations.

You cannot immediately promote a new convert to a leadership role within a congregation.

You have to wait until that person has proven himself as one who will hold steadfastly to the truth and be “apt to teach” (I Timothy 3:2).

Some people hide who they are, and so no one should be made an elder unless they are well-known by the congregation (and meet the qualifications set forth by God).

The fact that they made a second trip to all these congregations for that reason shows the importance of an eldership in each congregation.

By inspiration, Paul commanded Titus to do this same thing.

Thus, God desires elders in every congregation.

As the church grew, the elders were the leaders of the church.

Paul wrote letters to the churches, “with the bishops” at each congregation (Philippians 1:1).

James informed his readers that if any were sick, they were to call for the elders of the church (notice it is not the apostles they are to call upon) (James 5:14).

Paul commanded Titus to ordain elders in every congregation in Crete (Titus 1:5).

Elders are not to be chosen based upon social status.

The qualifications for the elders are not based upon how much money he has (which seems to be a defining qualification in some locations).

The qualifications, instead, are based completely on the man's character and spiritual steadfastness.

Some have said that there is only one qualification for being an elder: being blameless (I Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:7); and that the rest of the list is the areas in which he is to be found blameless.

Elders are chosen from among the members as men who take on the responsibility of leading the rest of the flock to heaven!

This is not a "job" nor is it a dictator's role.

This is instead a position within the church for certain members (remember, not all members have the same role to fulfill) who are willing to take on the responsibility for the souls of others.

It is NOT something to be entered into lightly!

Elders/Pastors are NOT (as some denominations practice) people who are sent by a convention or synod to a local congregation to lead them.

Elders were ALWAYS chosen from those who were already members of that congregation.

This is the only way anyone would know if he met the qualifications laid out in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Titus did not bring men with him to leave as elders in the churches in Crete, but was sent to ordain elders in every congregation (Titus 1:5).

Then Paul gave the qualifications, so Titus would know what to look for.

People who just moved to a congregation would NOT fit the description of elders in the NT.

From the members, some are chosen to by special servants (deacons).

The word "deacon" is the English spelling of the Greek word DIAKANOS which means "servant."

This word emphasizes the service which that servant does.

Seven servants (DIAKANOS) were chosen for the service of feeding the widows so the apostles could continue their ministry of preaching the gospel (Acts 6).

Phebe is called a servant (female form of DAIKANOS) (Romans 16:1), emphasizing the work that she did.

Jesus was called a "minister" (DIAKANOS) to the Jews to confirm the promises made to "the fathers" (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) (Romans 15:8).

Governmental rulers are called "ministers" (DIAKANOS) of God, because they carry out God's judgment (Romans 13:1-4).

Paul called himself a minister (DIAKANOS) of the gospel (Ephesians 3:7, Colossians 1:23, 25).

This word is used some times of those who were not “deacons” as we understand the term from I Timothy 3.

Phebe was obviously not a “deacon” because she was not “the husband of one wife” (I Timothy 3:12).

Those “faithful” seven men chosen to wait tables did not have the same qualifications given as those in I Timothy or Titus (Acts 6:3).

These men’s only qualification was “of a good report” and “full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.”

The church was not in existence when Jesus Christ was on earth.

Paul did not meet the qualifications that he gave to Timothy, for Paul was not married (I Corinthians 9:5).

The governmental rulers are by no stretch deacons of the church.

A specific role existed for some to “hold the office” of a deacon.

Because the word emphasizes a specific service or duty, a deacon ought to be set in charge of certain tasks or responsibilities within the church.

Educational materials for classes.

Building maintenance.

And many other roles.

It is preferable to have deacons in every congregation.

There were deacons in the church at Philippi (Philippians 1:1).

Timothy was given the qualifications for selecting deacons while he was in Ephesus (I Timothy 1:3; 3:8-13).

Some notes about the office of a deacon.

A deacon is not a “Jr. Elder.”

Deacons are not the leaders of the flock, but rather servants who do a specific service for the local congregation.

Deacons are to be men of moral uprightness who have proven their dedication to the word of God (I Timothy 3:9-10).

Therefore, deacons are already members of the local church who are selected to fill a specific role as servants in specific areas.

Deacon is a God-appointed office within the church (I Timothy 3:13), so we must treat it with other God-appointed things.

The plan of salvation.

Music of the church.

The role of elders.

The role of women in the assembly of the church.

Conclusion:

This is the way God ordained that congregations ought to be organized.

All Christians as members, each with their own specific role within the local congregation.

Certain members who are willing to take the responsibility and meet the qualifications are set as leaders to guide the local congregation to heaven.

Other members fulfill the role of deacons, special servants who do specific jobs so that the elders can devote more of their time to overseeing the flock.

Any other system of organization is not scriptural, and should be avoided.

The one-man rule (pastor system).

The "synod" or "conference" system (where an organization tells you what to do and what to teach/believe each year).

The hierarchy system (the pyramid scheme like the Roman Catholic Church).

What if there are no qualified men to fill the offices of elder and deacon?

For the answer to this, we need only look to the Scriptures!

Acts 2:5, 11 – there were men from Crete in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost who heard the word.

These, and others, went back to their homes and spread the gospel (Acts 8:1-4).

Some 25-30 years later, Paul told Titus to ordain elders in every city in Crete (Paul never set foot on Crete that we know of, so where did the congregations come from?).

Thus, the congregations existed for 25-30 years, apparently without any elders.

Remember that Paul planted congregations, and then went back later to ordain elders.

Would Paul have left the congregations after planting them, knowing they were in sin?

Of course not!

There were no qualified men at that point (proven themselves faithful to the gospel) in those locations, there couldn't have been yet!

Where no qualified men exist, no elders or deacons can exist.

Someone once said: "Better to be Scripturally Unorganized than Unscripturally organized."

Paul once told the elders of Ephesus that God bought the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

The blood of Christ is what washes our sins away (Revelation 1:5).

Ananias came to Paul with a message from Jesus: Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16).

Baptism is what puts you in contact with the sin-cleansing blood of the lamb!

Have you heard the good news?

Do you believe it?

Confess that belief before others. (Matthew 10:32-33).

Repent of your sins! (Acts 2:38)

Be baptized so you can have your sins washed away!

As a member of Jesus Christ's body—the church—you can have continual access to the blood of Christ by simply walking in the light (I John 1:7).

02 - The Descriptions of Elders in the Bible

Introduction:

Last week we discussed the organization of the church.

All Christians are members of the body of Christ and of the local congregation.

Within the local congregation, each member plays a different role.

Some members fulfill the role of leaders (elders).

Some members fulfill the role of servants (deacons).

This week, we will be looking specifically at the Bible descriptions of elders.

Did you know that the Bible uses three words to describe elders?

Elders

Bishops

Shepherds

Some believe that these referred to three different offices, but I would like you to notice the following:

Acts 20:17 – Paul calls the elders from Ephesus.

Acts 20:28 – Paul calls them “overseers” (this is the same Greek word as “bishop”).

Acts 20:28 – Paul tells them to “feed” (shepherd) the flock.

Titus 1:5 – Paul tells Titus to ordain elders in every city.

Titus 1:7 – Paul gives him the qualification for “bishops.”

I Peter 5:1 – Peter addresses the elders.

I Peter 5:2 – Peter tells them to exercise the office of bishops.

I Peter 5:2 – Peter tells them to “feed” (shepherd) the flock.

The elders held the office of bishops and were commanded to shepherd.

Therefore, they are three different descriptions of one office.

Elders are older.

The word “elder” (PRESBUTEROS) means one who is older.

This is not a term which exclusively means “a leader in the local congregation.”

Instead, this is a general term used to describe men who have maturity and experience.

By definition, this means an older man.

One religious group takes their name from this Greek word (Presbyterian), naming themselves after their form of church government.

What makes one “older”?

There are some who will gladly appoint a man in his 30’s or early 40’s to be an elder.

Is this an older man?

The argument they use goes like this:

The lifespan back then was barely 45.

Therefore, a man would be considered “older” in his late 30’s.

Is this truly the case?

Let us let the Bible shine some common sense on the subject.

I Timothy 5:9 – let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old.

The church was not to support widows under 60.

I Timothy 5:11 – but the younger widows refuse.

Those under 60 were to be refused continual aid.

I Timothy 5:14 – I will that the younger women (those under 60) marry, bear children, etc...

So, who exactly are these 55-year-old widows supposed to marry if all the men died off before they reached 45?

Obviously the “short life span” theory is erroneous.

Peter wrote that he was an elder (I Peter 1:5).

Most believe this was written approximately 61-64 AD.

The apostles were likely about the same age as Jesus or younger (because most people would not be disciples of someone younger than themselves).

Therefore, Peter would have been an elder in his early 60s.

How long had he been an elder?

We don’t know.

We know that Peter exhorted the elders (I Peter 5:1-4), and used his being an elder as back-up for what he said to them.

This does not seem like something a newly-installed elder would say.

So, we could probably safely say he was an elder for a time.

From this evidence, we can see that someone was considered an elder (age-wise) in their late 50s, early 60s.

We will discuss later in this series that a man must have children who have proven themselves faithful.

That cannot be proven until they have left the house.

Why should the leaders of the congregation be “older”?

With age comes wisdom (Proverbs 16:31).

With age comes honor (Leviticus 19:32).

With age comes experience on how to deal with issues.

Elders are to Shepherds the flock of God (I Peter 5:2).

The Greek word is POIMAINO, which is a verb meaning to shepherd, to tend or to feed a flock.

This is a form of the word used to describe the shepherds who heard the angel proclaiming Jesus' birth in Luke 2.

It indicates care for the sheep.

It indicates feeding and protecting the sheep.

It indicates leading the sheep where they need to go in order to thrive.

In I Peter 5:2, it is translated as FEED the flock of God.

In Acts 20:28, it is translated FEED the church of God.

What kind of feeding are we talking about?

One of the elders here once jokingly asked for some of my pizza at Mazzio's.

He was informed (jokingly) that the elders are supposed to be the ones feeding the flock, not the other way around!

We are not speaking of literal food.

However, if a brother or sister be in need of daily bread, obviously the elders would be happy to help (because that is something EVERY Christian should be doing).

The elder's responsibility is to make sure the local congregation is fed a good diet of Scriptural teaching.

Therefore, it is the elder's responsibility to hire a preacher if they deem it necessary.

It is the elder's responsibility to make sure they know the teachers in the classes are sound.

It is the elder's responsibility to choose what comes into the congregation and what does not.

A sound, spiritual diet will produce healthy Christians who are then prepared to do every good work (II Timothy 3:16-17).

Elders also have the responsibility to protect the flock.

Shepherds carried a staff for two reasons.

One was to help sheep who had fallen to stand back up.

The other was to use as a weapon to keep predators away.

Elders must protect the flock by making sure they do not become victims of false teachers.

Some may wonder why we do not involve ourselves with some of the congregations in the area.

This is because the elders are doing their job of protecting the flock from the influence of false teachers within the brotherhood.

Elders must protect the flock by helping them up once they have fallen so they don't stay in that condition.

It is the responsibility of the elders to try to lift up the Christians who have fallen astray.

Having said that, it is the responsibility of every Christian to be a good soldier of Christ, winning back the hearts that have been lost.

Helping the erring Christian to return to fellowship with God is not an exclusive job of the elders or the preacher; it is the responsibility of every Christian.

Elders are to guide the sheep in the way they should go.

Shepherds are ones the pastures where the sheep feed.

See Psalm 23:1-2.

If the congregation is in need of certain spiritual food (specific topics or lessons), it is the responsibility of the elders to make sure the congregation hears them.

This can be done by choosing the classroom material.

This can be done by asking the preacher to cover certain topics.

If the sheep start heading in a dangerous direction, the shepherd is to guide them elsewhere.

The elders are to be watchful and make sure the congregation is heading in the right direction.

There are things that, in and of themselves, are not sinful, but if allowed and encouraged could lead the congregation down a slippery slope.

We need to make sure we don't decry something sinful which isn't, but at the same time, we need not do something which may lead down that path towards sin.

For example: one man wrote many books of very sound material back in the 1970s, but has since veered far from the truth in many areas.

Would it be inherently wrong for us to buy those books and give them to the members?

If we were to do that, however, it might give the impression that his other books are sound.

Then people might pick up another book and be adversely influenced by it.

It is better not to start it in the first place than to risk a soul (I Corinthians 10).

Elders are Overseers (Acts 20:28).

The word here is EPISKIPOS, meaning to oversee or superintend.

This word is sometimes translated overseer (Acts 20:28).

Other times it is translated "bishop" (I Timothy 3:2).

It indicates one who investigates something (literally the word means "to look intently upon), an examiner.

EPI means "upon," and "SKOPEO" means to examine, to look intently.

We get the word "scope" (as in microscope, telescope, etc..) from this word.

Thayer's says it means to scrutinize.

It indicates being one who oversees a work, a manager or supervisor.

There is a religious group who is named after this Greek word (Episcopalian).

Uses of the word EPISKOPOS.

Jesus was called an EPISKOPOS (bishop) of our souls (I Peter 2:25).

In the same verse, He is also called our Shepherd (POIMEN)

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament:

It was used of God (Job 20:29).

It was primarily used in the sense of visitation for punishment, inquisition, or numbering (Vincent's Word Studies).

Elders are said to hold the office of a bishop (I Timothy 3:1).

Therefore it is a God-ordained role in the local church.

Each congregation, ideally, would have elders to oversee the local work.

Elders are to look intently upon the congregation.

This means the elders must get to know the members well.

The elders cannot act (as many do) as though they are above the membership and don't want to have anything to do with them.

The elders must investigate new members (and current members) to make sure that they are sound in the faith.

Liz moved to Columbia, TN, and the elders of the congregation there called us to investigate her before they could accept her as a member there.

This is the reason why some people carried letters of commendation when they moved (I Corinthians 16:3, II Corinthians 3:1).

The elders must examine the members to be sure they are fulfilling their role in the church.

Some Christians get bent out of shape when the elders “pry” into their personal business (meaning their personal sins), yet that is what the word “bishop” demands!

Because of the demands of looking intently upon the congregation, knowing their troubles and struggles and needs, it is important that the congregation have enough elders.

In a congregation of 150 people, do you really think three men could get to know everyone well enough that they could do their job as elders effectively?

This becomes even more difficult since many elders have jobs in order to support their family.

In addition to making sure there is not a one-man ruler of the congregation, having multiple elders in each congregation is just good common sense.

Elders are to manage the congregation.

This means the elders look at the congregation, see what skills each one has, and then puts each one to work in the way that best fits their abilities.

Some congregations rotate teachers to keep them from getting burned-out, but also to make sure as many members as possible are involved in the work.

The elders have a responsibility to maximize the output of the congregation.

What is the job of an office manager?

It is to make sure the employees are all doing their jobs and doing them correctly.

The elder’s responsibility is the same within the congregation.

If someone is not attending services regularly, it is the elders’ responsibility to find out why and then to try to correct the problem.

If someone would be more effectively used in a certain aspect of the church’s work, it is the role of the elder to recognize that and get them to doing it!

Because of the absolute importance of this work and the time and effort it entails, God gave authority for elders to be financially supported by the church (I Timothy 5:17).

This is not a requirement (some congregations cannot afford to pay the elders enough to support their family).

However, if a man is willing to devote his life to being a full-time overseer of the church, and the church has the means, he ought to be supported in this work.

If we can pay the preacher (which we can – Matthew 10:10, I Timothy 5:18) to work full-time bringing us lessons and teaching, why do we not also see the need to have elders who are paid so they can work full-time helping us all get to heaven?

Again, this is an individual choice.

Some congregations may not have the means.

The stipulation given by God is that the elder must first prove himself (the elders that rule well are worthy...).

Some men do not have the need for support (have a good pension).

It is not a sin to be a volunteer elder, fulfilling the role as best you can.

Conclusion:

I hope you have seen through this that the role of an elder is a difficult, often strenuous one.

Those who desire the office of a bishop desire a good WORK (I Timothy 3:1).

Make no mistake about it, there is work involved in being an elder!

God's requirements (based on these three words) are:

The elder must be older, mature.

The elder must protect and feed the sheep.

The elder must oversee the work of the local congregation, including its members.

The role of an elder can be summed up as follows:

To protect and feed the congregation, doing his best to make sure they all live in a way that they will get to heaven.

Elders deserve far more respect than they are often given.

So, to the elders, I say thank you.

03 - The Authority of the Elders

Introduction:

We have spent the past couple weeks dealing with the topic of elders in the church.

We have determined that elders are members of the local congregation who fulfill a specific role within the church (that of leadership).

We have determined some of the responsibilities and attributes of elders based on the three words used for them (shepherd, elder, and bishop/overseer).

Today we are going to look at the topic of the authority of the elders within the local congregation.

If the actions and practices of some congregations are to be believed, elders of a local congregation have absolutely no authority whatsoever.

Instead, the elders are reduced to figureheads, only having a title attached to their name.

Nothing they say or think matters to the congregation.

Because of this, in some congregations, the God-ordained office of an elder is reduced to nothing.

If the actions and practices of other congregations are to be believed, elders of a local congregation are the absolute authority in everything the members do.

Some elderships go so far as to say who the single members are allowed to date.

Some elderships go so far as to tell the members where they are allowed to work, what restaurants they are allowed to eat in, etc...

Because of this, in some congregations, the God-ordained office of an elder is elevated to a place of equality with God Himself!

This is blasphemy!

What does the Bible say about the authority of elders in the local congregation?

Do elders have any authority whatsoever?

Some people say "no."

Some congregations (as already stated) believe that the elders are only figureheads who have no say in the lives of the members.

These same congregations also do not think that the elders have any authority to make decisions for the local congregation.

Instead, it is assumed that majority rules, and they will decide matters by a men's business meeting or by a congregational meeting.

Neither one of these setups is sinful in and of themselves, but when they usurp the role of an elder, they become sinful.

A congregation with no elders can allow the men to make the decisions.

Sometimes it is good to have a congregational meeting to gather input from all the members about a specific project.

But these cannot be allowed to usurp the authority of the elders in the congregation.

So, if the elders have no authority, what purpose do they serve?

According to those who believe the elders have no authority over the local congregation, the elders' role is as follows:

They are to teach classes (since the elder must be "apt to teach" – I Timothy 3:2).

They are the ones who you call on for prayers when you are sick (James 5:14).

The only "leading" they are allowed to do is by example (I Peter 5:3).

They are not permitted to tell someone he needs to repent.

They are not permitted to make decisions regarding the direction of the congregation.

Of course, not all congregations fit simply into a certain category, and there are various shades of demands placed on the elders.

Sometimes, a congregation only has elders so they can have someone to blame if something goes wrong.

They want to grant them no authority, but act as if anything that goes wrong is the elders' fault because they didn't fix it.

Congregations who fit this mold are rarely sound in the faith, and are unscriptural in their approach to the eldership.

The Bible says that the elders DO have authority in the local congregation.

I Timothy 5:17 – elders are to "rule well."

According to the inspired apostle Paul, those elders who "rule" well have the right to be financially supported, should they desire such.

What does he mean by "rule"?

The word used means "preside, maintain, oversee, and rule" (Strong's).

It is the same word used in I Timothy 3:4 regarding the role of a father.

An elder must be one who rules his own household, having his children in subjection to him.

Could a man rule his house by only his example and nothing else?

Obviously this is not the meaning of "rule."

The elders have the responsibility (thus the authority) in the local congregation to preside over matters within the congregation.

They have the responsibility (thus the authority) in the local congregation to oversee the congregation.

Just as with children, the elders are to initiate correction when it is needed.

The congregation is to “obey” those who “rule” in the congregation (Hebrews 13:17).

Since God directs that the congregation is to “obey” those (plural) who have the “rule” over them, these “rulers” must have some God-given authority.

It is clear that God is speaking of elders in this passage (see 13:7).

Remember those (plural) who have rule over you.

These men have spoken unto them the word of God.

Why would God command the congregation to obey someone who had no authority?

If they have no authority, there is nothing to obey, because they could not tell you to do anything.

Since God said to obey them, however, that means absolutely that elders have some authority in the local congregation.

We can see that the elders do have authority in the local congregation, but the question now is: what authority, and how much authority has been given to the elders by God?

What authority do the elders have?

Are the elders the absolute authority in every section of the members’ lives?

Some say “yes.”

The “Boston Movement” or “Crossroads Movement” within the church which came to a head 30 years ago taught this very thing.

They taught that elders could control who you were allowed to date, what job you could have, where you spent your money.

In effect, the elders became all-controlling and ran every facet of the members’ lives.

Since the inception of this, they have since split from the church and call themselves the “International Church of Christ.”

They now have a hierarchy similar to the Catholic Church.

There are other, usually smaller, congregations wherein the elders run the lives of the members.

Usually it is one elder more than the others who spearheads this.

It becomes a power grab for them.

When this occurs, the congregation becomes very close to being a cult.

Are the elders the absolute authority in every section of the members' lives? The Bible says "no."

The elders' responsibilities all revolve around this: "they watch for your souls" (Hebrews 13:17).

If someone began to date a non-Christian who showed no interest in the Bible, it would be right for the elders to approach that member and express their concerns.

They could point out that it is very unwise to yoke yourself with a non-believer (II Corinthians 6:14).

They could point out what happens to people who marry someone who is not trying to please God (I Kings 11:1ff).

They could point out that Christians are to put God first in all things, making their first priority getting to heaven (Matthew 6:33).

But could they tell the member "stop dating that person or you will be kicked out of the church"?

Of course not.

After all, Paul specifically addresses Christians who are married to non-Christians (I Corinthians 7:12-16), saying they might just convert their unbelieving spouses.

The elders have full responsibility to inform the members if their job selection is in opposition to God.

If one of the members here got a job at the casino down the street, shouldn't the elders approach that member?

That job is something that could affect the member's soul, therefore the elders have that authority to act.

Anything in your life that could affect your soul (choice of spouse, choice of job, choice of entertainment) falls under the authority of the eldership.

The authority of the elders ends with the spiritual matters.

The elders have no Scriptural authority to tell you what time to go to sleep.

The elders have no Scriptural authority to tell you where to get gas.

The elders have no Scriptural authority to tell you where you can eat.

The elders have no Scriptural authority to tell you what kind of car you can drive.

If you think these are far-fetched, I assure you that these are things which some elderships have tried to bind on the local congregations before.

If it is something that affects your soul, the elders have authority to deal with it.

If it is something that affects your soul, you have the responsibility to obey the elders in that matter (Hebrews 13:17).

Do elders have absolute authority in matters of doctrine in the local church?

Many congregations more and more frequently are saying "yes."

I have lost count of how many times I have read letters from elderships announcing that they (as an eldership) have decided that it is okay to have women preachers or instrumental music.

What this inherently means is that whatever the elders decide is what the congregation will do, REGARDLESS of what the Bible says on the subject.

This is where the Catholic Church really began to drift further and further from the truth.

This means that if the elders decide it is okay to have a choir, that the congregation must follow.

This means that if the elders decide that they will now have the Lord's Supper on Thursdays, it is perfectly acceptable.

This means that if the elders decide instrumental music with worship would be permissible, then God has to be satisfied with it.

This makes MAN the authority in all matters of faith and practice instead of letting GOD be the authority!

This idea of the elders having the absolute authority in all spiritual matters means that one congregation could say "from now on, all of our elders will be women," while another congregation says "all elders must be men" and BOTH would be perfectly acceptable to God!

Could this POSSIBLY be correct?!?!?!

Do elders have absolute authority in matters of doctrine in the local church? The Bible says "no."

If the apostles did not have absolute authority in the church (which they did not), elders cannot either.

Paul did not say "follow me," he said "follow me as I follow Christ" (I Corinthians 11:1).

If Paul did not follow Jesus Christ's teachings, the Corinthian church should not follow him!

The elders who "rule well" were ones who also labored in THE WORD and in doctrine.

This holds the elders to following what God's word has to say on every subject.

No Christian, not even an elder, has the authority to change what has been laid out in God's word.

To all Christians (which would include elders), Paul wrote "whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord" (Colossians 3:17).

This means that everything we do must be done by the authority of Jesus Christ.

It is interesting that this verse comes right after the verse which authorizes only singing for our music in worship to God (Colossians 3:16).

If Jesus did not authorize it, we cannot do it!

To transgress (literally go beyond) what is authorized is sin (I John 3:4).

The elders' authority is NOT absolute!

The elders cannot change doctrines or practices.

The absolute authority in the church is Jesus Christ and His revealed word (II Timothy 3:16-17).

What authority do the elders have then?

The elders have the authority to teach the word of God (I Timothy 5:17).

They do not have authority to teach their opinions on matters of doctrine or practice.

They only have the authority to teach God's revealed word.

The elders have the authority to oversee the work of the local congregation.

This is inherent in the word "bishop" or "overseer" (Acts 20:28, I Peter 5:1-4).

They have the authority to determine which members fulfill specific roles within the congregation.

They have the authority to determine what material will be used in classrooms.

They have the authority to determine the times of worship, the order of worship, the leaders in worship, and the place of worship.

They have the authority to determine which works the local congregation will be involved in.

The elders have the authority to watch for the souls of the congregation (Hebrews 13:17).

This means the elders are fulfilling their God-given task by going to each member and correcting them if necessary.

If you are doing something which could endanger your soul, the elders have the authority to approach you about it and try to help you.

Your soul is worth more than the entire world (Matthew 16:26)!

Though some people feel like it is prying, the elders can lose their own soul if they do not try to help you save yours!

Conclusion:

As always, it is important to let the Bible speak on all matters.

Men say elders have no authority whatsoever, the Bible disagrees.

Men say elders have absolute authority in all matters, the Bible disagrees.

Men say elders have absolute authority in all matters of faith and practice, the Bible disagrees.

The Bible lays out the authority of elders quite plainly:

Follow the word of God.

Help the congregation do the same thing.

Oversee the work of the local congregation.

Correct those who need correcting (more on church discipline in a later sermon).

It is important that we not take away from the authority of the elders, but also that we do not give them more authority than permitted by God.

This is because it is always important to follow what has been commanded by God.

God commanded that in order to be saved, you must hear the gospel which leads to faith (Romans 10:17).

God commanded that in order to be saved, you must believe (John 3:16).

God commanded that in order to be saved, you must confess Christ (Romans 10:10).

God commanded that in order to be saved, you must repent (Acts 2:38).

God commanded that in order to be saved, you must be baptized (I Peter 3:21).

God commanded that in order to be saved, you must live faithfully (I John 1:7).

It is damnable heresy if we try to remove anything that God has commanded or add to it with commandments of men.

04 - The Responsibility of the Congregation Toward the Elders

Introduction:

The past few Sunday evenings, we have dealt with the topic of elders.

We discussed elders must come from within the congregation, being members serving in the specific role of leaders.

We discussed three words the Bible uses to describe elders and how that helps to define them:

They must be “older”

They must feed and protect the congregation (spiritually speaking).

They must oversee and manage the congregation.

We also looked into the authority which elders have in the local congregation.

This week we will be looking at the congregation’s responsibilities towards the elders.

It is common that you will find Christians who disrespect the elders of their congregation.

Many elders are treated as ones who “think they are better than the rest of us.”

If we are to be those who follow the Bible, we must realize that we have responsibilities towards the elders!

The things we will be discussing today assumes that we have Scriptural elders who are truly trying to fulfill their role as such.

The congregation has a responsibility to recognize the elders (I Thessalonians 5:12-13).

The congregation has a responsibility to know those who are over them in the Lord.

The word “over” is the same as “rule” in I Timothy 5:17.

This is a specific reference to the elders in the local congregation.

The word “know” in this verse has reference to recognizing and acknowledging.

Therefore the congregation has a responsibility to recognize the elders as the leaders of the congregation.

We cannot be like some Christians in the first century who tried to cast doubt on the leadership of certain men (they acted as if Paul had no authority).

We must acknowledge that these men are the elders and that they have authority over us in the Lord.

“In the Lord” means spiritually speaking.

It is according to the Lord's will that they rule over us in the church.

We are also to "esteem" the elders (I Thessalonians 5:13).

This means that we give them respect.

We look up to them.

The reason we do this is because of the work which they are doing.

The work of an elder is an oftentimes difficult one, and we should respect them for the hard work they put into it.

Do you like to be recognized for the work that you do?

Many times husbands want to be recognized for everything they do around the house.

The joke goes that a man's wife is outside repaving the driveway, and he comes outside to tell her that he refilled the ice-cube trays, then goes back inside.

If you want to be recognized for the hard work you have done, should you not recognize those whose hard work can help lead your soul to heaven?

The congregation has a responsibility to remember the elders (Hebrews 13:7).

We are commanded to remember the ones who have the rule over us.

This again has reference to the eldership (see again I Timothy 5:17).

What does it mean to remember them?

Does it mean we are not to forget their names?

Does it mean we are to remember them in prayer?

The meaning of the word used here is that of being mindful, with a view to observing the admonitions, of those who have the rule over you (Wuest, Vincent).

We are to be mindful of them and the role which they are fulfilling in the Lord's church.

We are to remember their leadership and the things which they have said we must do.

We remember them because they have spoken the word of God to us.

We keep their admonitions in mind because they come from the word of God.

We need to remember the elders because they are holding to the rock-solid foundation of the Scriptures.

We need to remember the elders because they are trying to help us by showing us how to improve ourselves from the word of God!

The congregation has a responsibility to obey the elders (Hebrews 13:17).

We are commanded to obey those who have the rule over us.

This again is a reference to the elders.

This is seen because those who rule over us in this passage also watch for our souls.

Thus this cannot have reference to governmental bodies who care not for our souls.

We obey the elders because they are looking out for our own souls' best-interest.

They are trying to get us to heaven, and we should obey them because they will help us get there!

They are also trying to help others get to heaven, so we should obey them to give an example to others as well.

The congregation has the responsibility to obey the elders when they give directions.

If the elders say we need to meet at a certain time, then we meet at that time.

If the elders say we need to pray for someone, we should pray for that person.

If the elders say you need to repent of something (an attitude, perhaps), then you need to repent!

If the elders say that certain songs should not be lead during worship, then those songs should be left out.

We need to remember that we are the sheep, and it is the eldership that is shepherding, guiding us.

How easy is it to obey someone that you know has a genuine concern for your well-being?

Do children find it easy to obey their parents when the parents show a genuine concern for them?

Or is it easier for them to obey when the parent acts as if they hate them?

How easy is it to obey someone who knows what they are talking about?

Imagine calling tech support for your computer and not believing that person on the other end of the line knew anything about computers.

Would you find it easy to obey them?

However, the elders are "in the Lord," and speaking "the word of God" to us.

They know what they are talking about, and we should find it easy to obey them, if we truly care about being right with God!

As the sheep, we go where the shepherds lead us.

The congregation has a responsibility to make the elders' job as easy as possible (Hebrews 13:17).

Another of the reasons we are to obey the elders is so that they can fulfill their role in the church with joy instead of grief.

When a parent has an obedient child, it makes life so much easier and more enjoyable.

When the child is unruly, or will not do what he is told (sometimes even after continual correcting), it makes the parents' lives difficult and depressing.

The same thing is true with the eldership.

When the congregation willingly obeys the elders, it makes their job an easy one.

They will be much happier in their role as elders.

When the congregation (usually just a few members) causes problems, it can make the elders' lives miserable.

Many elders have been so disheartened because of the reaction of the congregation that they simply quit.

Some elders have been so depressed by the actions of the congregation that they have left the church altogether.

Here is a question: as a child, is life easier for YOU when your parents are happy?

Is life easier for you as an employee if your boss is happy?

Is life easier for you as a Christian if the elders are happy?

When someone in leadership is dissatisfied with their role because of the people who are supposed to be under them, it is oftentimes made known through their behavior.

An angry boss takes it out on all of his employees, often piling more and more work on them.

An angry parent will sometimes over-punish the child, and at the least will be short-tempered towards the rest of the family.

An angry elder will lose focus on his responsibilities to God and to the congregation.

When members cause grief for the elders, they are endangering their own soul, but sometimes the souls of the elders in the process!

We should make it a point to make the elders' job as easy as possible so that the whole congregation can be happier.

The congregation has a responsibility to imitate the elders' example (Hebrews 13:7).

The elders should be living their lives in a way that others should follow.

This should be true of all Christians (I John 1:7).

But especially true of the elders, because the other Christians are to follow their example.

The congregation has a responsibility to follow their example of faith.

Elders should be those who are not novices (I Timothy 3:6), but instead mature Christians.

All Christians should make it their goal to become more mature in Christ.

The elders are supposed to be the example one earth for us to follow in order to get to heaven.

We are to follow their example remembering what the end (goal) of their conversation (manner of life) is (Hebrews 13:7).

Their goal is first and foremost to get to heaven.

If we follow their example, it should be because we want to get to heaven as well!

The congregation has a responsibility to trust the elders (I Timothy 5:19).

Accusations should not be allowed to stand against the elders except with the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Because elders are the leaders of the church and are to be esteemed, we must show trust in them.

If someone brings an accusation against an elder, we should side with the elder.

This is because the elder has shown himself to be a man of God.

This is because his foremost priority is to get to heaven.

This is because he has lived his life as an example for others to follow.

We should not entertain frivolous accusations against the leaders of the local congregation.

The elders look out for our souls (Hebrews 13:17), and we must trust the decisions that they make (so long as it does not go against God's word).

If we do not trust the elders, then we will be second-guessing everything they try to do, and we will be disobeying the command to make their jobs as easy as possible.

If the elders have shown themselves to be examples for us to follow, we should trust that their decisions are the right ones because they are holding to the truth of God's word!

The congregation has a responsibility to correct the elders (I Timothy 5:20).

If it has been shown that an elder is in sin, he is to be publicly corrected.

Elders are not exempt from sinning.

They need to be corrected from time to time as well.

This does not mean that any time an elder sins we have to publicly expose it, because it might just be something between him and God.

But if an elder commits a sin which can bring reproach on the Lord and His church, that elder needs to be corrected publicly (in the congregation).

If the elder is sinning and will not repent, he is to be publicly corrected.

Why correct him publicly?

Look to the example of Moses when he struck the rock instead of speaking to it.

God punished him because he was the leader of the people.

If the leader can “get away” with sinning, then those following would have used that example as an excuse to sin.

The congregation needs to know that not even the elders are exempt from correction and punishment from God.

If elders are allowed to “get away” with sinning, then that is an example to the rest of the flock.

The leaders must be held to the same standard of God’s word as the rest of the Christians.

The congregation needs to have fear and respect for God.

The reason why church discipline does not work as well as it should is because people have ceased to practice it.

If you as a Christian thought you would be publicly corrected for your sins, would you not think twice about sinning?

If the elders are teaching (or allowing) false doctrine, they must be held accountable.

If left uncorrected, an entire congregation could lose their souls.

We cannot let anyone (even elders) get away with adding to or taking away from God’s word.

Many people seem to think that if the elders allow something, it must be okay.

These people have put their faith in men instead of in God’s word!

If an elder is guilty of promoting or allowing false doctrine, they must be corrected publicly.

This will either end in repentance or the man being removed as an elder.

The congregation CAN NOT take this responsibility lightly.

The congregation has the responsibility to treat the elders equally (I Timothy 5:21).

We cannot act as if one of the elders is better, higher, or preferred above the others.

If an elder sins, he is to be corrected publicly.

It does not matter which elder it is.

We cannot let our friendships come between the need to help them get to heaven.

We need to remember that the goal of a Christian is to get to heaven, and we need to help other Christians get there (even the elders).

We cannot allow one elder to “get away” with something, yet hold others accountable for the same thing.

If it is sin, we should treat it like sin, regardless of who it is that is sinning.

This goes also for family relationships.

If the thing is not a sin, then we have no right to treat it as if it were.

If we have concerns, we take it to them.

We cannot take our concerns and problems to one elder and leave out the others.

The eldership is a unit.

We do not have one-man rulers in the church.

One elder cannot make the decisions for the congregation.

All of the elders are watching out for our souls, not just one of them.

Conclusion:

Just as the elders have responsibilities to the local congregation, the local congregation has responsibilities to the elders.

We must recognize them and their authority.

We must remember the things they have taught us and told us to do.

We must obey them, making their job as easy as possible.

We must imitate them.

We must trust them.

We must correct them when they are wrong.

We must treat them all with equal respect and accountability.

These are not things to be taken lightly.

These are commands of God which will help us and them to get to heaven.

Also, if these commands are followed, life in the church will be a whole lot easier, and the work of the Lord will be much smoother.

This is because the elders will be happy.

This is because the members will know they are making God happy.

This is because we will all know we are obeying God and that we have a home in heaven awaiting us.

Do you want to go to heaven?

05 - Motivations for Becoming an Elder

Introduction:

I Timothy 3:1 says that if a man desires the office of an elder, he desires a good work.

However, there is more than one reason why someone would desire to be an elder.

(true story) One man moved into a local congregation.

He was very well-off financially, and owned his own business.

After a few weeks, he asked the preacher how much it would cost to get him installed as an elder.

After the preacher rebuked him, the man came back again with the same offer and received the same rebuke.

Then that man left and went somewhere else, trying the same trick.

It is obvious that his motivation for becoming an elder was not based upon any spiritual concern, but instead one of a desire for power and influence.

Some people desire the office because of ego (just like in politics).

Some people desire the office because of a sense of duty to the local congregation.

Today we are going to look at some of the motivations people might have in seeking the office of an elder.

The Motivation of Power (I Peter 5:3).

Some people want to become an elder because it is a position of authority.

Have you ever met someone who seems to be obsessed with being in control?

Have you ever met someone who always wants to boss other people around?

There are people who desire the office of an elder for just this reason.

Elders do have authority in the local congregation (as we discussed).

This is a role which some people covet.

Peter clearly condemns such an attitude.

He says that elders are NOT ones who seek to be "lord" over God's heritage (His children).

Some people were wanting to be elders so that they could "run the church."

Perhaps this is because they have a massive ego.

Perhaps this is because they hold to false doctrine and they want to force it on the rest of the congregation.

Instead of being slave-drivers, the elders are to be examples to the flock.

The Motivation of Providing for themselves (Ezekiel 34:1-6).

Some people seek to become elders because it benefits them personally.

Have you ever met someone who is always trying to figure out how to make things work for his own advantage?

Some people always have an angle on how to take advantage of others.

Some people won't help someone else out unless it helps them in the process.

Just look at the people and companies who give money to charity, then advertise that they do it.

The NFL spends more money advertising the fact that they support the United Way than they actually give to that organization.

Surely you've met someone who, when they do something nice, your first question is, "ok, what do you want?"

Or you know, "he's up to something" because he is doing something nice.

My father was raised Catholic and went to a Catholic school, which was very strict.

He then went to a public high school.

Each morning, he would go to the teacher's lounge and say good morning to all the teachers before going to his first class.

One of his teachers called his mother and asked what he was up to, because that was something that no honest student would ever do...

The shepherds of Israel used their position for their own gain.

These shepherds (Ezekiel 34:1-6) were also called the "elders of Judah" (Ezekiel 8:1, 14:1, 20:1).

They fed themselves instead of feeding the flock (Ezekiel 34:2).

They took advantage of the people, but never took care of them (Ezekiel 34:3).

They did not help the weak Israelite, nor the sick Jew; they did not bring back the ones who had gone astray, nor did they try to retrieve those who had been run off (Ezekiel 34:4).

Instead, they were trying to rule over the Israelites with an iron fist.

They caused people to leave (34:5).

Because they gave no guidance, the people were lost and easy prey (34:5).

God promised punishment for those elders who did not do their job (34:7-ff).

Some men (like the one we mentioned at the beginning of the lesson) want to become elders because it will mean more business.

Since we are to “prefer one another” (Romans 12:10), some men want to become elders so that their business will be preferred and he will make more money.

Imagine the amount of guilt an elder could lay upon you for not doing business with him.

Some men seek to be elders because (in some congregations) the elders are all paid.

Some people have said “I can’t seem to find a job, so I think I’ll go to preaching school,” thinking it is an easy job.

Some people have said, “I want to be an elder because it is a life-long job with a guaranteed income!”

This motivation for leadership over God’s flock is condemned by God Himself!

God told the selfish shepherds of Israel that He would take it upon Himself to see that they were destroyed (Ezekiel 34:7-ff).

In the same way, those who are selfish shepherds of spiritual Israel (the church) will be destroyed eternally.

The motivation of money is not a proper motivation for being an elder (I Peter 5:2).

Those who have money as their main motivation will not make it to heaven (Matthew 6:33, I Timothy 6:10).

The Motivation of Pressure (I Peter 5:2).

Some men only become an elder because they feel like they are being forced to do it.

Have you ever met someone who is doing a job, but only because they’ve been told to do it?

When I worked at Tyson, there was a man who was “the sweeper.”

His job was to go through the two warehouse freezers, sweeping up the dust, debris, and frozen chicken pieces that had spilled from the boxes and throw them into the dumpster.

This man was really good at his job, but he constantly complained because he was “made to do it” by the supervisor.

How do teenagers behave when they are forced to do something by their parents?

Some congregations are so intent on having elders that they will try to force people into the role, even if that person does not have the desire to be an elder.

After enough prodding, many people give in and do the job.

However, they do not usually give it the attention they should, because it is something they were forced into.

Do you ever like being forced into something?

Peter said that elders should not ones who were elders “by constraint” (I Peter 5:2).

This means that we should not force people to be elders.

If someone does not desire the office of an elder, even if they are qualified in every other way, we should not seek to force the role upon them.

Would you really want someone leading you who felt like they were forced into the position?

This does not mean that people who were coerced into being elders cannot do a good job and eventually decide they actually want to fulfill this role in the local congregation, but this is NOT the proper motivation for the eldership.

The Motivation of love for the souls of the congregation (Hebrews 13:17).

Those who seek the office of an elder must first recognize the need for leadership in the local congregation.

First, elders are Scriptural (I Timothy 3:1-ff).

Second, elders provide guidance to the congregation (I Peter 5:1-4).

Third, elders provide spiritual food for the congregation (Acts 20:28).

Fourth, elders watch for the souls of the congregation (Hebrews 13:17).

When they see the need for leadership in the local congregation, they must then look to themselves.

Are they the kind of person who would be effective in watching for the souls of the congregation?

Are they ones know the Scriptures and are able to help others follow it?

Do they have a love for the souls of the congregation?

Are they seeking to be an elder willingly, and for the benefit of the congregation (not for their own benefit)?

If the answer to these questions is an honest “yes,” then that person has the proper motivation for becoming an elder.

Elders must truly love the souls of the congregation, otherwise they will not fulfill the God-ordained role properly.

Conclusion:

These ideas are not exclusive to seeking to be an elder.

These ideas also apply to becoming a Christian and staying faithful.

Should someone be baptized because it will benefit them personally (physically)?

I know of a man who was baptized so that his girlfriend's father would consent to their marriage (he rarely showed up for services after the wedding).

Should someone be baptized because they are forced to do it?

Some parents force this on their children.

The children grow up, and many become unsure as to whether or not they were baptized for the right reasons.

Should someone be baptized because of power reasons?

Constantine quite possibly did this, "becoming a Christian" just to solidify his power as emperor of Rome.

A person should be baptized because he has a love for the truth of the gospel and for his own soul.

Do you care about your soul?

If you do, then you need to make sure you are right with God so that your soul can live eternally in heaven with God!

06 - Qualifications of Elders (part 01)

Introduction:

In order for a person to teach in the doctorate program in a college, there are certain qualifications that he must have:

He must have graduated high school

He must have graduated college with a Master's degree and a PHD.

He had to have taught college level classes for a certain number of years.

Anyone not meeting these qualifications is not considered for a teaching post in the doctorate program at an accredited university.

In hiring someone to work in some stores, certain qualifications must be met.

They must be of legal age to work.

They must be legal residents of the United States.

They must pass a drug test.

If they do not meet these qualifications, they are not considered for employment.

You might notice that sometimes people are willing to overlook the lack of qualifications when they hire someone.

How many illegal immigrants have jobs in the US?

How many places hire underage workers, hoping no one will notice?

Though they may supposedly "get away with it," they are still doing something illegal.

Just as there are qualifications in getting a job in the world, there are qualifications for fulfilling the job/role of an elder in the church.

Ignoring those qualifications will lead to an unqualified person in the office.

Ignoring those qualifications will be "against the law" of God.

Beginning tonight, we will look at the qualifications for elders as laid out by God.

Most of the qualifications are found in Timothy 3 and Titus 1, but we will also be taking some other Scriptures into account as we go through these qualifications.

This will take us a few weeks to go through all of them.

An elder must be "older."

Because we discussed this in a previous lesson, we will not be spending as much time with this qualification.

The word “elder”—by definition—means someone who is older.

This is because as we age, we gain more experience and more maturity.

The ones who are more mature should be the ones chosen to be the leaders.

How old must an elder be?

As we discussed before, an elder must be one who is considered older by the place and time in which he lived.

He must be old enough for his children to have shown themselves to be faithful (and this really cannot be proven until they move out of the house).

It is not often the case that this qualification could be met by someone under the age of 50.

An elder must “desire the office of an elder” (I Timothy 3:1).

As we discussed last week, people may desire the office of an elder for many different reasons.

Those reasons may be for personal gain.

Those reasons may be for personal glory.

Those reasons may be for personal power.

Those reasons may be for the glory of God and aiding His church.

No one should be forced to be an elder if he does not desire the role.

I Peter 5:1-4 shows us that elders are to serve willingly, not because they were forced into the position.

God does not want forced service, but willing service.

If a person does not desire to be an elder for the right reasons, he is not qualified to lead the congregation in that capacity.

An elder must be a man (I Timothy 3:1-7).

It should go without saying that this is the case, but in today’s goofed-up world, it sadly has to be pointed out.

Today there are female preachers and elders in the denominational world.

Until just recently, there was a female preacher next door at the Methodists.

There are female leaders of denominational groups (called pastors).

But now there are even females taking the lead in the Lord’s church!

A lot of congregations (some even in Oklahoma City) have women song-leaders (which is a position of authority).

They have women leading the prayers (which is something commanded specifically for males to do in worship – I Timothy 2:8).

They have women preaching (Paul said that women were to keep silent in the church, and that was specifically in the context of public speaking roles – I Corinthians 14:34-35).

At least one congregation in Missouri (probably more) now has female elders as well as male elders!

The word “elder” is masculine in Greek, meaning it must be a male.

In addition to this, the male pronouns are used in reference to elders.

If a MAN desires the office of an elder, HE desires a good work (I Timothy 3:1).

Having HIS children in subjection (I Timothy 3:4).

If a MAN cannot rule HIS own house, how can HE take care of the church? (I Timothy 3:5).

Not a novice, lest HE fall into the condemnation of the devil (I Timothy 3:6).

HE must have a good report, lest HE fall into reproach (I Timothy 3:7).

Also, an elder is described as the “husband of one wife.”

When was the last time you met a woman who was a husband of anyone?

Regardless of what the religious world (and some in the Lord’s church) wish to say, an elder must be a man.

Why a man? Why not a woman?

God gave different roles to male and female, both in the family (see Genesis 2) and the church.

This does not mean that women are somehow inferior humans, but only that they are given a different role.

Unfortunately, we live in a society that goes against God’s order for male and female.

There are differences between males and females.

This is obvious to those of us with any common sense whatsoever.

There was a TV special about 10 years ago which gave the earth-shaking revelation: boys and girls are different!

These differences make each of us specially suited for the different roles God has laid out for us.

Women, generally speaking, are more nurturing.

Men, generally speaking, are stronger physically and are more logically minded.

Because of these differences, men make terrible mothers.

Elders must be faithful Christians.

You would think that “elders being Christians” is something that should go without saying, but unfortunately it must be said.

The word “Christian” is not the same as “baptized.”

Christian means “one who is like Christ.”

If someone is not living like Christ, then by the meaning of the word, they are not a Christian.

We frequently use the terms “faithful Christian” and “unfaithful Christian,” when one is redundant and the other is an oxymoron.

A Christian (one being like Christ) is one who is faithful.

There are congregations who will appoint a man as elder who is not even faithful in his attendance.

There are congregations who will appoint a man as elder because he is well-known in the community.

There are congregations who will appoint a man as elder because he has a lot of money.

Unfortunately, there are many congregations who seem to ignore the need for that man to be Christ-like.

There are many “Christian colleges” that are associated with the Lord’s church.

Some of them now have as their presidents people who are not even members of the Lord’s church, let alone faithful ones!

Leaving aside the issue of the schools, how is one supposed to lead people to heaven if he isn’t even going there himself?

The same standards exist in some congregations which are led by a “board of directors” instead of elders, some of that board being Lutheran, Baptist, or Catholic.

Can you imagine Paul going from town to town, ordaining the most prominent people in town to be the elders of the Lord’s church instead of those who were faithful members of the Lord’s body?

We discussed 4 or 5 lessons ago that elders were always selected from within the local congregation.

This presupposes that they are Christians.

An elder must be blameless (I Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:5-6).

Blameless does not mean “sinless.”

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Walking in the light (walking with God) gets us continual forgiveness of the sins we commit as a Christian (I John 1:7).

Peter sinned as a Christian (Galatians 2).

If blameless does not mean sinless, what does it mean?

Blameless literally means “unarrestable.”

Charges against one who is blameless will not stick to him.

ASV says “without reproach.”

He must be one about whom no evil rumors exist (or are accepted).

Some may spread malicious gossip about him, not no one takes it seriously because he is blameless.

His character is unimpeachable.

He lives a pure, clean life.

Some list this as the first or second qualification in the list that Paul gives.

It depends on whether or not you count “desires the office” as part of the list or not.

Some, however, believe that “blamelessness” is the ONLY qualification for an elder.

This is not to say that they throw out the next 5 verses.

Instead, Paul says an elder must be blameless, and the next 5 verses go on to give specific areas in his life to look at to see if he is blameless.

Are they blameless in the qualifications listed by Paul?

Conclusion:

Starting next week, we will be looking at the specific qualifications found in I Timothy and Titus.

We need to realize that since we are to follow the example of the elders, these should all be attributes that we should emulate.

Are you living your life as a Christian would?

Are you living your life blamelessly?

Or are there things that people could say against you which are true and ought to be changed?

Make up your mind right now to change, to live for God instead of yourself, to turn your life over to Him.

07 - Qualifications of Elders (part 02)

Introduction:

Last week we began looking at the qualifications that God has laid out for someone to serve as an elder in the church.

This week we will be continuing that study.

There are some qualifications that are easier to explain/understand, and some that are more difficult.

For example, we will be spending an entire lesson just dealing on the meaning of “husband of one wife” and all the views surrounding qualification.

We will also likely be spending an entire lesson on the meaning of having “believing children” and the various views surrounding that qualification.

Tonight, we will be looking at some of the “easier” to understand qualifications laid out by God.

Vigilant

Sober

Of Good Behavior

Given to Hospitality

An Elder must be Vigilant (I Timothy 3:2)

Vigilant means “ever watchful.”

Super-heroes are costumed “vigilantes” who are ever watchful for crimes being committed.

Many people are said to be “keeping a vigil” by someone’s bed at night, making sure they are taken care of, watching for any signs of sickness.

Sometimes police stakeouts are referred to as “vigils.”

The idea is one of being aware of your surroundings and of what is happening around you.

How can you tell if a man is vigilant?

He must be aware of himself and his actions and how those look to others.

The ASV translates this word as “temperate.”

We will deal with “temperate” in an upcoming lesson.

He must be self-controlled, not being carried away with things (this overlaps into the next qualification: sober-minded).

He must not be a Christian who is ignorant of the things going on around him in the congregation.

He cannot be a lazy Christian.

Why must an elder be vigilant?

It is inherent in the word Shepherd that he should be vigilant (I Peter 5:1).

A shepherd must be constantly aware of where the sheep are so that they do not stray.

A shepherd must be constantly aware of the dangers which come from outside so that the sheep are not harmed.

A shepherd cannot be “sleeping on the job.”

Imagine an eldership which paid no attention to the outside influences upon the congregation!

Imagine an eldership which paid no attention to the direction in which the congregation was heading.

Imagine an eldership which paid no attention to the attitudes of the congregation.

Elders must be vigilant in order to keep the congregation safely on their way to heaven.

In order to be vigilant, the elder must know the members of the congregation.

Remember, the elders watch for the souls of the congregation.

Do you really want the watchmen to be sleeping?

A man cannot be considered “vigilant” if he doesn’t care about the problems the congregation faces.

He must be aware of dangers to the congregation and be ready to combat them.

An elder must be Sober (I Timothy 3:2).

What is sober?

Sober does not mean “isn’t a drunk.”

This is the meaning that is placed on the word “sober” today.

There is another qualification that deals with alcoholic intake.

However, this word (in Greek) did carry with it the idea of not being intoxicated with wine, though that was not its only application.

Sober means to be serious, sober-minded (NKJV).

This means that the person has good judgment, taking things into consideration.

This person is clear-headed.

This means the person is not flippant about Christianity.

This does not mean the person cannot have a sense of humor, but he must take his Christianity seriously.

Some have said that this word means dignified, calm, and collected.

Someone who is sober-minded does not let outside influences cloud his judgment.

He is reserved, and does not make rash decisions based on emotions.

He will look to the heart of the matter and see it objectively.

He will not allow alcohol or other drugs to cloud his thinking.

How can you tell if a man is sober-minded?

He takes important things seriously.

He is not flippant, frivolous, or flighty.

Does he take his Christianity seriously?

Does he realize the importance of what he says and does in this life for both himself and others?

Why should an elder be sober-minded?

We do not need people leading the congregation who do not think it is serious work.

Would you want someone working for you who did not take their job seriously?

Would you want someone as your boss who did not take the company seriously?

If your boss was indeed that way, you might not have a company to work for much longer.

Imagine an eldership full of men who did not take the church seriously.

What kind of church are you going to end up with over time?

How many people are going to be led to heaven by these men?

The command to be "sober" is also applied to all Christians.

Let us be sober (I Thessalonians 5:6-8).

Older men are to be sober (Titus 2:2).

Older women are to teach the younger women to be sober (Titus 2:4).

Younger men are to be sober-minded (Titus 2:6).

Gird up the loins of your mind and be sober (I Peter 1:13).

Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, walketh about as a lion seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8).

In order to be prepared to fight Satan's influence, we must be clear-headed, serious, and ever watchful.

An Elder must be of Good Behavior (I Timothy 3:1).

What is “good behavior”?

Other translations:

Some versions translate this word as “orderly” (ASV, McCord).

Others translate it as “mannerly” (Coverdale - 1535)

“Respectable” (ESV).

“Modest” (Geneva Bible - 1587).

It means to be polite and modest in conduct.

This person is not rude.

He does not seek to draw attention to himself in a prideful way.

This person takes the feelings of others into account before he speaks and acts.

He is not rowdy in his behavior.

How can you tell if a man is “of good behavior”?

Is he polite towards others?

Does he take the feelings of others into consideration?

Is he modest (in dress as well as in actions)?

If the answer to these is “yes”, then that person fits this qualification.

Why should an elder be “of good behavior”?

It will help convert others to Christ.

How likely are you to convert someone by being rude to them?

It will help keep unity in the congregation.

It is when people put themselves first instead of the church first that problems happen.

If you have the right attitude (taking other people's feelings into consideration), then problems don't escalate as often.

It will help the members to be better people.

We are supposed to follow the example of the elders.

If the elders are not modest and polite, what sort of example are they giving to the members?

Would you be happy with people if they acted the same way you did?

An Elder Must be Given to Hospitality (I Timothy 3:3).

What is hospitality?

It is willing to take care of others in their needs.

It involves helping to house or feed those who might have need.

It involves having people into your house.

It is a willingness to share your blessings with other people, including strangers.

How can you tell a man is hospitable?

Does he share what he has with others?

This means: does he give food to those who are hungry?

This means: does he give a place to stay for those who might need it?

Does he have people over to his house?

Is he welcoming to visitors here?

Why should an elder be hospitable?

First and foremost, because it is what Jesus did.

He fed the 4,000 and the 5,000 because they were in need of food.

He shared the blessings which He had with others.

Some say this is simply the carrying out of the second greatest command: love thy neighbor as thyself (Mark 10:30-31).

It is commanded for all Christians (Hebrews 13:2).

It sets a good example for the congregation to follow.

It will help to show the love of Christ to others.

What does it mean "given" to hospitality?

In Titus, Paul says that an elder must be "a lover of hospitality" (Titus 1:8).

"Given" means it is his tendency, he is addicted to doing it.

Conclusion:

All the qualifications we have looked at today are not just for elders, but are commanded for all Christians.

All Christians are to be both vigilant and sober (I Peter 5:8).

All Christians should be of good behavior (I Timothy 3:15, I Corinthians 13:5).

All Christians should show hospitality (Mark 10:30-31).

Are you following these commands of God?

08 - Qualifications of Elders (part 03)

Introduction:

The past several weeks, we have been discussing the topic of elders from many different angles.

Elders are members who fulfill a specific role.

Elders have certain responsibilities to the congregation.

The congregation has specific responsibilities to the elders.

The elders have authority in all areas which affect the souls of the members.

The past couple weeks, we have begun to discuss the qualifications of elders as laid out in the Bible.

Elders must be men.

Elders must be older.

Elders must be Christians.

Elders must be blameless.

Etc...

Today, we will again look at the qualifications for elders mentioned in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

One thing I would like you to remember is that it is possible that Paul lists areas wherein the elder is to be blameless.

This really means that these men are the cream of the crop of the congregation in these areas.

With that in mind, let us look at some more qualifications.

An Elder Must be Patient (I Timothy 3:3).

What is patience?

Patience is the idea of longsuffering.

Patience is willing to work a long time with someone or something before expecting the desired result.

When I was a kid, I used to like to put together model cars.

My problem was I did not have patience. I wanted things done quickly.

As a result, the cars I put together looked terrible, had smeared paint, and globs of glue dried and smeared all over it.

I was not showing patience in putting those things together.

Patience also includes the idea of endurance.

How can you tell if a man is patient?

Is he willing to take the extra time needed to accomplish goals?

Is he willing to endure difficulties, knowing that there is an end in sight?

Does he suffer long with people, even when many others would have given up in frustration?

Think of Job.

He went through terrible trials (loss of property, loss of children, torment from friends and spouse), yet suffered through it, knowing there was a greater goal.

Why should an elder be patient?

Some people are projects.

While some people understand and respond to the truth of the gospel immediately, other people take weeks, months, and even years to convert!

Elders must show this kind of patience because of the importance of the gospel and of people's souls.

Some Christians have different personalities.

Not everyone is the same.

Some people have more "abrasive" personalities than others.

The elder must be willing to put up with these people for the sake of their souls.

Sometimes it takes a long time to get a point across to people (even Christians), so the elder needs to be patient with them and help them as they try to learn and grow.

If the elder was impatient, he might give up on teaching those who would eventually obey, but need more time and attention to do it.

An elder must be patient because many projects take a while to complete.

We have discussed trying to have Vacation bible School sometime in the coming years.

This is not something that can just be thrown together at the last minute and still be effective.

It takes patience, planning, and preparation to do these things right.

Patience will help an elder be more effective both within and without the church.

All Christians are commanded to be patient.

Be patient towards all men (I Thessalonians 5:14).

The reward for patient continuing in well-doing is eternal life (Romans 2:7).

Be patient (James 5:7-8).

In patience possess ye your souls (Luke 21:19).

Follow after patience (I Timothy 6:11).

Let us run with patience the race which is set before us (Hebrews 12:1).

Add to your knowledge, temperance, and to your temperance patience (II Peter 1:6).

So why is this qualification for all Christians listed in the qualifications for elders? Shouldn't that have gone without saying?

Again remember that elders are to exemplify these qualities.

All of us have some level of patience, elders are to be among the most patient men in the congregation.

An Elder Must be a Lover of Good Men (Titus 1:8).

What does "lover of good men" mean?

The phrase is actually one Greek word: Philagathos.

It comes from Phileo – to like, as in a friend.

And Agathos – good.

So, literally, it is "a friend of good."

The ASV translates it "a lover of good."

The Coverdale Bible (1535) says "one that loveth goodness."

McCord says "a lover of goodness."

NKJV – "a lover of that which is good."

You will notice that the word "men" is not in these other translations, for the idea is broader than just "lover of good men."

The idea is that this man loves those things which are good, according to God's standard.

He is a friend to all those who are doing the will of God.

He likes to surround himself with things which are good.

He appreciates the good qualities of others and focuses on them.

He will encourage good behavior in other people.

If one loves the good, then he should also hate the evil.

In such case, the man will not have things which are evil.

He will not allow sinful things to have influence on him.

How can you tell if a man is a lover of good?

Does he seek to exemplify the good characteristics which can be found in the Bible?

Does he encourage others who are showing good traits?

Does he surround himself with things which are good?

Are his entertainment choices in line with God's will?

Remember that in these categories, the elder must be blameless.

Why must an elder be a lover of that which is good?

Because elders watch for the souls of the congregation.

He must encourage those good traits in people so that they will seek to grow them.

He must serve as an example to the rest of the congregation about what they should surround themselves with.

He must also be a lover of those things which are good because he seeks to convert lost souls to Christ.

Imagine a man who surrounds himself with evil things (alcohol, pornography, rap music) trying to convince someone to turn to God (who is completely GOOD).

If you are a Christian, you WILL seek to follow after good things.

All Christians are commanded to follow after good.

Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth (Colossians 3:2).

The fruit of the spirit includes goodness (Galatians 5:22).

A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things (Luke 6:45).

Cleave (cling) to that which is good (Romans 12:9).

Speak that which is good (Ephesians 4:29)

Follow that which is good, both among yourselves and unto all (I Thessalonians 5:15).

Follow that which is good (III John 11).

Dwell on the good things (Philippians 4:8).

Elders are to exemplify this characteristic.

An Elder Must be Just (Titus 1:8).

What is "just"?

Just means fairness.

It means not overreacting, but fair-minded in a dispute or discussion.

It is acting without partiality.

This is why we call it a travesty of justice if someone is not given a fair, unbiased trial.

This is why it is said that “justice is blind,” meaning that it only weighs the facts and not the opinions or emotions.

The word in Greek can also be translated righteous or equitable.

How can you tell if a man is just?

Does he give preferential treatment to certain people if a disagreement comes up?

Perhaps his family, even if they are wrong?

How many people automatically take the side of their family members in a conflict without any concern for the facts of the case?

One old radio show had a man accidentally show up at the wrong place at the wrong time.

He thought he'd be able to prove he was innocent until he heard who the judge was going to be.

His words were: “Oh no, I'm gonna hang tonight!”

This judge was obviously biased against him before hearing any of the facts of the case.

Is he open to hearing both sides of an issue (even if he is involved)?

Is he willing to look objectively at things?

Why should an elder be just?

Problems within the congregation must be taken care of by the elders.

I would hope that you would want a just, impartial person dealing with the problems.

When an elder takes sides (based on something other than the facts of the matter), then more strife in the congregation is a result.

An elder must be ready to show where both sides may be wrong (because usually there is not just one side in the wrong).

One who is recognized as fair in his dealings will bring matters to a close a lot easier than someone who is known to take sides before hearing the facts.

Are all Christians to have this characteristic?

We are to emulate Christ, who was just (I Peter 3:18).

There are only two choices: just or wicked (Matthew 13:49), which one do you think we ought to be?

An Elder Must be Holy (Titus 1:8).

What is holy?

Holy means devoted to God, set apart for His service.

One who is holy is dedicated to the Lord His work.

How can you tell if a man is holy?

Can you tell his dedication to the Lord?

Can you tell his dedication to the Lord's work?

Is that man dedicated to being separate from sin?

Why must an elder be holy?

If he is to lead by example, and the goal is to get other people to separate themselves from sin, then he must be separate from sin.

He is to be the example of how we should live our lives for God.

An elder must be holy because we want leaders who are dedicated to the cause of Christ!

We do not want leaders who are half-way, wanna-be Christians.

We want, we need, leaders who are truly devoted to the cause of Christ.

This gives us sincere leaders as well.

All Christians are commanded to have this characteristic.

Be ye holy in all manner of conversation (I Peter 1:15).

This means every aspect of our lives should be set apart for God.

This means every aspect of our lives should be separate from sin.

We are to be holy because God is holy (I Peter 1:16).

If we are to be godly (like God), we must be holy.

Holiness leads to everlasting life (Romans 6:22).

Shouldn't this make us WANT to be holy?

God has called us to holiness (I Thessalonians 4:7).

Holiness is the kind of life God has called us to!

Without holiness, we will not see God (Hebrews 12:14).

Simply put, if you are not holy, you are going to hell.

Conclusion:

Again, all of these qualifications for elders are also qualifications for Christians as well.

Are you patient?

Do you love the good things (according to God's standard)? Or are you one who surrounds himself with evil things (entertainment, friends, etc...)?

Are you fair in your dealings with others (just)?

Are you holy?

If the answer to any of these is "no," then you need to repent immediately and get right with God!

Yes, God expects the elders to meet these qualifications, but he expects the same of all Christians!

09 - Qualifications of Elders (part 04)

Introduction:

If you owned a company and you were looking for someone to promote to manager, what would you look for?

You would want someone you were familiar with (from within the company).

You would want someone who you trusted.

You would want someone who was familiar with the employees.

You would want someone who exemplified the attitudes and attributes you would want all of your employees to have.

God is looking for people to lead His congregations, so what is He looking for?

Someone from within the congregation.

Someone trustworthy.

Someone familiar with the members.

Someone who exemplifies the attitudes and attributes He wants all the church to have.

With these thoughts in mind, we are going to continue our look at two qualifications for elders listed in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Apt to teach.

Must hold to the Word of God.

An Elder must be Apt to Teach (I Timothy 3:2).

What does “apt to teach” mean?

The ASV translates it “able to teach.”

The word “apt” (as in aptitude) refers to ability.

It means that an elder must have the ability to teach.

The one word translated “apt to teach” only appears one other time in the Bible, II Timothy 2:24.

We will look at that verse in a few minutes.

What must he have the ability to teach?

Does the elder have to be able to teach any subject at any time (algebra, for example)?

We must remember that this is in the context of the church.

Does the elder have to be able to teach any and every Bible subject?

Does each elder have to have the ability to teach all the intricacies of the book of Revelation?

Does each elder have to be able to successfully prove whether Noah was alive when Abraham was born (a subject of debate among some)?

What if (like these and others) it is an issue that the elder has not studied or considered before? Does that make him unqualified?

Those both are issues in which the Bible is what is taught, but is this what Paul is talking about?

What must the elder be “able to teach”?

If an elder cannot teach someone what they must do to be saved, then he has no business being an elder.

If an elder cannot teach someone how to live faithfully (things to avoid, things to do), then he has no business being an elder.

Does this mean that unless a man can teach an adult Bible class thoroughly, deeply, and exhaustively that he is unqualified?

No, and we will get into why momentarily.

Where must an elder be “able to teach”?

The Greek word does NOT have public teaching as part of its inherent meaning.

There are certain types of teaching that an elder might not have any skill at whatsoever (teaching little children, perhaps); does that disqualify him?

The idea is that an elder must be able to teach someone the gospel in a way that can be understood (that is what makes someone able to teach).

There are some college professors who might be very smart and able to write incredibly technical instructions.

However, they could not teach it in a way it could be understood by most.

There is no point in teaching if you make it so difficult nobody knows what you are talking about.

So, does an elder have to be able to teach an adult class on any/every book of the Bible?

No, that is not inherent in the meaning of the word.

No more than every elder must be able to teach a college doctorate class on Revelation (after all, isn't that teaching as well?).

Often people say that if a man isn't teaching a class, he can't be an elder.

What do you say of congregations who have 10 elders?

Must each of them be teaching a class?

What do you say of congregations which only have adult members and only one class on Sunday/Wednesday, but they have 3 or 4 elders?

Must they make extra classes so that each of the elders is teaching?

The qualification does not say he **MUST BE TEACHING A CLASS**.

The “Bible class” set-up is not really seen in the New Testament as a regular practice of the early church.

The qualification means that he is able to teach the gospel to someone (perhaps on a one-on-one basis), as well as teach people how to live faithfully so as to get to heaven.

There are many people who are not very good at public speaking (such as teaching a class), but who are fantastic personal workers for the Lord.

There are some people who are very good public speakers, but who are terrible personal-workers (they lack patience, perhaps cannot speak without a prepared script).

Of the two, which would you rather have?

The apostles taught publicly and privately (Acts 5:42), but only one word is used to describe both (the same root word as “apt to teach”).

Therefore, the word “teach” does not inherently mean a public setting, but instead simply means to teach someone, somewhere.

A look at II Timothy 2:24.

This is the only other place in the Bible where “apt to teach” is found.

The person who is to be “apt to teach” is “a servant of the Lord.”

The word “the” is not in the Greek, so it is “A servant of the Lord.”

Also, the word “servant” is not in the masculine (referring to male members only, or perhaps the preacher only as some suggest), but instead in the neuter gender, which encompasses every Christian (male and female).

So, every Christian is to be “apt to teach.”

Since we have the same writer (Paul) writing to the same person (Timothy) we should expect that this same phrase means the same thing in both instances.

If it means that elders must be able to preach on Sundays, then that means all Christians (male and female) must be able to preach on Sundays.

We know women are to keep silent in regards to public speaking roles in the church (I Corinthians 14:34-35).

Therefore “apt to teach” cannot mean “must be able to preach on Sundays.”

If it means that elders must be able to teach the adult class, then it means all Christians (male and female) must be able to teach the adult class.

Again, the previously mentioned verse makes this an impossibility, scripturally speaking.

If it means that elders must be able to teach others the gospel and how to get to heaven, then it means all Christians (male and female) must be able to teach others the gospel and how to get to heaven.

Isn't that a novel concept?

Are Christians commanded to teach others how to be saved and how to live their lives as to go to heaven?

Matthew 28:19-20 – teach others, baptize them, and then teach them to do what I've commanded you to do (which includes teaching others).

II Timothy 2:2 – teach faithful men who can teach others as well.

II Timothy 2:4 – the older women are to teach the younger women how to live godly lives (which would allow them to go to heaven).

If you know what you did to become a Christian, you should be able to teach others what to do to become a Christian.

More than just ability to teach, all Christians must also have the willingness to teach.

This is the only way to prove that one is able to teach is if he actually does it!

What good is the ability to teach if one does not use it?

If a man is not willing to teach others the gospel, then whatever ability he has to teach the gospel is useless!

Such a man has no business in the role of elder.

Such a person has no right claiming to follow Christ if they are not willing to teach the gospel to others!

Why should an elder be "able to teach"?

First, because ALL Christians are to be able to teach!

Second, because he needs to lead by example, helping other Christians to be able to share their faith with others.

Anyone who is not willing to teach the gospel to others is not qualified AT ALL to be an elder.

An Elder must Hold to the Word of God (Titus 1:9).

This qualification goes hand-in-hand with the previously mentioned one (able to teach).

This is viewed by some as Paul; describing the same qualification in two different ways (since it is in two separate letters).

Really, one describes the ability, the other describes the standard held while teaching.

Teaching the Baptist gospel does NOT mean one is qualified to be an elder.

Be must be willing and able to teach the gospel AS FOUND IN THE BIBLE!

The word of God is where the gospel is found.

Here, it is called “the faithful word.”

“Faithful” means trustworthy.

It also means that it is faithful to the original.

Therefore the word of God, as delivered to us, is faithful to the original message sent by God.

As Paul said, when we read what he has written, we have the same understanding that he had received from God’s Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:3-5).

Teaching any other gospel than what is found in the Scriptures causes one to be cursed by God (Galatians 1).

It is in the gospel that God’s power to save is found (Romans 1:16-17).

No one can be saved without the true gospel.

A false gospel makes fake Christians.

A false gospel gives false assurances.

If we do not hold to the FAITHFUL word of God, we will not be saving souls.

Why must he hold to the faithful word of God?

Paul clarifies the reasons for holding to the word of God.

In order to exhort by sound doctrine (Titus 1:9).

Exhort literally means “to call to one’s side.”

We use sound doctrine (true teachings) to call people to our sides in Christ.

It is the same idea we discussed earlier with “able to teach.”

If you know how you became a Christian, you should be able to teach others how to become a Christian.

This would be calling them to your side.

Without sound doctrine, there is no calling them to Christ.

Exhorting them would describe teaching them the gospel.

In order to convince the gainsayers (Titus 1:9).

To “convince” is to convict, answer, or correct someone.

A gainsayer is literally “one who speaks against.”

The same word is translated one chapter later as “answering again” (Titus 2:9).

It carries the idea of talking back or against someone or something.

The gainsayers are not just people who are antagonistic, but also those who might argue about what Scripture teaches.

Holding to God's word will help convince those who have the disposition to accept it.

This also contains the idea of correcting the Christian who has gone astray.

After all, most people don't really care if they've violated a certain passage of Scripture unless they are Christians in the first place.

Does this mean than an elder must always be able to convince the opposers?

Some people will never be convinced, nor do they care what the Bible teaches on any given subject.

Such people will never be convinced or convicted.

They will never come to your side in response to the call of the gospel.

The verse does not teach that elders must be able to convince everyone or even most people.

Instead, the qualification is that he holds to the true word of God so that he MIGHT exhort and convince others.

It only speaks of his responsibility in the matter.

His qualification does not hinge on whether or not some people respond to God's call for repentance.

The qualification is that he holds to the word of God and uses it as his tool for converting people to the Lord.

What about the rest of us?

We saw that all Christians must be willing and able to teach others.

Do we also have to hold to the faithful word of God as our instrument for teaching others?

Quite obviously the answer is YES!

This does not mean we cannot use aids (pamphlets, filmstrips, dvds, illustrations, etc...), but if the teaching is not Biblical, we sin in teaching it!

II Thessalonians 2:15 – hold fast to the teachings which were delivered by the apostles.

II Timothy 1:13 – hold fast the form of sound words which Paul delivered.

Again, if we do not teach the truth (which is the sound doctrine from the faithful word of God), we give others false hope and also condemn ourselves!

Make your choice: are you going to hold fast to the word of God?

Conclusion:

More than just a discussion of the qualifications of elders, this lesson has been an attempt to remind all of us that we have a responsibility to share the pure gospel with others.

All Christians are supposed to be able to teach others.

If you have become a Christian, all you have to do is share with others how to become a Christian.

If you see a Christian who is not living their lives properly, you have a responsibility to teach them how to teach them what they are doing wrong so that they can get to heaven.

Most importantly, YOU need to pattern your life after God's revealed word and encourage others to do the same!

Are you?

10 - Qualifications of Elders (part 05)

Introduction:

With this series of lessons dealing with the eldership, and specifically the qualifications, we have been seeing how almost every qualification listed for an elder is also something Christians are commanded to have as well.

All Christians are to be sober and vigilant (I Peter 5:8).

All Christians are to be hospitable (Hebrews 13:2).

All Christians are to be “apt to teach” (II Timothy 2:24).

All Christians are to be just (Matthew 13:49) and holy (I Peter 1:15).

Etc...

Tonight we are going to look at some more characteristics all Christians should have, but that elders especially ought to show forth in their lives.

Temperate

Not Covetous

Not Greedy of Filthy Lucre

An Elder Must be Temperate (Titus 1:8).

What does “temperate” mean?

Most newer translations (including Hugo McCord’s) says “self-control.”

Some others (ESV) say “disciplined.”

The idea is that this person does not over-indulge in things.

He can control his appetite so that his appetite does not control him.

He has the ability to deny himself of things.

The word literally means strong, or having power over something.

In this case, the temperate person has power over himself.

Have you met someone who “cannot control” their eating?

That is not temperance.

Some people jump headlong into anything that interests them.

My grandfather was this way.

He got interested in classic cars, then spent thousands of dollars buying and restoring some cars.

Then he got into stamps (cars were forgotten), and spent thousands of dollars building up a stamp collection and going to stamp shows.

He let his hobbies control him instead of the other way around.

Some people call this an “addictive” personality, where the person basically becomes addicted to whatever hobby happens to come along.

What “temperance” does NOT mean.

Temperance does not mean completely avoiding certain things, but instead not letting them control you.

Take food for instance; you can’t just cut it out altogether!

In the 1800s and early 1900s, there were “temperance” societies which advocated the complete annihilation of alcohol.

Alcohol is a completely other topic that will be dealt with in a week or two.

But temperance simply means not letting something else control you.

There are good uses of alcohol (medicine, specifically) which should not be thrown out with the bathwater.

Temperance does not mean you cannot have a hobby you enjoy.

Ask any preacher’s wife if their husbands are addicted to books.

This does not mean they are not temperate (unless they get to the point where they are putting the family in financial danger by continuing to buy them).

God wants us to study the word of God, and many books are helpful.

Some people enjoy garage sales, but they don’t spend obscene amounts of time thinking about them and using all of their money on them.

It is okay to watch the television, but you must not (as some do), just sit in front of the television all day, every day, when there are things which need doing (in your house, for your family, and most importantly for the Lord).

How can you tell if a man is temperate?

Is he able to control his appetite?

I have heard it said by some that it is a disgrace for a fat man to be a preacher because it shows that it is ok to let your appetite control you.

There is a big difference between what the government calls “overweight” and someone who is gluttonous.

I may fit one category, but I do not fit into the other.

If a man is addicted to eating, then he shows that he cares more about filling his stomach than he does his health.

Again, that does not mean that eating is wrong.

But if the person does not know when to quit, he shows he has no self-control.

Is he able to control his spending?

If a man is always broke because he is always buying things, he is NOT temperate.

Some people have to have all the latest electronic gadgets, even though the ones they had already still work just fine.

I can't tell you how many times I've heard one of my relatives tell me "I got a new computer."

Look at the amount of people who waited in line overnight just to buy the last iPhone.

When I worked at a record store, there were people who came in near the 3rd of every month (welfare check day) and spent \$300-400 on cds.

You know, there is usually a reason if someone is ALWAYS broke.

Is he able to control his time?

Is he a workaholic? Does work ALWAYS come before his family or the Lord?

Does he spend all of his spare time in front of the TV or the computer?

Does he spend every possible moment fishing or hunting?

Or is he able to appropriately divide his time amongst the things which need his attention?

Why should an elder be temperate?

It helps assure us that he will give his time to the Lord's work.

It is possible for some people to spend too much time in certain parts of the Lord's work.

Some preachers spend so much time in study and preaching that they neglect their family.

The temperate man will make sure he allots his attentions to the various parts of the Lord's work (family, congregation, evangelism, etc...).

We do not want a man to be an elder if he lets insignificant things of this world take all of his time.

It helps him to identify the lack of self-control in others in the congregation, so that he can help them learn self-control.

If an elder is not temperate in the first place, he would have no standing to tell others that they need to better allot their time.

It would be like a drunk telling you that you drink too much.

It would be a case of "do what I say, not what I do."

It will keep him focused on his role of shepherding the local flock.

There are elders within the Lord's church who have taken to spending all their time "exposing" supposed false teachers and condemning all those who can, in any way, be connected with them.

Is exposing false teaching proper? Of course it is!

Is it the responsibility of the local elders to spend countless hours each day and week condemning congregations in other states because their preacher once spoke on a lectureship with someone else who they deem a false teacher?

The responsibility of the elders is to shepherd the local congregation!

The temperate elder might deal with false teaching occurring elsewhere, but he will not let that take up all of his time, leaving him with little or no time to fulfill his God-given role to the local congregation!

Should all Christians be temperate?

Aged men are commanded to be temperate (Titus 2:2).

Paul preached to non-Christians the need to be temperate (Acts 24:25).

The topics Paul preached about in this occasion were: righteousness (how to get right with God), temperance (how to live right), and judgment to come (condemnation if you don't live right).

Why would Paul tell a non-Christian he needed to be temperate if it only applied to those who were elders?

Obviously, then, this is something EVERYONE should strive for.

Peter listed temperance as one of the "Christians graces": add to your knowledge temperance (II Peter 1:6).

The fruit of the Spirit includes temperance (Galatians 5:23).

Temperance is required for the eldership, but it is also commanded for all Christians.

An Elder Must Not Be Covetous (I Timothy 3:3).

This is the first of the "negative" qualifications we will be looking at.

These are characteristics elders (and Christians) should NOT possess.

What does covetous mean?

Basically, the word means intensely desiring something.

Coveting prayers of your brethren is a good thing.

However, when it is used in the Bible, it refers only sinful desire.

One of the Ten Commandments is "thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's possessions, including his wife, house, servants, animals, etc (Exodus 20:17).

The ASV translates it “not a lover of money” which is apparently a literal rendition of what the Greek word used.

McCord translates it “greedy for money.”

This is very similar to “not greedy of filthy lucre” which also appears in this verse (in some versions).

Covetousness, from a Biblical perspective, means putting desire of something above your desire to do right by God’s standard (Paul calls covetousness “idolatry” – Colossians 3:5).

There are at least 3 different words used in the Bible which are translated “covetous” or “covetousness” and each of them have different shades of meaning.

Most of them in the NT seem to refer to a sinful desire for money or gain.

How can you tell if a man is “covetous”?

If a man places his focus on money and getting rich, he is covetous.

Is it wrong to be rich?

Of course not!

Paul gave commands to those who were rich (I Timothy 6:17), and the commands did not include “give away all your wealth.”

Is it wrong to want to have a successful business?

Absolutely not!

Lydia was a seller of purple (very expensive clothing) (Acts 16:14), but she was never told to close her business.

It is when the person thinks constantly about ways to get more and more money for himself that it becomes covetousness.

If a man constantly talks about his money and possessions, he is covetous.

If a man is constantly seeking more material things then he is covetous.

Why should an elder NOT be covetous?

People who seek after riches put their trust in material things instead of trust in God (I Timothy 6:17).

Our trust should be in God, not in riches.

Men who are covetous are always on the lookout for ways of getting money instead of being on the lookout for the souls of the congregation.

God does not want men as elders (and neither should we) who put money (or any other material thing) first in their lives.

If an elder puts material things first, then that makes him a hypocrite when telling others to “seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33).

Is it ok for Christians to be covetous?

Hebrews 13:5 – let your conversation be WITHOUT covetousness, but be content with such things as you have.

Colossians 3:5 – Covetousness is idolatry.

Ephesians 5:3 – don’t let covetousness even be named among you.

Romans 1:29 – covetousness is given equal billing with murder.

Elders must not be Greedy of Filthy Lucre (I Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7).

What does “greedy of filthy lucre” mean?

Lucre is where we get our word “lucrative” from, which means profitable.

Filthy is dirty, ill-gotten.

So, greedy of filthy lucre is the desire or willingness to take money in an illegal or unethical way.

This person will cheat on his taxes.

This person might steal from his employer (taking supplies from work, lying on his timecard, not earning his paycheck.

“Greedy of filthy lucre” is an outgrowth of being covetous (a lover of money).

While this qualification is missing from some versions in I Timothy 3:3, it is present in every version of Titus 1:7.

How can you tell if a man is greedy of filthy lucre?

First, look to see if he is covetous (as we previously discussed).

Is the man into “get rich quick” schemes?

Does he cheat others in transactions?

Does he talk about how he “pulled one over” on someone in finances?

It may be hard to discern this trait in some people, because most don’t about advertising that they are looking to gain money unethically or illegally.

Why should an elder be “not greedy of filthy lucre”?

Because this is an outgrowth of covetousness, it means this person puts material gain ahead of God.

A man who is greedy like this would be tempted greatly to abuse the office of elder for his own personal gain.

If we are to follow the example of the elders, we need examples that are worth following!

We cannot ask people to follow the example of someone who tries to cheat people out of money.

We need people whose focus is on the eternal life, not the earthly life!

Are Christians under this same requirement?

Absolutely!

We saw that no Christian is to be covetous, and being greedy of filthy lucre is an outgrowth of that.

We should set our sights on things above, not on things of this earth (Colossians 3:1)

How would you like to explain to God why it is ok that you cheated on your taxes?

How would you like to explain to God why it is ok that you stole things from work?

How would you like to explain to God why it is ok that you set your sights on getting rich in material things instead of setting up treasures in heaven?

Conclusion:

Christians should always seek to exercise temperance in their lives!

Do you? Or do you get carried away with things (hobbies, TV, computer, eating)?

Christians should not be covetous!

It is setting something up ahead of God.

It could be money, time, friends, or many other things.

It is idolatry, and it is sin!

Christians should not be greedy for filthy lucre!

We should be content with what we have and know that our treasure is in heaven!

We should never do things unethical, immoral, or illegal to obtain anything!

Yes, these qualifications describe the elders, but they also describe Christians as well!

How do you match up?

11 - Qualifications of Elders (Part 06)

Introduction:

If you want to know what anger looks like, cut someone off in traffic and then slow down in front of them.

I don't recommend actually doing that, but if you did, you would see people get livid and quickly.

For other people, that anger comes when someone speeds up so that they can't pass them.

Anger is a real problem for a lot of people.

You hear almost daily about arguments that escalated until someone gets shot.

It is the cause of many divorces.

So, you may ask, what does this have to do with the qualifications of elders?"

I'm glad you asked.

Tonight we are going to be looking at the qualifications which deal with anger and other similar things.

An elder must not be soon angry (Titus 1:7).

What does "soon angry" mean?

Thayer says the word used means "prone to anger."

Brother Hugo McCord translated it that way.

Another way of saying it is "quick-tempered."

This is the only time in the New Testament that this word appears.

This describes a person whose buttons area easily pushed.

It is someone who gets angry very easily.

You know the type of person: he might be nice much of the time, but he quickly goes to being angry if he is crossed or disagreed with.

Basically, this describes someone who does not have a handle on his temper.

This person usually won't seek for understanding, but instead his first response is to get mad.

How can you tell if a man is quick-tempered?

Simple observation over a period of time should make this quite clear.

Is he quick to "fly off the handle"?

Is he someone who you know you cannot discuss things with because he'll just get mad?

Sometimes a man is well-behaved with his friends, but put him in his business, and he might be someone else completely.

How does he act towards those who disagree with him?

How does he behave towards his wife and children?

A quick-tempered man will usually focus his anger on his family.

Instead of being quick tempered, elders are to be patient and longsuffering.

We looked at the need for all Christians (including elders) to be patient a few weeks ago.

All Christians need to spend time in prayer asking god for His help in controlling our tempers so they don't flare up.

Why should an elder be "not soon angry"?

A man who is quick-tempered will bring reproach upon the church quicker than almost anything else.

He will fly off the handle and say things without bothering to consider other people's feelings or responses.

Do you really think that person can help us to be patient and longsuffering?

A quick-tempered man will not show patience in solving problems in the Lord's church.

In fact, his anger will cause things to quickly escalate to the point where people may leave the congregation and souls may be lost.

He will not seek to work towards solutions, but instead get mad and let his anger cloud his judgment.

A quick-tempered man will quickly give up on studying with people who may need more help and explanation.

Imagine a quick-tempered person, and then image someone telling them they don't understand what he's trying to get across.

Imagine even more someone who says "I don't think that's right..."

A quick-tempered man will constantly have trouble in his family.

Is it wrong to be angry (since it says not "SOON" angry)?

It depends on what you mean by "angry."

Ephesians 4:26 says "be ye angry, and sin not."

This "angry" is the same root word in Greek as "not soon angry."

Some take this verse to mean you can have righteous indignation (anger) towards sin, but that you don't let that anger drive you to sin (perhaps in berating the person who is sinning).

Others take this verse to mean it is ok to be angry at someone so long as you don't sin because of your anger.

The differences in the interpretations come down to "what are you angry at?" The person or the sin?

If this refers exclusively to righteous indignation, it would mean that an elder must not soon get angry at sins.

God frequently was angered because of sin (Deuteronomy 4:21, 9:8, 9:20, etc...).

Some say it is ok to be angry so long as you don't actually "do" anything about it or act on it.

Jesus taught that the thoughts behind actions were also sin (even if not acted upon) in the Sermon on the Mount.

The one who looks at a woman to lust after her (this refers to impure thoughts) has sinned just as if he had committed adultery.

One who hates his brother (thoughts) is just like a murderer to God.

This obviously cannot be what is meant, so what is it?

It is okay to get upset about something, so long as you do not give place to evil thoughts or actions (be angry, but don't sin).

If you are angry because people sin, that is a good thing.

Just make sure you don't decide to respond in an unchristian way.

An elder must not be a brawler (I Timothy 3:3).

What is a "brawler"?

The first thought that might enter your mind is that of a boxer or a fighter, but physical confrontations are not what is in view here.

Other translations:

ASV, McCord – Not Contentious

NKJV – not Quarrelsome

Coverdale – Abhorring Strife

Really, what "brawler" means in this verse is someone who is always looking for arguments.

You know the people: they aren't happy unless there is some strife.

If there is none, they seem to find ways to cause some.

They are the kinds of people who are always trying to stir up trouble.

We might call them troublemakers.

How can you tell if someone is a “brawler”?

Is he argumentative?

Do his “discussions” always involve how everyone else is wrong?

Do his “discussions” seek to cause problems?

Is he a gossip?

Those who talk about others behind their back are repulsive to God.

Does this person always seem to bring other people up (and not in a good way) in his conversations?

There are a lot of congregations that have one person who can (and will) tell you all the dirt on any and all members of the congregation.

Paul called them tattlers and busybodies (I Tim 5:13).

Does he seek to divide the Lord’s church instead of uniting it?

Does he drive people away (members or visitors) from the congregation with his contentious attitude?

Does he insist everyone who disagrees with him on any subject is wrong?

And worse yet, bound for hell because they don’t agree with him on some issue that is not related to our salvation?

Many one-cup brethren are like this in regards to the one cup and one loaf.

Does he fit the description “he’s not happy unless people are unhappy”?

Instead of being contentious, elders should be peaceable.

All Christians are told, “as much as lieth within you, be at peace with all men” (Romans 12:18).

Since this applies to all Christians, it also applies to the eldership.

Why should an elder not be contentious?

An elder is supposed to help protect the flock as well as helping them grow.

Driving them away is not going to help protect them, nor will it help them grow.

Paul is a good example of trying to be all things to all people so that he might SAVE some of them (I Corinthians 9:22).

A contentious person will find it very difficult to encourage people to convert.

A contentious elder will cause strife, not just within the congregation, but also within the eldership.

A contentious person usually seeks to elevate himself over others which violates the need to put others above yourself (Philippians 2:4, Matthew 7:12).

Does this apply to all Christians?

All Christians are to seek to be at peace with all men (Romans 12:18), which eliminates being a brawler.

The contentious person will receive the indignation and wrath of God (Romans 2:8), is that what YOU really want?

An elder must not be a striker (I Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7).

What does it mean to be a “striker”?

Does this mean a union member who walks out on his job? No.

Interestingly enough, McCord translates it as “quick tempered.”

The New King James translates it “not violent.”

Some say it means “a pugnacious or combative person,” however that is not strong enough.

The word, in Greek, comes from a word meaning “to strike” as in hitting or beating someone or something.

So, the person who is a “striker” is a violent person.

How can you tell if a person is a “striker”?

My great-aunt-in-law attends a religious organization that they refer to as “the Bloody Bucket.”

They call it this (not on their sign, obviously, but it has gotten that nickname) because just about every week there is a disagreement during their Bible study.

Instead of going to the Bible and looking to see what it says, they “take it outside” and proceed to fight in order to determine who is right on a given Bible issue.

They honestly have fistfights in front of their building until someone is bloody and gives up.

These are what we would term “strikers.”

You can tell a person is a “striker” if he uses physical intimidation to get his way.

Do people fear crossing him because of what the consequences might be?

You can tell a person is a “striker” if he beats (by that I mean abusively) his children or his wife.

This man might take out his frustrations on his family with his fists.

You can tell a person is a striker if he is serious when he asks “do you want to take this outside?”

If he is serious about resolving disputes with his fists, he is not qualified to be an elder, and has some serious work to do in order to even be a faithful child of God.

Why should elders not be violent people?

These would try to “Lord it over” the flock, which is condemned by the Holy Spirit (I Peter 5:1-4).

Violent people try to force others to do things their way.

This completely violates the example of Jesus who was meek.

This would also be trying to keep the members of the congregation faithful by force instead of willingly.

They would bring reproach upon the church.

Can you imagine what would be said around town about the church of Christ if Jerry began to threaten the members with beatings if they didn't come to services?

No one would ever want to visit here, and any influence we might have would instantly vanish.

They would be bad examples to the rest of the congregation.

Is it permissible to God for a Christian to instigate fights?

Jesus chastised Peter for instigating violence against the servant of the high priest (Matthew 26:52).

If the elders are allowed to do it, then why not all the rest of the congregation?

If that was allowed, we would end up with every member coming to blows anytime there was a disagreement.

Does this mean that violence is never permissible by God?

To cover this topic in-depth would require more time than we have tonight.

However, God did command the Israelites to go to war and utterly destroy entire nations.

Jesus Himself told his followers to have weapons, even if they had to sell their garments to get one (Luke 22:36).

If violence is not permitted, why would Jesus command the disciples to have weapons?

Since Jesus condemned Peter for instigating violence, yet commanded them to have weapons, the only explanation is that Jesus permitted them to have weapons for self-defense.

Some people teach that the Bible condemns any violence at all, that we must all be pacifists.

This means if a man comes in your house and begins smashing your children's fingers with a baseball bat, you would be forced to sit there and do nothing but watch until it was over.

The extreme views of some of these people even says that you cannot even call the police, because that could end in violence which you caused by calling them.

Needless to say, that is NOT what the Bible teaches.

Conclusion:

Do these three qualifications for elders also apply to every Christian?

Yes they do.

We are to be at peace with all men, not violent towards them.

We are to seek for unity and peace in the church, not causing trouble and strife.

We are all to be patient, not allowing our temper to take control.

All of this means that we are to follow God and not Satan.

Look at yourselves tonight.

Are you the kind of person who argues a lot?

Are you the kind of person who gossips (which causes strife and contentions)?

Are you the kind of person who resorts to violence?

If the answer to any of these questions is “yes,” then you are in desperate need of repentance.

This is NOT the way God wants you to act.

12a - Qualifications of Elders (Part 07)

Introduction:

Few things are as dangerous to public safety as alcohol.

A large percentage of all deaths on the road are because someone was drinking.

Most of the “domestic abuse” cases in this country stem from someone drinking.

It has been reported that well over half of the violent crimes committed in this country involve someone who has been drinking.

Alcohol is a drug used by more people than all illegal drugs combined.

It is made readily available in many grocery stores, gas stations, Wal-Mart, and restaurants.

In 1970, a survey was released which said 79% of all men and 69% of all women drink alcohol.

It is advertised frequently on television as something fun or cool.

Never do you see a commercial for beer that shows a man beating his wife, with the caption “we helped cause this, drink it up!”

Never do you see a commercial with a man at a funeral crying over his dead son who was killed by a drunk driver with the caption, “drink Bud Light, help keep funeral homes busy!”

No, instead the commercials are written to be funny, showing people being “cool” and having beers in their hands.

Why would they advertise what their product causes? That would hurt sales.

There is supposedly an age restriction to purchase alcohol, but it is very easy for someone to have their older sibling buy the beer for them.

Unfortunately, for a lot of teenagers, their own parents will buy the beer, giving the teenager free access to it at home.

Alcohol is rapidly becoming viewed as acceptable in this country.

Many tout the supposed “health benefits” from drinking alcoholic wine.

Many say “it helps me relax at the end of the day.”

Others say “I just drink to fit in.”

Still others say “I like the taste.”

This is proven false because “Near-Beer” was released years ago and it tasted EXACTLY like real beer.

It didn't give the buzz of alcohol, and did not sell, and they stopped making it.

Does the Bible speak about alcohol and whether it is right or wrong?

Is it possible that God wants us to enjoy alcohol?

The current pope wrote a book a few years back which said alcohol is from God, we should absolutely take advantage of it and enjoy it!

Many preachers within the Lord's church have been advocating that "social drinking" is completely permissible (some even said it is encouraged) by God.

Is it possible that God condemns all uses of alcohol?

Some believe that every use of alcohol should be avoided at all costs (some even go so far as to say rubbing alcohol should be banned).

Today we are going to look at some questions about alcohol from a Biblical point of view.

Does the word "wine" in the Bible always refer to alcoholic wine?

The Greek word translated "wine" in the Bible is OINOS.

It is the same word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

It specifically refers to that which comes from the grape.

It never refers to drinks made by some other means (malted hops and barley – beer).

This word does indeed sometimes refer to fermented grape juice.

Ephesians 5:18 – be not drunk with OINOS, but be filled with the spirit.

Noah drank of the OINOS, and was drunk (Genesis 9:21).

The word, however, can also refer to plain grape juice.

The new OINOS is on the vine (Isaiah 24:7).

How can alcohol still be on the vine?

Grape juice will not ferment while it is still in the grape and on the vine.

Washed his garments in OINOS, washed his clothes in the blood of the grape (Genesis 49:11).

The Hebrews liked to repeat themselves by saying the same thing in different ways.

Here, OINOS is called the blood (juice) of the grape.

OINOS is what comes from treading out grapes – Proverbs 3:10, Revelation 19:15.

A winepress is where grapes are smashed to release their juices.

But it is the OINOS that is pressed out.

When you crush grapes, do you have alcohol or just grape juice?

Because the same word is used for the juice of the grape whether fresh or fermented, we must look at the context to determine which one is being described.

If it is used in the context of someone being intoxicated, then we know it is alcoholic (fermented) wine.

If it is not used in that sense, then there must be a compelling reason (and not just opinion or desire to drink) for us to say it is alcoholic wine.

Does the Bible ever condemn drinking alcoholic beverages?

Proverbs 20:1 – Wine is a mocker and strong drink is raging, and any who is fooled thereby is not wise.

Even the wise king Solomon knew that drinking alcoholic beverages was an unwise thing to do.

The opposite of wise is foolish or just plain dumb.

Imagine going before the judgment seat of God and saying “drinking beer is just fine.”

God might refer to this exact verse and say, “you fool. I told you drinking alcohol was a foolish thing to do.”

Notice that in this verse he includes both wine (fermented grape juice) and strong drink (other alcoholic beverages like we might have today).

Both are flatly condemned as foolishness.

If something is called “foolish” or “not wise” does that mean it is something God desires we do? Of course not!

Leviticus 10:9 - Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou [Aaron] nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.

The priests were told that if they drank alcohol, the punishment was death.

Many who try to defend drinking point out that this was qualified by the statement “when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation” (meaning when they were fulfilling their duties as priests).

We are the priests of God today, and we are ALWAYS to be doing our duty as priests (Colossians 3:17, I Peter 2:5).

Notice that the command from God is not to drink it AT ALL if you are a priest!

He doesn't say “you can drink a little, so long as you are not drunk.”

He says “DO NOT drink wine nor strong drink.”

Proverbs 23:29-35 - Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.

Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

The inspired writer says “don’t look upon the wine when it is red, when it is in the cup.”

Given the context (alcoholic is obviously being described), God says don’t even look at it when it is in the cup!

If you are not even to look at it, what does that say about drinking it?

God then has the Proverb writer describe the effects of drinking.

It stings like an adder.

It makes people seek after strange women.

It makes people say perverse things.

It makes the eyes red.

It makes people not feel the beating they are taking until the next day.

They still seek to drink again.

Does the Bible ever permit the drinking of alcoholic beverages?

Proverbs 31:3-7 - Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

First we need to notice that those who have responsibilities (kings and princes) are not to drink any intoxicating beverage.

Who has responsibilities for others today?

Do parents?

Do elders?

Do teachers?

If you have responsibilities, you are not to drink alcohol.

Strong drink (alcohol) is for those who are about to perish.

Those who are about to die, usually this means those who are in intense suffering because of a deadly sickness or injury, can be given alcohol to kill the pain.

Wine is for those of heavy hearts.

The phrase “Those who be of heavy hearts” is translated in different ways:

“the bitter in soul” – ASV

“those who have lost all hope” – CEV

“those at mourning” – Coverdale

“those in bitter distress” – ESV

“Those in anguish” – NIV

Today, we don't really see a problem with giving drugs to people who are suffering from depression.

It is viewed as ethical to give drugs to someone who is having these mental breakdowns.

God also allowed for that, specifically mentioning alcohol (they didn't have the synthetic drugs which we have today).

At least in the Old Testament, God permitted alcohol to be drunk for medical reasons.

Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities (I Timothy 5:23).

This is probably the most quoted verse by those seeking to justify drinking.

Here is an inspired apostle giving permission for every person everywhere to drink socially, and perhaps drink all they want, right?

Look closely at the verse in question.

Paul tells Timothy to (literally) stop being a water-drinker.

Is this a permanent command? Never drink water again?

If so, then would it not follow that we should all avoid drinking water?

Instead, Timothy should use a little wine.

The word little means just what it says.

Literally, one said it means a puny amount, or for a very short amount of time.

The REASON Timothy needed “a little wine” was because of his stomach condition and his sicknesses/infirmities.

According to some, Timothy was likely sick to his stomach dealing with the church in Ephesus, and possibly getting ulcers from all the worrying.

Regardless of the cause, Timothy was told to take a little wine to help cure or alleviate his medical problems.

It is very important to realize that Paul had to command Timothy to do this.

This shows that Timothy had rejected completely drinking any alcohol.

He was only drinking water, and Paul commanded him to take a puny amount of wine to help his medical problems.

People want to take this verse and say, "It's OK to drink socially."

Nowhere does this verse allow or endorse drinking for pleasure.

This verse only permits what was permitted in the Old Testament: alcohol to be used for the sake of medical issues.

So, is it permissible to drink Nyquil which contains alcohol? If it is for a legitimate medical problem, of course.

Before the anesthesia that we have today, doctors would have their patients drink brandy before undergoing surgery.

We need to make sure we don't "throw the baby out with the bathwater."

Alcohol is a drug.

If it is permissible to use other drugs to alleviate medical issues, why would it be wrong to use alcohol for the same purposes (so long as it actually helped with those purposes)?

It is also important to notice that all the permitted descriptions of alcohol use were for already existing medical conditions.

Nowhere does God say "drink some alcohol each day to keep from getting sick."

There are some who wish to advocate drinking a "glass of wine" each night "for their health."

However, the studies which touted the healthiness of drinking a small amount of wine each day neglected to reveal some other facts from the study:

The study concluded that in those over age 70, there was a slightly smaller occurrence of heart disease for those who drank a small amount of wine each day as compared to those who did not.

The study concluded that those under age 70 who drank suffered other medical ailments in larger amounts than those who did not.

The study also did not mention that an improvement in diet caused a large improvement in the number of those with heart disease, far exceeding the alcohol.

All the health benefits from wine are found in greater concentration (150%) and number in unfermented grape juice.

Also, you can now get those same antioxidants in gelcap form.

Yet these "illuminated" ones insist that they must drink the fermented wine instead.

If it is truly for their health, why not drink grape juice (which improves the heart better)?

If this is truly for their health, why not improve their diet?

You know the reason why they insist on drinking alcohol.

The descriptions of the ones permitted to take it were:

Those who were dying.

Those who were suffering from mental depression.

Those who were already suffering from medical issues which the wine could help alleviate.

Like many other drugs, alcohol can be abused and misused.

Many people stay on medication longer than they should and become addicted to it.

They think they cannot go without their pain pill, their cigarette, or their alcohol.

Sometimes people take drugs for reasons other than legitimate medical problems.

They take them to get a buzz, to get high, or because they are hooked on them.

Does God ever permit alcohol to be used for purely social occasions (in other words, for pleasure)?

The passage used by those who advocate social drinking is in John 2 when Jesus “turned water into wine.”

First, it needs to be noted that in Proverbs 23:20, the inspired writer says “be not among winebibbers” (those who are drinking alcohol).

A faithful child of God under the Old Testament was not to even be around those who were drinking alcohol (except perhaps if they were vocally preaching against it).

Jesus was a faithful child of God who lived under the Old Testament.

Connect the dots:

Would Jesus have been hanging around a bunch of people who were drinking without preaching against it?

Would Jesus flaunt rebellion to this command to faithful Jews and indeed make them even MORE drunk?

We readily admit that Jesus turned water into OINOS, the Bible says so.

There is no one who will argue that point.

But was it alcoholic wine, or was it grape juice?

Jews of the first century (and many centuries before them) commonly boiled their grape juice down to a paste (must) and saved it.

It was said that when properly done, and cooled in water or wet sand, it would stay fresh (unfermented) for well over a year.

In order to make grape juice again, a few spoonfuls of it were added to a glass of water, and stirred.

Jesus commanded the men there to fill up the six waterpots all the way to the brim.

Why?

To prove it was a miracle.

The men who filled them with water knew there was no room to add any of the paste or concentrate to the waterpots.

These were 20-30 gallon waterpots which would have required a large amount of concentrate to turn them into decent grape juice.

The fact that there was no room to add the concentrate, yet it turned to OINOS, proved it was a miracle.

The Jews at the feast had “well drunk” (John 2:10).

This phrase does not mean they were wasted, drunk like we use the word today.

The same word is used and translated different ways other places in the Bible:

Isaiah 58:11 – a WATERED garden

Psalms 36:8 – ABUNDANTLY satisfied

The phrase means that they had already drunk a lot of the grape juice, in fact, all that the one throwing the wedding party had provided.

They were “well drunk,” but they could instantly tell that this new OINOS was far superior to what they had been drinking.

Anyone who has been drunk before could tell you that once you are drunk, you lose the ability to discern between flavors of your drink.

The fact that this was “good OINOS” does not mean “more alcoholic” as some people wish to claim.

Jews did not have a lot of sweet drinks like we do today (sodas, sweet tea, cappuccinos, Gatorades, etc...).

Their goodness or badness of a drink depended upon its sweetness.

If there is any doubt that Jesus turned water into the best grape juice human lips have ever tasted and NOT into alcoholic wine, just remember that it was a sin for a child of God to be around those who were drinking alcohol.

If, as some claim, they were already drunk and Jesus gave them more alcohol, would Jesus have been sinless?

No, He would have been encouraging drunkenness, something which is ALWAYS condemned in the Bible.

Conclusion:

There is much more that could be said (and likely will be said in a later sermon) about drinking and alcohol, but hopefully this will lay the groundwork for you to understand that God condemns drinking alcohol for pleasure.

The only times we have seen that God permits the use of alcoholic wine or strong drink is for medical-related ailments (just like any other drug).

The fact that it is legal and readily available to the masses does not mean it is something in which the Christian should participate!

We are to be separate from the world, completely given over to God's service.

We cannot serve God if we allow alcohol to cloud our minds.

12b - Qualifications of Elders (Part 07)

Introduction:

This morning we began a look at some of the Scriptures dealing with alcohol.

Priests are never to use it when they are supposed to be doing the work of the Lord (Leviticus 10).

It's only permitted use (as a drink) was for already-existing medical conditions (and then only when it would help).

The Bible does not permit alcohol for a hangnail.

We saw that the word "wine" can refer to the juice of the grape in any form (fermented or not), and that it is dependent upon the context to determine which is being discussed.

Tonight, we will be looking at the qualification for elders which also deals with alcohol: "an elder must...not be given to wine."

There are many different interpretations of this qualification.

They usually hinge on that interpreter's stance on "social drinking."

Let us look at the Scriptures and determine what they say.

What does "given" mean here (I Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7)?

Other translations:

ASV – Not a brawler

ESV – Not a drunkard

The phrase comes from one Greek word "PAROINOS"

That word has two parts

PARA – Beside

OINOS – Wine.

So, literally, the phrase "not given to wine" means not beside (or next to) wine.

What some say about this word:

Some say it only condemns drunkenness, and means not staying with wine for a long time. So long as you are not just wasted, it is permissible to drink.

Others say it only condemns the violent actions that come from being drunk (they pair it up with "no striker" to arrive at that meaning).

So, as long as you aren't a violent drunk, it is ok to drink all you want and still be an elder.

Except that Paul listed them as two separate qualifications.

Others pair it with the statement of Paul that deacons are "not given to much wine" and say elders are not permitted to drink at all, but deacons can drink so long as they don't get plastered.

The problem with this view is that the qualification for deacons does not permit drinking either (we will touch on this a little bit later).

With these differing opinions, can we know what the truth is?

Let us look back at the word which Paul uses.

This word appears only twice in the Bible, but times used in the qualifications of elders.

Because of this, there is no reason to assign a meaning to the word other than what it literally means.

An elder is one who refuses to be around (beside, next to) alcohol.

Remember that an elder is to be blameless in all of these categories.

Literally, it means that no charges could stick to him, or that he is unarrestable.

So, an elder must be one that no one could say he is around alcohol.

You will not find an elder with beverage alcohol in his house.

You will not find an elder hanging out at a bar.

You will not see an elder in a liquor store.

An elder will not be present at a drinking party.

If an elder drinks "socially" can charges that he is next to wine stick? ABSOLUTELY!

So, though it is translated "not GIVEN to wine," (meaning not addicted to alcohol), the actual meaning is "not BESIDE [or near] wine."

Does this mean he cannot use Nyquil or cough medicines, which have alcohol in them?

No, as we saw this morning, God permits the use of alcohol for medicinal uses for already-existing conditions.

No one should ever be able to accuse an elder of drinking alcohol.

Can other Christians drink alcohol?

Older women are commanded to not be "given to much wine" (Titus 2:3).

Literally, it says they are not to be enslaved by much wine.

The Greek is even more specific than that.

It is in the perfect tense, which also shows past actions with continuing effects.

So, she is not to be enslaved by alcohol currently, but also if she was in the past, she should not let that take her back into alcohol-drinking.

Deacons are commanded to not be “given to much wine” (I Timothy 3:8).

Though the exact same words are used in English for the older women and the deacons, the Greek is very different.

Deacons are commanded:

Don't pay attention to many wines.

Don't think about many wines.

Don't give heed to many wines.

Basically, what it says is that deacons are not to even be thinking about the many forms of alcohol which exist.

Does this sound like Paul was saying that deacons could drink, so long as they don't get drunk?

Far from it!

Paul is telling them don't even be thinking about alcohol!

All Christians are commanded to be sober (I Thessalonians 5:8).

As we discussed a few weeks back, to be sober means to be clear-headed.

You cannot let anything over-ride your thinking.

That includes letting your emotions control your thinking.

That includes dwelling on certain things which monopolize your thoughts.

That includes taking any drugs (such as alcohol) which cloud your mind and judgment.

It is interesting to note the word translated “drunk” in Ephesians 5:18.

It says “be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess...”

The word translated “drunk” is what is called a progressive or inceptive verb which describes the process of getting drunk, not the end result.

So, Paul is condemning the process of getting drunk.

Where does that process begin?

It begins with the first drink.

Some have said one drink makes you “one-drink drunk.”

Some people claim that there is a difference between drinking alcohol and being drunk.

Being drunk is a process, which we can prove by this question.

Is it possible for someone who is drinking to become MORE drunk?

Since there are degrees of drunkenness, it should be obvious that being drunk is a process which begins at the first drink.

An example of how even one drink keeps you from obeying the command to be sober.

In a classroom at Arkansas Tech University, the students were shown the following.

A man signed his name on a piece of paper.

It was legible.

Then he had a drink, and signed his name again.

The signatures bore very little resemblance to each other.

The writing was not neat nor very legible.

This after one drink.

The experiment continued, and after a few more drinks and signatures, the writing bore no resemblance to letters at all.

It has been shown by tests that just one drink of beer will slow down reaction time by at least 1/2 second.

Paul specifically said that regardless of what it was, he would not be brought under the power of anything.

This means he will not let anything control him.

He won't let his appetite for food control him.

He won't let desires control him.

He won't let drugs (alcohol) control him.

Yet some say it is ok for us to do those things...

Some answers to common arguments.

The Jews did not have any way of keeping grape juice fresh, so it always fermented and was alcoholic.

This is not true, as we mentioned in passing this morning.

They could boil the grape juice until it became a syrup, then seal it (and airtight seals have existed since at least the time of the ancient Egyptians).

If the temperature was over 65 degrees, grape juice will not ferment, but instead will turn to vinegar.

What is the weather like in the Middle East?

The average temperature is well over that amount.

So, in order for them to make it ferment into alcohol, they would have to purposefully dig out holes in the ground and bury the grape juice in new wineskins.

There was no “accidental alcohol.”

They had alcoholic wine then, so it is ok for us to have whiskey now.

Alcoholic wine existed during the Bible times, there is no doubt.

However, even those alcoholic wines were far less intoxicating than even light beers today.

In fact, most research shows that those of Bible times took the alcoholic wine (which was less alcoholic than beer today) and then they diluted it with 2 or 3 times as much water.

In order for someone to get truly plastered on the wine they had in Bible times, they would have had to drink it by the gallon!

One can of beer contains as much alcohol as around 2-3 gallons of the alcoholic wine from Bible times.

Now, ask yourself this:

If this FAR LESS INTOXICATING alcohol was condemned, what does that say about the FAR MORE INTOXICATING liquor sold today?

It is ok to drink socially, as long as you don't get wasted.

Elders are not to even be next to wine.

Deacons are not to even think about wine.

Older ladies are not to be effected by wine.

All Christians are to be sober, clear-headed.

One drink stops you from being clear-headed.

“My grandfather made wine and he was an elder in the church.”

This argument makes out like the grandfather is the standard of right and wrong.

Some have said that Alexander Campbell had a large wine cellar. So what?

Just because an elder does something, that does not mean it was right.

An inspired apostle of Jesus Christ, who had miraculous ability to heal and to cast out demons, committed suicide, therefore it is ok, right?

The same logic applies.

If we can point to an elder and say “if he did it, it must be right,” then how much more should we be able to say “if an inspired apostle did it, it must be right”?

While we should hope that an elder only does what is right, we must still remember that they are not the standard of right and wrong—the Bible is.

The influence of a Christian.

Alcohol is a potent and deadly weapon of Satan.

Thousands are killed as a result of alcohol each year.

In many studies, Down Syndrome has been linked to alcohol use in the parents.

Alcohol use has been the primary cause of untold numbers of divorces.

Is this really what God wants a Christian to be involved with?

Alcohol damages the body irreparably.

Alcohol kills brain cells which cannot be brought back.

Have you met someone who drank a lot when he was younger, and you can tell just by talking to him (even if he's been sober for decades)?

Do you really think God wants us to end up in that kind of condition?

Alcohol damages your influence with those around you.

Do this experiment in your head.

You go to the liquor store, park your car out front and walk in.

You don't even have to buy anything, but people recognize your car.

What is that going to say about you to those who know you, even if you didn't even buy or drink anything?

Do this experiment in your head.

You go to the gas station and buy a 20-oz can of beer.

Open it, then go door to door with it in your hand asking people if they want to study the Bible with you.

Do you really think anyone is going to take you seriously with the Bible in one hand and a beer in the other?

Non-Christians recognize that Christians shouldn't drink.

Even those of the world know that Christians would not drink alcohol.

If I were to open a beer in the pulpit and take a drink, then you told all your friends, what kind of influence would I have with them?

Conclusion:

There are many reasons why a Christian should not drink alcohol:

We are commanded to be sober and to avoid alcohol.

It damages the body and brain.

It kills our influence with others, making us a useless soldier for Christ.

Elders are to not even be next to (near, in the presence of) wine.

Deacons are not to even be thinking about wine.

Christians are not to allow anything to keep them from being sober, clear-headed.

Don't fall into the trap of alcohol.

Wine is a mocker, and strong drink is raging, any who is fooled thereby is not wise – Proverbs 20:1.

13 - Qualifications of Elders (part 08)

Introduction:

A large company was looking to hire a new manager.

The looked over all of their employees and decided that the person they wanted was Jack.

Jack had been with the company 17 long days.

Do you think the company made a wise decision promoting a new employee to a position of leadership?

That same company decided they needed a PR person to interact with the community and help bring them more business.

So, again they looked over their employees and they picked Michael.

Michael had been with the company for years and knew the inner workings of the company better than almost anyone.

No one in the company could doubt that he was a hard worker.

However, away from work, Michael had earned a reputation of being disagreeable, untrustworthy, and downright cantankerous.

Do you think the company made a wise decision promoting to a position of leadership someone who had a bad reputation in the community?

There are reasons why God said an elder must “not be a novice” and must “have a good report from those who are outside.”

These are the two qualifications for elders we will be discussing tonight.

The next two weeks, we will be discussing “husband of one wife” and “faithful children.”

An Elder Must Not Be A Novice (I Timothy 3:6).

What does it mean to be a novice?

“Novice” can mean someone who is not well-trained in a certain area.

When it comes to repairing cars, I am a novice.

“Novice” can mean someone who does not have understanding in certain areas.

Someone might say that they are a novice when it comes to understanding football.

“Novice” can mean someone who is just beginning something.

He is a novice at his job, having started there only last week.

Other translations:

“he must not be a recent convert” (ESV)

“not a new convert” (NASB, Living Oracles)

“He may not be a young scholar” (Tyndale)

Some ancient Greek commentators on this verse said it meant “newly baptized” (which to them and us means the same thing as “new convert”).

Some modern commentators might mention that reference, but then quickly dismiss it as not correct, because they deny baptism’s role in salvation.

Literally, it means “newly planted.”

Why should a new convert not be made an elder?

There are many reasons for this.

Elders must be able to teach and guide people to heaven.

It would be difficult for a new convert to immediately go from learner to teacher.

Elders must correct the erring brethren.

A new convert does not have the respect of erring brethren that a long-time Christian would.

Therefore, it would be much harder for a new convert to go correct erring brethren who have been brethren for much longer.

Elders must hold to the faithful word of God so that they can teach it.

How many of you have ever taught something, based upon the Bible, that you later realized was absolutely wrong?

A novice does not have the understanding needed to accurately teach much of God’s word.

Novices “know just enough to be dangerous.”

How many people hear a bit of information on a topic, and then all of a sudden act like they are experts on the matter?

What is your opinion about those kind of people?

Novices make ineffective leaders.

How many of you have worked at a place and they hired a new man, fresh out of college, to come be the manager?

These people usually act as if they know everything, and try to implement programs and changes within the company which rarely work.

They quickly lose any respect from the people under them (if any existed in the first place), because they don’t understand how to be effective in leadership.

Novices do not know the flock.

Elders have the responsibility to oversee the flock, which includes knowing them.

How can a new convert know the members well enough to oversee their spiritual lives?

How can a new convert know the spiritual condition of the members?

The Scriptures state that an elder must not be a novice “lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil” (I Timothy 3:6).

A novice, one not grounded in the faith, is at high risk for being prideful, especially if he is instantly placed as a leader in the church.

The same is true when a new member (recently moved here) is quickly given a leadership position (as a teacher, deacon, elder, etc...).

I can't tell you how many times I have heard about people who are made teachers soon after moving into a congregation and then later they were the causes of major problems in the church.

Doing this gives them a sense of entitlement, an “I deserve it” type of attitude.

You see the same thing with certain football players coming out of college.

They feel like they are owed enormous amounts of money by the team before they ever play for them.

If a man is made an elder before he has ever proven his worth to the congregation, he likely will begin to think he is greater than he really is.

If he is quickly made an elder, what else might he aspire to within the local congregation?

Power, which would lead to him trying to mold the congregation to his own will.

The phrase “being lifted up with pride” might also be translated:

Puffed up.

Being blinded by pride.

One person observed that it means “a beclouded and stupid state of mind as the result of pride.”

The prideful person often will “fall into the condemnation of the devil.”

There are different ways of understanding this phrase.

Some say it means that the prideful person will be condemned just like the devil was condemned because of his pride.

Some say it means the Devil (literally the slanderer) will be able to make a successful accusation against him.

Others say it means that a prideful elder will give occasion for people to speak evil about him (since literally, the phrase is “the slanderer”).

The last of these seems to make the most sense, but obviously Satan would be able to make a successful accusation against him as well.

Someone who is a novice will likely be full of pride and bring condemnation upon himself.

We should not want to put someone in a position which would cause them to be condemned.

Paul gives another reason an elder must not be a new convert.

It takes times time for a man's character to be known (I Timothy 5:22-24).

Since all of the qualifications reflect on the man's character, we must allow there to be sufficient time after conversion to determine whether his character matches up with what Paul says.

This is not something that can happen quickly.

This will most likely take years.

Paul did not ordain elders in newly planted congregations because they were all new converts, even with the miraculous gifts which came by the laying on of hands.

This qualification applies to all Christians.

Though it is permissible for all Christians to at one time be new converts or novices, it is NOT permissible for them to stay in that condition.

We are commanded to study God's word (II Timothy 2:15).

We are commanded to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of Christ (II Peter 3:18).

One man said "God will take you just as you are, but he won't let you stay that way."

An Elder Must Have a Good Report From Those Outside of the Church (I Timothy 3:7).

Why would God command a qualification which says "you can't be an elder unless non-Christians speak well of you"?

Wouldn't we expect the opposite?

If non-Christians speak well of you, doesn't that mean you aren't doing your duty as a Christian?

Some people have that opinion (that you are compromising God's word if non-Christians speak well of you).

This qualification instead is speaking of the character of the man.

He is honest in his dealings with all people (Christians and non-Christians).

He is known for being an upstanding man who can be trusted.

He is not a troublemaker.

Why, though?

A man who becomes an elder must have a good reputation so that he can convert other people.

A man who is known as a liar, a cheater, untrustworthy, or any other bad characteristic is going to have a very hard time converting the lost.

A man who has a bad report from those outside the church will bring reproach upon the church.

A preacher moved into an area and purchased a lot of items from the local furniture stores and appliance stores.

He also opened a credit account at the grocery store.

They all trusted him because he was the preacher.

After 5 years, he was fired for one reason or another, and then the church found out that he owed literally thousands of dollars to the stores in town (and this was back in the 60s).

This gave a bad name to the church which took years to overcome.

The church stopped growing.

All of this was because one person in a prominent position had a bad reputation with those outside the church.

This is to keep the elders from falling into reproach.

If they have a bad reputation outside the church, you can rest assured that eventually that reputation will eventually begin to infiltrate the membership.

This will make the elder's job much more difficult, because the sheep will stop trusting him.

This is to keep the elders from falling into the snare (trap) of the devil.

God wants men as elders who have a good reputation (and deservedly so) so that they can avoid the devil's traps and help others to avoid them as well.

If someone has a bad reputation, making him an elder can lead to pride, which is playing into the devil's hands.

Does this apply to all Christians?

Must all Christians have a good report from non-Christians?

Remember that this is discussing the character of the person.

So, if people outside of the church know you as being untrustworthy, a liar, or anything else like it, then there is something wrong with you as a Christian.

So, yes. All Christians should have a good report from non-Christians.

Must all Christians have a good report (literally testimony) from ALL non-Christians?

If this was the case, then no one could ever be an elder.

Obviously some people are simply going to be cantankerous and speak badly about anyone connected with the church because of a preconceived bias.

In general, though, all Christians should be well-regarded by those who know them, even those outside the church.

There are people who have said, "I won't ever go to that church of Christ because so-and-so goes there."

Like it or not, there are some who will reject the truth because one Christian had a bad reputation.

We cannot be people who don't care about what other people think about us.

Conclusion:

It is important to realize that elders cannot be newcomers to Christianity.

It is also important to realize that no Christians can stay a novice, but instead are commanded to grow.

We also need to take seriously the qualification that an elder must have a good reputation from those outside of the church.

Many times, people will install an elder saying "we know him better than they do."

They ignore how he is viewed by those in the community, and do more harm than good.

We should all live to be the best examples we can be to all people.

14 - Qualifications of Elders (Part 09)

Introduction:

Regarding the qualifications for elders listed in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1, there are two which seem to have the widest range of opinions.

“Having faithful children”

“Husband of one wife”

This week, we are going to be looking at the various interpretations and meanings given to the phrase “husband of one wife.”

Then, we are going to look at what the phrase literally means, how it was used historically speaking, and what those mean when seeking to find the answer to “what does Paul mean by ‘husband of one wife’?”

“It means that an elder cannot be a polygamist.”

What is a polygamist?

A polygamist is someone who is married to more than one person at the same time.

Poly means multiple (more than one), “gamist” is from the Greek word for woman.

Many of the so-called “church fathers” (AD 100-300) believed that Paul was simply forbidding polygamy from the eldership.

Is this what Paul is trying to get across to us regarding elders?

All Christians are under the command to only have one spouse (I Corinthians 7:2).

Each man is to have his own wife (singular).

Every woman is to have her own husband (singular).

This is not a command that all must be married, but the ones who are married are banned from polygamy.

Elders are to be “blameless.”

We discussed that all the qualifications for elders are basically the areas in which they are to be “blameless.”

So, they are to be the most patient, the most hospitable, etc... of the congregation.

How exactly does someone get to be the man who is the “most married to only one person”?

You either ARE married to one person or you are not.

If Paul, as many within the Lord's church assert, wrote this only against polygamy, how does this separate the elder from any other Christian?

It is a sin, plain and simple, for someone to have multiple wives under the New Testament (I Corinthians 7:2).

Those in sexual unions with someone not their own wife (singular) were to be withdrawn from by the church (I Corinthians 5:1-ff).

No man would ever get to the point of being considered for elder if he was married to more than one woman, because he would have already been withdrawn from.

It would be like saying "an elder must not be a in a homosexual marriage."

This is, as one teacher of mine said, "a big bag of 'DUH'!"

If this is only against polygamy, then Paul is giving what, in effect, is a redundant qualification, because no Christian was allowed to be a polygamist in the first place.

If this is written against polygamy, then it becomes the ONLY qualification that does not refer to the character of the elder.

Every other qualification refers to the elder's character.

If it is against polygamy, then the first qualification refers to not a character trait, but instead a fact-check: is he married to two or more women, or just one?

While an elder cannot be a polygamist, it is not because of this qualification, but instead because no Christian can be a polygamist and get to heaven.

"It means that an elder must have been married only once."

This stance has been taken by many throughout the years.

Wuest says it means "married only once."

Alford says that it means must be married to his still-living wife, but then goes on to say, "How far such a prohibition is to be considered binding on us, now that the Christian life has entered into another and totally different phase is of course an open question for the present Christian at any time to deal with."

Don't you love that?

He says this is what it means, and then goes on to say, but that part of the Bible doesn't really apply to us today unless you think it does.

Vincent says that it forbids a second marriage, but in the same paragraph says that Paul didn't write the book of I Timothy...

Barnes says that it means IF a man is married, he is only to be married once.

That view means a man who has never been married still meets the qualification because it is an optional one (if you're not married, that qualification doesn't matter).

Paul said elders MUST meet these qualifications.

Some say Paul was intending to eliminate rampant divorces and remarriages.

Again, let us point to Paul's command regarding how to treat any Christian who is involved in unscriptural sexual activity—withdraw from them (I Corinthians 5:1-ff).

Jesus Himself said that anyone who divorced his wife for some reason other than fornication and then remarried was committing adultery (Matthew 5:32, 19:9).

Adultery will send your soul to hell if not repented of.

No man would be considered for the eldership if he unscripturally divorced and remarried because he would have been withdrawn from already.

If Paul meant this to mean “married only once” and that being done to eliminate from consideration those Christians who were in unscriptural second marriages, he could have said “an elder must not be one of the men who you have already withdrawn from.”

Obviously a man who is unscripturally divorced and remarried is not even a faithful child of God and is not in fellowship with God or faithful Christians, let alone is he a candidate for the eldership!

If it means an elder can only be married once, then it means elders (and those aspiring to be elders) are not permitted to do what Jesus said was Scriptural to do: remarry after the death of a spouse (I Corinthians 7:39) or remarry after having a Scriptural divorce (Matthew 19:9 only forbids the guilty party from remarrying).

Paul willingly gave up some of his liberties for the sake of weaker Christians.

Does Paul now command that stronger Christians have no choice but to give up something they are permitted by Christ to do?

A liberty is just that, something you are permitted to do.

Paul would not command people forego their liberty, because that stops it from being a liberty.

One man whom I greatly respect said the following:

If a man is married to his living wife, then he has one wife.

If that wife dies, he no longer has a wife; therefore he has zero wives and is no longer “the husband of one wife.”

However, if he marries again, he's now got two wives and is not “the husband of one wife.”

I greatly respect him, but his math skills leave something to be desired here.

If the man's wife no longer counts after she dies, how can she suddenly count again when he remarries?

And if this is the case, that means NO Christian can remarry after the death of a spouse (or after a Scriptural divorce) because they would then have two wives (which is forbidden by I Corinthians 7:2).

If it means “married only once” then it makes it (as before) the ONLY qualification given by Paul that has nothing to do with the man’s character, but instead makes the qualification about the state of his marriage license.

“It means ‘one wife at a time’.”

Basically, this idea is that the elder must be married (Scripturally, of course) and his wife must still be living (whether she be his first, second, or third scriptural wife).

Many say that if a man’s wife dies, he is no longer the present-tense husband of one wife, but once he remarries, he is again qualified as being “the husband of one wife.”

A preacher from the 1940’s and 50’s was asked, “if you were an elder, and your wife died, what would you do?”

The implication of the question was “would you step down or would you continue as an elder?”

The preacher’s response showed what he believed on the subject.

He said, “I would hurry up and get married again as quick as I could.”

The verse regarding a woman no longer being bound to her husband after he dies is used in this regards to show that the marriage bond is broken by death, and thus he is no longer “the husband of one wife,” because he is no longer a husband.

Notice that he is still called her “husband,” even after he is dead.

If this qualification means “his wife must still be living,” then it means it is not a qualification for the elder, but instead a qualification for his wife.

So, the very first qualification for blamelessness in an elder is that his wife hasn’t died yet?

Since these are areas of blamelessness, or areas in which the elder is to be the cream of the crop (the MOST patient, the MOST hospitable, etc...), that would mean the elder’s wife must be the MOST not dead.

Look, either someone is alive, or they are not alive...there are no levels in between.

Basically, this view says “the man must be married, and scripturally so.”

If a man is not scripturally married, he is to be withdrawn from (as per our earlier discussion).

All Christians who are married must be married Scripturally, otherwise they are in adultery which will keep them out of heaven (Galatians 5:19-21).

Such a person would never be under consideration for the eldership anyway.

You notice Paul never says “an elder must be a Christian” because non-Christians would never be under consideration anyway.

Paul didn’t say, “an elder must not be a polygamist” because such people would never be under consideration for the eldership anyway (having been withdrawn from).

Paul didn't say, "an elder must not be someone unscripturally married," because such people would not have been under consideration anyway (having been withdrawn from).

If this qualification means "one wife at a time" (another way of saying "not a polygamist, but still married"), then it is the ONLY qualification given that has nothing to do with the man's character, but instead is a qualification which only focuses on his marriage license and his wife's death certificate (or lack thereof).

So, if it does not mean "married only once," or "married Scripturally to one at a time," then what does it mean?

The literal rendition.

Literally, the phrase "husband of one wife" is "a man of one woman" or "a one-woman man."

This necessitates that the elder must be a man, however...

One commentator said "Rather, the decision on who to appoint should be based on the general principles laid down by the apostle as interpreted in the specific cultural context. In first century Ephesus and Crete women church leaders may have been inappropriate. That doesn't mean that the same applies in 21st century Europe and North America."

The interesting thing is that this quote was found immediately after the man insisted the text itself required that an elder be a man, according to Paul.

This necessitates a man who has entered into marriage with a woman.

Surprisingly, this is not universally believed.

Denominational books and websites (and even some of our own goofball liberal brethren) have attempted to say that this just means "IF a man is married, then he must be the husband of one wife."

However, when the exact opposite phrase (wife of one husband) is used there is no mistaking that Paul means they MUST have been married (for it describes widows).

If the phrase is conditional (IF he is married), then it is conditional when he uses it of the widows (IF they were married).

Can you have a widow who was never married?

Instead, Paul says an elder MUST be the husband of one wife.

The word "the" is not found in the Greek, and oftentimes that word is left out when the character or nature of something is being emphasized.

You may have heard Jehovah's Witnesses say that John 1:1 should be translated "and the word was a god" because the word "the" does not appear in front of "God" in the Greek there.

Other than the fact that they ignore their supposed "rule" 5 other times in John 1 alone, they also ignore that oftentimes the word "the" is left out when it is describing the character or nature of something.

John 1:1 says that the Word is God in His nature.

So, when Paul says that an elder must be “husband of one wife” he is emphasizing a character trait.

This eliminates from consideration any interpretation that would say the qualification depends on the state of his marriage certificate or whether or not his wife is alive.

The elder must be (present tense) one with the character of being a one-woman man.

If a man ever stops having this characteristic, he is no longer qualified to be an elder.

Historically speaking.

According to Arndt and Gingrich (and other sources), this phrase “husband of one wife” as well as “wife of one husband” were found in 1st century tomb inscriptions (like our headstones).

Many times the phrase was used to describe someone whose spouse had died years—sometimes decades—before.

Yet the person was still called a “husband of one wife” or “one-woman man.”

It described the characteristic of the person.

The meaning of the phrase “husband of one wife” did not mean “must have only married once and that wife still living.”

The meaning of the phrase wasn’t “not a polygamist” (though that’s part of it).

Putting all of this together, what does “husband of one wife” mean?

If you described someone as a “one-woman man,” what would you mean?

You would mean someone who is dedicated to his wife.

You would mean someone who treats his wife with love and respect.

You would mean someone who does not lust after other women.

The phrase was used the same way in the 1st century.

Therefore, when Paul says “a one-woman man” (husband of one wife), he is saying the elder must be a dedicated, faithful husband.

You can be married to your first and only wife, but if you don’t treat her right, you do NOT meet this qualification.

You can be married to your first and only wife, but if you look at pornography or lust after other women, you do NOT meet this qualification.

You can be married to your first and only wife, but if you do not fulfill your responsibilities to her, you are NOT qualified to be an elder.

The elder MUST be a dedicated husband.

If he ever ceases to have this characteristic, then he is no longer qualified.

Some questions which arise.

If the man's wife dies, is he still qualified?

This qualification (like all the others) describes a CHARACTER attribute of the man.

Does a man suddenly lose this characteristic if his wife dies?

Remember that this exact phrase was used regularly in the first century to describe people who were widowed, but who had been (and were) still dedicated to their wife.

So, the man is still qualified after the death of his wife, so long as he retains that characteristic.

He will not besmudge her name after she is gone.

He does not lust after other women.

He still loves her, even though she is gone.

Is a man qualified if his wife dies and he then remarries?

Remarriage after a spouse's death is not a sin (I Corinthians 7:39).

So it all depends on the man and his character.

Strangely enough, what I am about to say may sound the exact opposite of what many believe, but hear me out.

Many teach that if a man's wife dies he is no longer qualified, but if he remarries, he is qualified again.

I put forth that the opposite is true.

If a man's wife dies, he is still qualified (so long as he has proven himself to be a dedicated husband), but when he remarries, he should step down until such time as he has proven himself to be a dedicated husband to the new wife.

Proving that you are a dedicated husband is not something that happens overnight, but instead it is a long process.

For some people, it might take a few months, but for other people (who might have messed something up early in their married life) it might take years.

And if a man marries someone who is cantankerous and always causing trouble, he might begin to lose part of that characteristic of loving and respecting his wife.

So, if a man remarries, can he still be qualified?

Yes, he can still be qualified so long as he has shown that he is still a dedicated and devoted husband to his wife.

Can an elder who gets a scriptural divorce still serve?

This is a question that is full of questions.

What caused the wife to cheat on her him?

Was it something that he did/was doing?

Was it because he was not showing his dedication and devotion to her?

A preacher I know who scripturally divorced his wife said to me, "95% of the time there is no such thing as an truly innocent party."

By this, he meant that most adultery stems from the spouse not getting the love, respect, and attention they deserve at home.

Perhaps he does not treat her with respect.

Perhaps they constantly fight (it takes two to fight).

It may not be an intended thing, but sometimes men are not devoted and dedicated to their wives like they should be (and vice versa).

That is not an excuse for the spouse to commit adultery, but much of the time there is plenty of well-placed blame to go around.

For what it's worth, this preacher and his wife reconciled and have been married for another 16 years.

So, there are major questions to deal with in deciding if a scripturally divorced man was really the "one woman man" (dedicated husband) that he should have been.

Technically, a scripturally divorced man COULD serve as an elder if he was a truly dedicated, devoted husband whose wife cheated on him anyway.

Practically, it would be very unwise to make this man an elder because of the questions previously mentioned as well as the way he would be viewed by others.

Divorce still carries a stigma, especially among Christians, even if it is scriptural.

It is hard enough to convince people that a widower can still serve as an elder, but a divorced man?

Even if it was a completely scriptural divorce and the man was 100% free of any blame, the problems that would likely arise in the congregation would make allowing this person to remain an elder very unwise.

In fact, when a divorce is filed/announced, the elder should step down so as not to be a distraction/detriment/reproach to the church.

It is extremely unwise to place a man in the eldership AFTER he has been divorced.

Can a scripturally divorced and remarried man serve as an elder?

If the question is "is it possible for someone scripturally divorced and scripturally remarried to serve as an elder?" then the answer is "yes, it is possible."

It would be very unwise in many congregations.

Also, there are many questions which would need to be raised.

Does the congregation know for sure the man was Scripturally divorced?

Has he proven himself to be a dedicated husband in this second marriage?

But throughout all of this, the qualification is in the present tense.

He must now, with his second wife, be a one-woman man.

Imagine a man who was not a Christian, but was married and then his wife left him for another man.

Now, years later, he becomes a Christian and realizes what a Christian husband is supposed to be like.

He gets married (scripturally), and lives his life as a truly dedicated husband.

He fits the qualification of "one-woman man."

In some congregations, even having a scripturally divorced/remarried man as an elder would cause problems.

Because of this, it is unwise for such a man to serve, even though he might be qualified.

This is something that must be decided at the congregational level, because peace and unity are important.

Conclusion:

An elder must be a man who is a dedicated husband who loves and respects his wife.

Does this apply to you?

God gives his commands for all Christians to love their spouses (Ephesians 5:25, Titus 2:4).

You who are married, how do you treat your spouse?

Wives, do you submit to and obey your husband?

Husbands, do you respect and treasure your wife?

Do you show devotion to one another?

If you are not the person God wants you to be, showing dedication and devotion to your spouse, then why not repent and make it right with God now?

15 - Qualifications of Elders (Part 10)

Introduction:

Among all the qualifications for elders, the one whose meaning is perhaps most disputed is “having faithful children.”

Different interpretations place the emphasis and meaning on each different word in that 3-word phrase.

Some say it must mean multiple children, others say at least one.

Some say every child of the elder must be a truly faithful Christian.

Others say that once they leave the house, they no longer count.

Because it deals with the elder’s children, we will also look at the qualification “having his children in subjection.”

By the end of tonight’s lesson, hopefully we will have a better grasp on just what these qualifications mean.

How many children must an elder have?

Before we can even begin on the qualifications at hand, we need to answer this question.

How “children” is used today.

“On Sunday, children eat for free.”

We understand that if someone only has one child, that child still gets to eat free.

If we said “all those with children need to sign something,” it would be understood that someone with one child still needed to sign it as well.

We use the phrase “children” to refer to offspring, whether many or an only child.

How “children” was used in the Bible.

Genesis 21:5-7, Isaac was born, and Sarah said, “who would have said that Sarah would nurse children?” (NASB, ESV).

She used “children” in the plural, though she only had one child, Isaac.

I Timothy 5:3-4 – honor those who are widows indeed (with no relatives to care for her), but if she has children or nephews, let THEM take care of her.

IF “children” must always mean multiple children, then...

The widow’s only son has no responsibility to care for his mother.

In fact, the widow's one son, by inference, would be sinning by taking care of her, because the command is for CHILDREN (plural) to take care of her.

Before we consider this further, let's look at another couple verses in the same chapter.

I Timothy 5:9-10 – descriptions of widows who can be taken care of by the church.

She must have been the wife of one husband (a dedicated wife).

She must have raised "children."

So does that mean if she only raised one child, the church cannot support her?

If this means she must have raised multiple children, then the church SINS by supporting a widow who only had one child.

That also means that her one child has no responsibility to support her (I Timothy 5:4).

Therefore, if "children" must mean more than one child, a widow who only had one child is left to fend for herself in a culture which allowed no property to be owned by a woman, and most women were not permitted to have jobs.

Then the church must let this woman die of starvation or exposure, even if she has been a faithful Christian all her life!

"Children" can be used in the Bible to refer to an only child or to multiple children.

The only child of a widow has the responsibility to care for her.

Sarah only had one child, but used the plural word "children."

"Children" was used in the Bible the same way we use it today.

Practical application.

It would be better for an elder to have multiple children for a few reasons:

Children have different personalities, and that experience would help him in dealing with the different personalities within the congregation.

Children have differences with each other (arguments, etc...) and helping his children overcome these differences would better prepare him for helping members in the congregation overcome their differences.

Having multiple children will eliminate the "question" regarding whether Paul requires multiple children for the elders.

But because of the way the Bible uses the term, and the consequences from demanding multiple children (with the widow), a man with only one child can fit these qualifications.

Do they ever cease to be your "children"?

Some people cling to the notion that "once they leave your house, they are no longer under your control."

The idea is that once they leave the house, if they cease being faithful, they don't count against you anymore.

If this is true, then if they remain faithful, they don't count FOR you anymore either.

Therefore, if this reasoning is true, then once they leave your house, they no longer apply at all (good or bad).

The reasoning of "once they leave your house" they don't count against you is self-defeating.

It is a REQUIREMENT that elders have (present tense) faithful children and have their children in subjection.

If the children no longer count after they get out of the house, then an elder no longer meets the requirement of having children once his children all grow up and move out.

This would mean that every elder who does not have children at home is unqualified and needs to step down.

If it can be applied to one child, it must be applied to all his children.

This reasoning of "once they leave the house, they don't count" makes the qualification of "faithful children" meaningless.

Let us look back at I Timothy 5.

The widow's children (be it one child or multiple children) are supposed to take care of her.

If this is still a child living at home with mom, how can he take care of her?

Worse yet, if it is a small child, how is he supposed to care for his mother?

It should be obvious that Paul is referring to children who are adults.

They are still considered her children, even though they have grown and left the house to start their own families.

When Paul discusses "children" there is no line of demarcation that says they ever cease being your children.

The idea that "once they leave your house they no longer count against you" does not agree with what the Bible has to say about children.

Children are to honor their father and mother and obey them in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-2).

Jesus said the command to honor your parents applied to adults as well (Matthew 15:1-4).

The sins of the Gentiles included being "disobedient to parents" (Romans 1:30).

Paul said adults would become "disobedient to parents" (II Timothy 3:2).

The idea that "once they leave your house, they no longer count against you" also means that they no longer count FOR you either, and any elder with no children at home would have to step down immediately.

An elder must “have his children in subjection” (I Timothy 3:4).

What does it mean to “have his children in subjection with all gravity?”

First, the man who would be an elder must take seriously his responsibility towards raising his children (“with all gravity”).

He must not take it as a light thing.

Even after they are grown, he must take his responsibility as a parent seriously.

Secondly, his children must be in subjection to him.

This means that they are not unruly (like you see at almost every restaurant and store), but ones who listen to what their father tells them to do.

How many times have you seen parents with screaming children say “stop that...I said stop it...I told you to quit that...You’d better quit that...” yet the child never listens?

This reflects on the parents and how they are raising their children.

Even after the children are grown, they are still to be in subjection to their parents in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-2, and other verses).

Does THIS include the idea that the children must be faithful Christians?

After all, it is said, if they are still in subjection to their father who is a Christian, he would make sure they are faithful.

I challenge each one of you to force someone to be a faithful Christian.

God does not want FORCED faithfulness, he wants people to DESIRE to be faithful themselves.

THIS qualification (having children in subjection) says nothing about whether or not the man’s children are faithful Christians.

How can you tell if a man’s children are still in subjection to him, even after they have moved out?

Do they still respect him?

Do they still obey him?

A man should be able to tell his daughter to change clothes if she is dressing inappropriately, even if she is grown and married.

A daughter who respects her father will obey him.

Esther was raised by Mordecai, but still obeyed him even when she had moved out and was queen (and obeying could have resulted in her death).

Why is this qualification here?

Because if a man cannot rule (run, control, keep in line) his own house, how can he hope to lead the church? (I Timothy 3:5)

The church is far more difficult, and if you cannot keep your own kids in line, there is no way you will be an effective elder.

An elder must have “faithful children” (KJV) or “believing children” (ASV) (Titus 1:6).

There are three main arguments regarding this qualification.

The elder must have children who have become Christians.

The elder must have children who are faithful Christians.

The elder’s children must be faithful to him (that is, submissive to his authority).

Interpretation #1: the elder must have children who are faithful to him.

Those who say this make this qualification to be a different way of saying “having his children in subjection.”

This effectively eliminates the requirement for the children to be Christians.

However, you must ask yourself this question: even IF (and I’m not saying it is) this is the correct interpretation, what does this say about the importance he placed on the Lord in raising his children?

Do you really want a man as elder who did not instill a love of the Lord in his own children?

What does that say about his ability to lead others to Christ?

The word “faithful” is used elsewhere in the New Testament.

What part hath he that believeth with an infidel (II Corinthians 6:15), the context demanding that “believeth” (same word as “faithful”) means a Christian.

“If any man or woman who believeth...” refers to male and female Christians (I Timothy 5:16).

Literally, the verse says “if any faithful man [or] faithful woman.”

The context demands that this be understood as it is translated in almost every Bible version: believers or Christians.

Slaves were not to despise their “believing masters” (I Timothy 6:2).

“Be thou faithful unto death” (Revelation 2:10).

Does anyone doubt that “faithful” here means a faithful Christian?

Literally, it says “be a faithful one unto death.”

Paul uses the word “faithful” as an adjective to describe those who are dedicated Christians.

Ephesians 1:1

Colossians 1:2

Colossians 4:9 (about Onesimus)

The only times Paul uses “faithful” in a way other than describing a child of God are when:

He is discussing the faithfulness (trustworthiness) of God or Christ.

Describing a saying (faithful sayings).

Describing the gospel (hold to the faithful word).

Possibly describing the wife of a deacon (I Timothy 3:11), though this may also mean she is to be a Christian.

When using this word to describe a person, Paul NEVER applied it to a non-Christian.

Conclusion: this qualification cannot be referring to faithfulness to their earthly father.

Interpretation #2: The elder must have children who have become Christians.

As we noted earlier, Paul only used this word with humans when they were dedicated followers of God.

Yes, this would mean that the elder must have children who are Christians.

However, this is not the end of the discussion.

Paul never used the term “faithful” to refer to someone who was not “faithful.”

He called people “faithful ministers”.

He referred to the faithful saints.

When Paul called someone “faithful,” he was referring to someone who was still a faithful child of God.

He never uses the term to describe someone who was once faithful, but is no longer walking in the light.

So, just because a man has children who are Christians does not automatically mean that he fits this qualification.

Are they ones who are faithful?

Or are they ones who have abandoned God?

Yes, an elder must have Christian children, but that is not enough.

Interpretation #3: the elder must have children who are faithful Christians.

Because of the way Paul uses the term “faithful,” this is the proper interpretation.

In the Bible, to call someone “faithful” is the same as calling them a Christian who is living for God.

So, when we look at the elder, we must ask, “does he have children who are faithful Christians?”

If the answer is “no,” then the man is not qualified.

If a man’s children die, is he no longer qualified?

For the sake of the question, assume the man had two children who were both faithful Christians and both died in a car accident.

Should he step down because he no longer has any living children?

Please remember last week we discussed that all the qualifications for elders centered on character traits.

You look at the children and how they turned out to see the character of leadership in the father.

You look at the children and see how much emphasis he put on the gospel in his house; that will give you an insight into his character.

So, if the man's children all die, does that destroy the character trait of leadership and passing on the word of God to others?

Just like the death of a spouse does not take away that person's character trait, nor does the death of his children.

Must every one of his children be faithful Christians?

Faithfulness cannot be determined until after children have moved out.

Children may become Christians and come to services while living with their parents, but that is mostly because they don't have a choice in the matter.

It is after they have grown and moved out that THEIR faithfulness or lack thereof is seen.

How many times have you heard of people whose children become Christians, but when they go off to college, they leave the church?

That reflects on the importance placed on the gospel by their parents, especially the father who is to be the head of the household.

Paul adds to the qualification of "faithful children" by saying "not accused of riot (prodigal living) or unruly (disobedient)."

This is something that younger children would never be.

This implies the idea of older children.

Some say "yes, every one of them must be faithful."

So, if a man has 7, 10, 13 children, each one of them would have to be faithful.

If one of them ceases to be faithful, the man is no longer qualified.

This would be ideal; no one would doubt that for a moment.

But is this what Paul says?

Paul's words are "having faithful children."

Let us place some other adjectives there instead of faithful and see if you would insist it means all the children.

Do you have sick children? (would you answer “no” if only 4 of your 5 kids were sick?).

Do you have grown children? (if you had two married children and one who was in Jr. High, how would you answer the question?).

Do you have athletic children? (maybe you have one bookworm and one baseball player. What would you answer: “yes” or “no”?)

Do you have faithful children?

Ill John 4 – I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

John here is saying that he has great joy when he hears his children (spiritual) are faithful.

Did he mean that EVERY person he converted remained faithful?

Not even all the people Jesus converted remained faithful (see Judas).

John used the phrase in a general way, meaning he has great joy when he hears about those he converted remaining faithful.

He did not—could not—mean that he was only happy when every person he ever converted was faithful.

Instead, John used the phrase to refer to some of his children.

So, we can see that an inspired apostle referred to his children, but was not speaking of every last one of them.

If all of a man’s children cease being faithful as adults, then it reflects on the father’s ability to lead and instill the word of God to others, and that man is not qualified to be an elder.

It is true that after the children grow up, they are on their own to make their own decisions.

However, if all of a man’s children choose to not live for God, that tells you he did not make spiritual things an emphasis, and he is not qualified to be an elder.

But if most of the man’s children remain faithful Christians, it reflects on his leadership and emphasis of spiritual things in a good way.

Remember, even Jesus didn’t keep all of His disciples (not even His apostles) faithful.

God, our Father, does not have 100% faithfulness out of His children, either.

Again, you cannot force someone to be faithful.

Identical twins are raised in the same family, by the same people, in the same way, yet many times turn out completely different.

One may be faithful, the other may have rejected Christ completely.

Yet both were raised in a Christian home and reared to respect God.

Some people just won’t live for God.

If most of the man's children are faithful Christians, then he would fit the description of having faithful children.

Conclusion:

Summarizing all of this:

An elder must have children (at least one).

The elder must have his children in subjection to him.

The elder must have children who are faithful Christians.

This does not say ALL of his children must be faithful Christians (though that would be the ideal).

He must have shown the leadership and care of God's word needed to convert his children to Christ.

They do not cease being your children when they move out.

It is when they move out that they give objective proof to their faithfulness.

It is when they move out that they are the testimony to how they were raised.

If most of the children stay faithful, then the father did something right in raising them.

If most of them leave the faith, then the father was not a good leader and cannot lead the congregation.

The most important thing to remember is that the qualifications deal with character traits in the elder.

The character trait from "children in submission" is one of leadership.

Does he show the leadership needed in his family?

If not, then there is no way he can be an effective leader in the church.

The character trait from "having faithful children" is how much emphasis he places on God's word in his life and how he spreads it to others.

If most of his children are faithful Christians, it means he places a lot of importance on following God's word.

If most of his children are not faithful Christians, then it tells you he was not diligent in passing on the word of God to his children.

Does this qualification apply to everyone?

If you have children, you are commanded to raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

Failure to do this will result in you sinning (disobeying a command of God), but it will likely cost your children their souls.

If you don't teach them the truth, and show them that you live by it, they will not learn it.

Appendix - The Age of an Elder

How Old Should an Elder Be?

Bradley S. Cobb

It was about seven years ago when the knocking of a hand against my front door got my attention. Upon opening the door, I was faced with two Mormon boys who could not have been older than 19. I asked the customary question, "Can I help you?" Instead of answering the question, they proceeded to introduce themselves. "My name is Elder Bob, and this is Elder Joe." Knowing that these boys had no idea what the word "elder" meant, I asked them a simple question. "How are your wife and kids?" The look of confusion across their face told me they also didn't know what the Bible teaches about elders. Upon explaining that an elder was the husband of one wife and had believing children, I asked them the question again. They said "thank you" and shortly thereafter were on their way to the next house. The word "elder" signifies, by its very definition, someone who is older. How old? Let us let the Bible speak on this matter. The first place to look is in the qualifications for elders which were laid out by the apostle Paul in I Timothy 3. The one desiring the office of bishop (elder) must be blameless, the husband of one wife. Literally, the wording is "a one-woman man." This man must have proven himself to be faithful to his wife, a dedicated husband. Obviously this is not something a 19-year old can prove. This is something that is proven over a period of time. According to some sources, most men during the first century did not marry until they were in their 30's. Imagine, then, the age at which these people would have been known as dedicated husbands by the rest of the congregation.

Also, the elder must have faithful children (Titus 1:6). Does this mean faithful to him or faithful to God? Skipping this question for a moment, let us look at the simple point that the man must have children who are old enough to show they are faithful. The children must be old enough to make decisions and show that they have been raised to make the right ones. They obey their father because they are in subjection to him (I Timothy 3:4). This does not describe children under the teenage years. If this means children who are faithful to God, it means that the children must be faithful Christians. If it means faithful to their father, this age of accountability would be about the same, wouldn't you think? This man's children must be known to be obedient. This again is something that takes time to prove, especially if it is referring to being a faithful Christian.

Looking at the likely age of marriage (say 30-35), adding the time it would take for their children to get to be teenagers (add another 15 or more years), as well as tacking on the time it would take for the children to prove themselves "faithful" once they reach the age of accountability, and you get someone who meets these first two qualifications for being an elder probably around age 50.

Let us also consider one last point. The apostle Peter, approximately 61-63 AD, said he was an elder of the Lord's church (I Peter 5:1). If we accept that he was about Jesus' age when he became a disciple of the Lord, then Peter would be about 65 years old when he wrote this. He commanded the elders to whom he wrote, using the fact that he was an elder as back-up for his

commands (1 Peter 5:1-4). This is not something that a newly-appointed elder would likely do, so Peter had likely been an elder at the church in Jerusalem for some time, perhaps a decade? From a Biblical perspective, there is no way that a 19-year old could be an elder. It would be pushing it to say someone in their 40s would qualify as “older,” as the word “elder” necessitates. Though the Bible gives no specific age, it does give certain milestones (faithful husband and faithful children) which would be very difficult to reach before their late 40s/early 50s.

Qualification of Elders - Chart

Qualifications For an Elder As found in the Bible

Must be a Man (male)

I Timothy 3:1-2, 4-7

Must be “older”

Titus 1:5, 6 (inherent in the word “elder”)

Must Desire the Office for the Right Reasons

I Timothy 3:1, I Peter 5:1-3

POSITIVE CHARACTER QUALIFICATIONS

Must be Blameless (Above Reproach - ASV)

I Timothy 3:1, Titus 1:5

Must be Husband of One Wife

I Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6

Must be Vigilant

I Timothy 3:2

Must be Sober

I Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8

Must be of a Good Behavior

I Timothy 3:2

Must be Given to Hospitality

I Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8

Must be Apt to Teach (Able to Teach – NKJV)

I Timothy 3:2

Must be Patient

I Timothy 3:3

Must be a Lover of Good Men

Titus 1:8

Must be Just

Titus 1:8

Must be Holy

Titus 1:8

Must be Temperate

Titus 1:8

Must Hold to the Word of God

Titus 1:9

NEGATIVE CHARACTER QUALIFICATIONS

Not Given to Wine

I Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7

No Striker (Not Violent – NKJV)

I Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7

Not Greedy of Filthy Lucre (Money – NKJV)

I Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7

Not a Brawler (Quarrelsome – NKJV)

I Timothy 3:3

Not Covetous

I Timothy 3:3

Not Self-Willed

Titus 1:7

Not Soon Angry

Titus 1:7

OTHER CHARACTER QUALIFICATIONS

Rules His Own House Well

I Timothy 3:4

Has His Children in Subjection to Him

I Timothy 3:4

Has “Faithful Children”

Titus 1:6

Not a Novice

I Timothy 3:6

Must Have a Good Report with Non-Christians

I Timothy 3:7

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