

Systematic Theology
Church Government: Monarch, Anarchy or Democracy, Part 3 (Elders)
Selected Scriptures
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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church

We return tonight to our study of the church. We find ourselves nearing the end of the doctrine of the church, or as theologians would call it, *ecclesiology*, borrowing from the Greek word for “church,” the study of the church. And, we have already established the reality that the church is to be led by a plurality of godly men. But tonight we need to ask ourselves who should those men be, and how do you know whether or not you should be one? There’s such a crucial importance to understand that you cannot simply declare yourself to be an elder, a pastor, or an overseer. Remember those three words all describe the same office, the same gifted individual. You can’t merely declare yourself to be that. We live in a day and in a culture where that happens on every street corner it appears, a new church pops up and someone who has not been called and has not been sent in some cases, hangs out his shingle and begins the work of ministry.

But, biblically it is absolutely important to be called. When you look at the Old Testament prophets, for example, God said, “I did not send these prophets, [speaking of the false prophets] but they ran, I did not speak to them, but they prophesied.” “Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams,’ declares the LORD, ‘and related them and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them.’” In addition to their wrong message, Jeremiah said that another distinguishing feature of false prophets is that they preach without truly being sent or being called. Look at the Old Testament priests in Numbers 18:7. Aaron and his descendants were instructed, “You and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything concerning the altar and inside the veil. . . I am giving you the priesthood as a bestowed service, but the outsider who comes near [he] shall be put to death.” You couldn’t simply declare yourself to be a priest. You remember there are a couple of stories in the Old Testament where men decided that they would usurp that role and God struck them with illness, and in one case, with death.

Even the Lord Jesus Christ did not operate with self-commissioned authority. He stressed the fact, and the Father stressed the fact that He had been chosen and appointed for the task that He had. In Matthew 3, you remember, at His baptism it says that “Jesus came up immediately from the water; and . . . the heavens . . . opened . . . saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and . . . a voice . . . [from] the heavens said, ‘This is My . . . Son.’” In the parallel account, they’re told to listen to Him. In John 12:28, Jesus is praying, and He says, “‘Father, glorify Your name.’ Then a voice came out of heaven: ‘I have . . . glorified it, and [I] will glorify it.’” Everybody around heard it and some were saying it “thundered; others were saying an angel had spoken. Jesus answered and said, ‘This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes.’” “So you know that I’m not commissioning Myself, I have been commissioned by My Father for ministry.”

Even the language of the New Testament referring to various forms of ministry, take the word “called.” No one takes the honor to himself, speaking of the priesthood, but receives it when he is called by God as Aaron was, separated or set apart. Speaking of Barnabas and Saul, they were to be set apart for the missionary labor that was before them. Romans 1, Paul, “called as an apostle, [and] set apart.” Others were described as “sent,” Jesus told His disciples “I send you.” Romans 10 speaks of how beautiful are the feet of those who are sent. Other passages speak of being appointed, Titus 1:5, “I want you to appoint elders in every city.” When you look at the New Testament of illustrations of ministry, they all describe somebody who has been sent officially on business: heralds, ambassadors, stewards, messengers. All of those words describe someone who has not decided to send himself, but has been chosen, appointed, and sent on official business by a superior.

The same is true with becoming a leader in the church. They have to be called by God to that ministry. But that raises a question that has often been asked, and that is, “So what constitutes a call to be an elder in a church or to be a pastor?” Some of you young men may be thinking about the ministry. How do you know if you’re called to ministry? Some of you who are a part of our church but aren’t looking at being a senior pastor and being a teaching pastor as I am but look to serve as other men our congregation do, as an elder in the church. How do you know if you should pursue that office? What are the necessary elements of a call? How do you know if you’ve been called by God?

There was a time in my life when I was confused about all of this, shortly after I became a Christian. I came to Christ as a senior in high school and I went off to a Christian college, it was the only one my family knew anything about and I went there as just a babe in Christ, although I'd been raised in the church. And I began to wonder whether God wanted me to pursue ministry. There began a struggle over time that was eventually made clear to me by God putting me in the hospital for a couple of weeks and giving me a little time in isolation to think about it. And so, there's a struggle. There's a struggle in many people. How do you know if you've been called?

Well, Spurgeon mentions in his *Lectures to My Students* that John Newton distinguished three marks of a call. John Newton, of course, who wrote "Amazing Grace." He says there has to be desire, there has to be competence, and there has to be the providence of God. The reformers and the Puritans used to refer to the internal call and the external call. That is, the internal call was subjective, primarily within the person and coming directly from the Spirit. And then there was an external call which was objective, it was obvious outside of the man, and it's a work of the Spirit confirmed by the church. As you will see tonight from the scripture, the scripture teaches this view of both an internal call and an external call, and either without the other is not a legitimate call of God to ministry. Calvin wrote of these two elements of a call to ministry, "If one is to be considered a true minister of the church, it necessary that he consider the objective or external of the church, and the secret inner call conscious only to the minister himself."

So, how do we know exactly what these internal and external parts are? Well, in 1 Timothy 3, where I want us to turn tonight, there are four tests of a man's call to ministry, to the ministry to serve as an elder. Turn with me to 1 Timothy chapter 3. By the time we're done tonight, you will know if you should pursue being an elder and you will also know how to evaluate those who claim to be called. I'm going to give you these four tests as we go through this text. The first test is the inward, or inner, internal call, and the final three constitute the external call, okay? So keep that in mind. The first is the internal call, and the final three are the external call. I'm going to do it, just for memory's sake, with a series of c's.

The first thing that constitutes, the first test that constitutes a call to ministry, let's call craving. Notice verse 1, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do." Now, it begins with this issue of desire. This is not mere excitement

or enthusiasm. There are two words in this verse for desire. The first is the word “aspires.” Thayer in his Greek lexicon defines its meaning, “To stretch oneself out in order to touch something or grasp something. To reach after, or desire something.” The second word is translated into English as “desires.” This is defined as “setting one’s heart upon, desiring, lusting after, craving.” Those are all definitions of the second word.

In other words, the first and internal part of the call to be an elder in a church or to be a pastor, is a strong desire. But it’s not a desire, notice, for the position. It’s not a desire for the acclaim or the perks. It’s a desire, notice, “it is a fine work he desires to do.” It is a strong desire, a craving, if you will, to do the work of ministry. To handle the Word of God, to teach the Word of God, to counsel and shepherd people with the scriptures, to care for them when they’re going through difficulty and trouble, to protect them from error, to love them, to be concerned about them through all the aspects of life. This is the work of ministry.

Just to put it in perspective for you, I spend thirty hours of my week sitting chained to my desk and chair studying for these two messages that I preach each week. And by the way, those are joyful hours. I’m not at all disappointed about that; I love the fact that the elders of this church give me the freedom to do that. In addition to that, I have wonderful times of meeting with the staff that are here, and being encouraged by them, and hopefully encouraging them. I have opportunity to meet in counseling appointments, go on hospital visits. All of those things are part of the work of ministry, and if you have in your heart a craving, a strong desire to do those things, then you have the internal part of the call to ministry.

Charles Bridges writes in his book, *The Christian Ministry*, “Much more important that our choice should be influenced, not by the love of literature, or the opportunities of indulgent recreation. We should guard against the desires of professional elevation, that we should be divested of the selfish motives of esteem, respectability or worldly comfort, that we should not seek great things for ourselves, that we should aim at nothing but souls, rather willing to win one to Christ than a world to ourselves, and that we should exhibit a devoted consecration of our talents to the service of God and to the people of God.” That’s what this craving represents and if you have within your heart a craving to do the work of ministry, then you have one aspect, you’ve passed one part of the test for a call to serve as an elder or to serve as a pastor.

Now, one warning I want to give here. It's easy to mistake a genuine desire to serve Christ, which every Christian ought to have, for a call to ministry or this craving to get into the work of an elder or pastor. Be careful to sort that out; give it time to see. I would guess that up to 50% of the men that went through seminary with me probably mistook a call to ministry for that longing they had to serve Jesus Christ. Every Christian ought to have that desire and it's very easy to confuse the two. How do you know? Well, when we come to the other test it becomes a lot clearer.

Alright, so let's move on to test number two, and that's character. The first test is craving. Do you want the work of ministry? The second test is: Are you qualified based on your character? Now, we move from the internal and the subjective, the feeling that you have, to the objective. You see, I used to think that a call to ministry was some sort of a feeling that just overwhelmed you and you just knew. God sort of spoke to you, or something. God never spoke to me and He's not going to speak to you either. This is how, according to the Apostle Paul, we know if we've been called or not, it begins with a craving, a desire. Secondly, is character.

Now, an introductory qualification that really doesn't have to do with character, but with gender: the elder must be male. There are a number of passages that teach this, but just look at the end of chapter 2. 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 9, he says here's how I want the women to handle themselves, and verse 11 he says, "A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or [to] exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." And then he gives as his argument, two reasons. One, because the order of creation, Adam was created first then Eve, and the other because Eve is the one who was deceived and fell into sin before Adam.

Both of those are timeless truths. Some people would have us to believe that this principle is something that was stuck in the first century culture and that Paul would not at all admonish us to keep it this way today. But notice that Paul roots his argument in the created order and in the Fall. Remember 1 Timothy is written to tell us how we ought to conduct ourselves in the church of God, 1 Timothy 3:15. Now, he says in the church I don't allow women to teach men or to exercise authority, to be in a position of authority over men. That doesn't denigrate women at all

and at some point, we'll deal with the exalted role God has given women. It's simply the divine order in the church. And so that's clear the elder must be male.

But let's move on to the character qualifications that are outlined here. And I'm not going to spend a long time on any one of them, because we have a lot to cover this evening. So let me just give you some sort of summary overviews of the character qualifications. And if you're considering whether or not you're called to ministry, you need to measure yourself against these qualifications because if you don't meet them, not in perfection, but if these don't characterize you and the people around you wouldn't think of you in these terms, then you're not called to be an elder or a pastor, because this is the second objective test. And God doesn't call men to be elders or pastors who don't meet these character standards and qualifications. So give yourself a little test as we go along here.

First of all, he must be above reproach. This is in both verse 2 of 1 Timothy 3 as well as in Titus chapter 1. And I'm going to give you, as we flow along here, if it occurs in both Timothy 3 and Titus 1, I'll give you both references, if it occurs in one or the other I'll only give you the one reference, so you can note that as you go along. "Above reproach," this is simply a summary of all the qualifications. Literally, it means "not to be taken hold of." It was used originally even in a criminal setting, there was no charge that would stick. A good way to think of it is this: here is a man whose life is without handles. There's nothing you can grab onto and bring reproach to his character. There's no obvious glitch in his character that disqualifies him from serving in the church. He must be above reproach. That is the umbrella qualification and all the others fall beneath it.

Let's look at the others together. Secondly, in terms of character, he must be the husband of one wife. That occurs in both 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 1. This is a moral qualification. Literally, it says, he must be a "one-woman kind of man." He must be a one-woman kind of man. Now, this is a very complex issue; there are actually six different views of what this means and I'm not going to spend a lot of time with it, but let me just briefly give them to you. Some say, this excludes all marriage except to the church, in other words, that "one woman" he's married to must be the church. That's not the normal Roman Catholic view, but some Roman Catholics do use it to defend the celibacy of priests.

The second view is that this really is intended to exclude polygamy. Now, certainly the scripture does forbid polygamy. This is, by the way, the more typical Roman Catholic view. But this cannot be all that Paul means because scripture already forbids polygamy, 1 Corinthians 7:2 for example. And Jesus, you remember, in Matthew 19, said that it was intended from the beginning for there to be one man and one woman. That was the divine intention. Roman law prohibited polygamy, so it would have been unnecessary for Paul to have stressed this point. By the way, the same wording is used of widows in 1 Timothy 5:9. The widows had to be one-man kind of women. It's very unlikely that that's a reference to widows having multiple husbands. History doesn't record that was very common in Greek or Roman society, so it's very unlikely that this is the point Paul is making.

Number three, some would say a one-woman man excludes remarried widowers. In other words, a man's wife dies and he then may not remarry and continue to be an elder. Kent Hughes, in his commentary, makes a good point that if this verse excludes remarried widowers from being elders, then 1 Timothy 5:9 excludes widows from remarrying if they want to be on the roll, you remember? And yet, chapter 5 verse 14 that's exactly what Paul tells the younger widows to do, is to remarry. So this can't be it either.

Number four, some would say this excludes the unmarried; you have to be married to be an elder. In the Greek text, the emphasis in the Greek sentence is on the Greek word translated "one." He must be a one-woman kind of man. If Paul had wanted to say that all elders have to be married, all he had to do is omit that little word "one" and then it would have said, "He must be a married man." But that isn't what he said. Instead he emphasizes this word "one." But I think even a bigger problem with this view is that Paul himself was unmarried and yet he was not only an apostle, he was also an elder. In 1 Timothy 4:14, he told Timothy that he was given a spiritual gift through the laying on of hands by the elders, and in 2 Timothy 1:6, he says it was the laying on of my hands, so therefore he proclaims himself to be one of those elders who was a part of laying on of hands of Timothy.

A fifth view says that a one-woman man excludes the divorced, and this gets really complicated because there's several sub-views. One says a man who's divorced ever, for any reason, a man who was divorced after conversion for any reason, a man who was divorced after conversion

without biblical grounds, and a man who was divorced ever for unbiblical grounds. So you can see it gets really complicated. And then view six is that it excludes post-conversion sexual impurity. Once the man comes to Christ, he has to be a one-woman kind of man in terms of his purity.

Now, the elders here at Countryside have come to a consensus with a slight variation of two of those views. Let me just share this with you just in case you've never seen this. This is the elder's perspective on this issue. God holds the leadership of His church to the highest standard, a standard unequivocally recorded in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. One specific, often debated requirement, is that every elder or deacon be the husband of one wife, or literally, a one-woman man. This means a married man should be known for a long-standing pattern of fidelity to one spouse. We believe therefore, that divorce often disqualifies a man from holding either of the leadership offices of the church, but of course not from serving in the church. However, we will consider a divorced man for leadership as an elder or deacon if the divorce occurred prior to conversion, if a lengthy period of time has passed since the divorce, if the man has demonstrated fidelity to his present wife, *and* (and that's the key word, all of these conditions have to be met) *and* if we conclude therefore that there is no lingering reproach associated with the divorce. So that's where we as the elders of this church have landed, any divorce after conversion and any sexual impurity.

Now, that takes us, then, to the word, "temperate." The next qualification is temperate, or as it's put in Titus, self-control. The Greek word for "temperate" is like our English word, "sober." It can refer to temperance in the use of alcohol or it can refer to not being in excess, being under control. Since there's about to be another qualification about wine, this one is undoubtedly used metaphorically to describe a man who is self-controlled, as opposed to being controlled by something else. This is a man who is not under the control of anything but the Spirit of God and his own mind. He is stable, self-controlled, and clear-headed.

The next qualification is "prudent," you see there in verse 2. In Titus chapter 1 verse 8 it's "sensible," which is parallel to this. It means serious, not somber, you don't have to be long-faced, but it means, here's a man who's serious about life. He understands what are the right spiritual priorities in life and he takes those steps. Homer Kent in his excellent commentary on

the Pastoral Epistles says, “He should have the balanced judgment to regulate fun to its proper place. The overseer, especially if he is young, must avoid the reputation of a clown. Young people may think he’s funny, but they won’t come to him for spiritual help.” So, prudent, sensible, having the right seriousness about serious things, knowing when to be fun and enjoyable, when to have a good time, and when to be prudent.

The next word is “respectable,” again in verse 2. This is an interesting word. It comes from the Greek word *cosmos*, which means “world.” It spoke of a well-ordered arrangement of things. It literally means to have your life arranged in such an orderly fashion that others respect you. As one of my seminary professors used to say, if you want to know if you have this quality go look in your closet. It’ll be clear. But that same disposition and attitude that keeps someone from having an organized world around them in the home also shows itself every other way. John MacArthur writes, “The ministry is no place for a man whose life is a continual confusion of unaccomplished plans and unorganized activities.” He’s got himself and his world ordered.

The next character qualification is “hospitable.” In verse 2 and in Titus chapter 1 verse 8, both places, it literally means “a lover of strangers.” Now, this is not talking about making wonderful cookies and having your friends over, although there’s nothing wrong with that, and I encourage you to do that. In the first century, there weren’t many places for traveling Christians to stay because the typical inn or hotel, as we would think of them, were known as disreputable places rife with drunkenness and brawls and prostitutes, and so Christian leaders often opened their homes to traveling Christians as a place for them to stay. So, to be hospitable is to be “a lover of strangers,” that is, to love people and to open your home to others.

Paul goes on to say that the elder is not to be “addicted to wine.” Again, he writes this in both Timothy and in Titus. This one is fairly straightforward. It simply means that a man who would be an elder or a pastor may not be pre-occupied with, known for, over-indulgent, in alcohol. He is to be under control in every area of life. He’s not to be pugnacious, 1Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7. We all know people who are pugnacious. The Greek word comes from a verb that means “to strike.” It can refer to physical violence, but it can also refer to somebody who is just a fighter. We all have people in our backgrounds or perhaps in our life today who are like this. They simply love to argue and to fight. This person tends to be bad-tempered, irritable, and

generally argumentative. And at times it can even lead to the brink of and even beyond the brink of physical violence. That's pugnacious, and if a man is pugnacious, he may not serve as an elder in a church.

In verse 3, Paul goes on to tell us that he instead must be gentle. Notice that Paul lists it as the opposite of pugnacious. He says, he's not to be pugnacious, but, and the Greek word is a strong adversative, it means "but on the other hand, let me tell you the opposite of that, what he is to be, he's to be gentle." No single English word really captures the full meaning of this word, but Alexander Strauch in his book, which I highly recommend to you if you're even weighing whether or not you should serve as an elder in the future, it's called *Biblical Eldership*, and he deals with every relevant text, by the way, in the New Testament about the issue of elders. In his book he suggests that several good English words for this word "gentle," are the words forbearing, kind, gentle, magnanimous, and I love this one, gracious. I think that word really captures it. Here's a man who is not always looking to fight people, instead he is known for having a gracious spirit toward others. He's not a wimp. He's willing and ready to fight when the truth is at stake, but his character is not a character that loves fighting. If you love a good fight, and that's what really motivates you, then the ministry is not the place for you, whether it's to serve as a pastor, a senior pastor, a teaching pastor, as I am, or one of the elders of a local church.

"Peaceable," in verse 3, and in Titus 1 the parallel expression is "not quick-tempered." It means you're uncontentious, and this is related to not being pugnacious and to being gentle. It means you're not quick to get angry, you're not quick-tempered, you're not always flying off the handle at something, impulsively angry, and therefore promoting disunity. We are to be known as peaceable people, not quickly angered and quickly in a fight. In verse 3, Paul goes on to say that the elder is to be free from the love of money, or in Titus, "not fond of sordid gain." That means he doesn't love money, he's not greedy, he's not in the ministry for what he can get out of it. Paul said in Philippians chapter 4 that he knew what it was to have more than he needed and he knew what it was not to have enough, and he was content with either. That's the spirit that you and I, all of us, have to work toward, but if you want to be an elder or if you are an elder, this is the spirit you have to work toward. Being content with plenty but not being tied to it, where you have to have it, willing to let it go.

I'll just share a personal vignette with you. This is something that Sheila and I often are reminded of. Right now she's reading a biography of John Paton, missionary to the cannibals in the South Pacific. We were talking about this recently. The Lord in His providence has placed us here in Southlake and Colleyville and Keller, a very wealthy area, and we want to be able to enjoy God's goodness to us here, and enjoy the generosity of this church, but we never want to have to have these things. We want instead our hearts to be, "Lord, send us anywhere, only go with us. Lay any burden on us, only sustain us. Sever any tie, save the tie that binds us to Your heart." And that should be the heart and prayer that we all should strive to have.

He's not to be a new convert, 1 Timothy 3 verse 6. In secular Greek this expression was used literally to describe something newly planted. Some of you have been a little late getting your winter plants in and they didn't maybe fare too well during this latest cold period we had because they were newly planted. That's exactly what Paul is saying here, but he's using it to refer to someone who's newly converted. Don't put someone who's newly planted in the faith in this position. And he gives a reason, because he might fall into the same condemnation incurred by the devil. I think Paul means both that he might succumb to the temptation the devil succumbed to which was pride, to be lifted up and exalted, and he might face the same swift action on the part of God that Satan faced as well.

We're going to come back to the in-between verses, stay with me, we're talking about character here. He has to have a good reputation with those outside the church. Again, that's very straightforward. People in the community may disagree with him biblically. They may disagree with his moral standards. They may disagree with some of the decisions he makes, but they know nothing that would impeach his integrity. He pays his bills on time. He's known to be the same person in the barbershop that he is in the pew.

"Not self-willed." Now we're moving to Titus. These qualifications are not found in Timothy but are found only in Titus. Titus 1:7, "not self-willed" I don't think I can improve on Alexander Strauch's definition, "A self-willed man wants his own way, he is stubborn, arrogant, and inconsiderate of other's opinions, feelings or desires. A self-willed man is headstrong, independent, self-assertive, and ungracious, particularly toward those who have a different

opinion.” That’s self-willed, and if you’re self-willed then you’re not qualified to serve as an elder.

An elder loves what is good, according to Titus 1:8. One Greek lexicon defines that as, “One who willingly and with self-denial does good.” William Hendricksen said, “one who is willing to do what is beneficial to others.” He is to love doing good. I read a verse this morning from Acts 10 verse 38 where Jesus was described by Peter as, “One who went about doing good.” The elder is to be one who delights in doing good. He loves what is good. He loves to do what is good. He is just, probably a reference to being fair, equitable, in your dealings with others. And finally, in Titus 1:8, devout, he is to be resolutely committed to God and to His truth. Those are the character qualifications.

Now, none of us, not a single, living person has those in perfection. And in fact, there are areas even as I go through these and teach them to you that I realize are weaknesses in my own life that I want the Lord to build and to strengthen. But you ought to be known for these qualities if you’re going to pursue the office of elder. That’s the character you must have. So, if you’re going to pursue, if you’re going to know what constitutes a call to be an elder, to be a minister, to be a pastor, then you have to have craving that is, the desire. You’ve got to want the work of the ministry. Secondly, you’ve got to have the character. Now we’ve gone from the internal desire to the external, objective, measurable character qualities that qualify you to serve in that role.

There’s a third test and that is capacity, skill, or ability. There are two specific skills or abilities that an elder must have, and if you’re going to serve as an elder, God has given these to you. The first, and the most obvious one, is that he must be able to teach, according to 1 Timothy 3:2. And the way Paul puts it to Titus in Titus 1:9 is he must “be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.” Look at those expressions for a moment. Notice that to Timothy, Paul implies that he has the skill to teach, he is able to teach. To Titus, Paul implies that he has a sufficient knowledge of scripture and doctrine to exhort believers and to refute error in false teaching.

So, this qualification means that you have both the skill to take the Word of God, to understand what the original author meant, through careful study to organize your thoughts in such a way that you can be understood and to present it to others. We’re not talking about the fact that you

have to be John MacArthur. We're talking about the fact that you can take the Word of God and you can understand it and explain it to others in a way that they can understand it and apply it in life. You have the skill, but it's more than that, you have to have a certain degree of knowledge. That's why when we are bringing men onto our elder board we want to test them for their biblical knowledge. Because it's not merely skill, there's a degree of knowledge that has to be there in order to carry out what Paul tells Titus. So, if you're going to be an elder, you have to have a certain capacity to teach.

But there's a second capacity that I want you to see in 1 Timothy chapter 3. It's the capacity to manage, or to lead. Notice 1 Timothy 3:4 and 5, "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he . . . care . . . [for] the church of God?)" In other words, he must be able to lead people and to manage his affairs because that's the basic function of leadership.

The basic function of the New Testament leader is overseeing, and that's best shown how? By what happens in his home. Having his children under control with all dignity, he manages his own household, which includes everything. The Greek word for household, or the way the expression's used here implies everything that is under that man's responsibility, under his roof, if you will, which in New Testament times included not only his children but, perhaps some servants, perhaps as well extended family. And so, in every sense, he manages his household and he keeps his children under control with all dignity. And the reason's clear: it's a test. If you don't have the capacity enough to manage your own household, then you don't have the capacity to manage the church of God. Paul adds in Titus that he must have "children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion."

Now let me just tell you that there have been whole forests slain for enough wood to make enough paper for all the opinions on what that verse means. Just to short-cut the process, let me tell you where the elders of this church have landed as well. We've discussed this at length and come to this consensus. By children who believe, or children who are faithful, this is what we've written. In Paul's epistle to Titus, he lists the qualifications for elders beginning in Titus 1:6. One of those qualifications is having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.

Recognizing that there are good men on either side of the interpretive issue of children who believe versus children who are faithful, that, by the way, is the crux of the argument, can be translated either way. We agree to support the Countryside Bible Church position on this elder qualification as follows, here's where we landed, understanding that there's a lot of argument that goes behind this. If the children are in the home, let's start there. A man meets this qualification if the children in the home are believers in Christ, or if they have not yet made a profession of faith in Christ but are trustworthy in behavior, that is, responsive to the authority of their parents. A man does not meet this qualification if, in his home, there is a child who is a professing believer in Christ but not under control, or is an unbeliever who openly professes rejection of Christ and/or is given to dissipation or rebellion.

What about when children are outside the home? We discussed that as well, adult children, no longer in the home. A man meets this qualification, we believe, if the children outside the home are believers in Christ; if they are unbelievers, yet do not bring reproach upon the man. So, we are interpreting it here as "faithful" children, not "believing" children. A man does not meet this qualification if there is a child, even outside of his home, an adult child, who is given to dissipation or rebellion, a sort of dissolute lifestyle known for debauchery and all kind of loose living, brings reproach upon the man, and in that case he does not meet this qualification. But it's important even when you think of this, that it has to be reviewed in the context of the total life and character of the man. So, those are the capacities this man must have: he must be capable of teaching, and he must be capable of leading and managing, one of those shown in how he handles the Word of God, the other one's shown in how he handles his children.

There's one final test and that's confirmation. Look at 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 10. Now, this is in the section on deacons but notice what it says. 1 Timothy 3:10, "These men [that is, the deacons] must also [there's your key word] first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach." The point here is, Paul is going back to the elders in saying, elders too must be first tested, and then if they're found to be beyond reproach then they can serve as elders. Essentially, this confirmation by the church happens in several ways. First of all the elders select, by selection, I don't mean they go to a man, I mean once a man demonstrates a desire and comes to the elders and says I really want to pursue becoming an elder, remember it starts with desire, then the elders, out of those who say they want to pursue that, select those

whom they believe meet these objective standards, who have the character, who have the capacity.

Then there is an evaluation by the church and the elders. Notice here in 1 Timothy 3:10, by the way, this passage occurs in a section, beginning in chapter 2 verse 1 running through the end of chapter 3, which are instructions to the whole church not just to the elders or to Timothy. And the whole church is to test or to evaluate whether or not this man who wants to pursue this office, meets these tests. The elders are to as well, because in 1 Timothy 5 verse 22 Paul tells Timothy that's he not to lay hands upon anyone too hastily. In other words, evaluate them, test them, make sure. So both the elders and the congregation are to evaluate whether or not this man who wants to serve as an elder or a pastor meets these tests. And then, finally, there is public recognition by the elders with the laying on of hands. You see this in 1 Timothy 4 and in 1 Timothy 5 as well. There is the public recognition that this man, by the laying on of hands, the elders are saying, "This man has passed these tests. We confirm him, the congregation has confirmed him, to meet these qualifications."

So how do you know if you've been called to be a pastor? How do you know if you should pursue being an elder? The four tests: Do you have the desire? Is there within your heart a craving to do the work of ministry? Is that desire matched by meeting the character qualifications that are laid out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1? Is there the capacity to teach? Have you demonstrated that? Are you teaching, and are people responding to your teaching? Have you shown in your home the capacity to lead and to manage by how your home runs, how your children respond? And fourthly, have the elders and the congregation confirmed that you meet these other tests? If all four of those things are true, then you have been called to be an elder. If any one of them is not, then you have not.

Now, what about the rest of us here tonight? What about the rest of you who have no aspirations of being elders? You perhaps, you know, you're a woman, and you know you can't serve in that role. Or perhaps you're a man and you simply want to serve in the church. What do you do with all this? Well, first of all, understand that you have a significant responsibility. It's your job every time the elders come to you and say, "Here's a man who we believe may be called to ministry," you're to involve yourself in that process, you're to take that seriously. And if you

believe that person, for whatever reason, doesn't meet the qualifications laid out here in 1 Timothy 3, you're to let the elders know, you're to let that person know.

Also, when you look at the character laid out here, this isn't merely for the elders. This is a target for everyone here. Those qualifications that are laid out for an elder, apart from the capacity of "able to teach" and "able to manage," the rest of those character qualifications should be what every one of us strive to be; they're a target for us all. It's amazing isn't it, to see the wisdom of God in how He has established His church? It's my prayer that God would continue to help us to be biblical in our approach to leadership and our approach to how the church functions. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for the clarity of Your Word. Thank you for how You've established the church. Lord, remind us again that You love the church, that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. That He's building His church, that what matters to Him in the world today is His church. And Father I pray, that you would give all of us a similar love for the church. Lord, I thank You for the men that you have raised up here, the men who serve as elders in this place. I pray that You would help all of us to continue to pursue You, that our devotion to Christ, our knowledge of His Word, our obedience to Him, our pursuit of personal holiness would all continue to grow through the years. Father, I pray that you would use us in the way You intended elders to be used in the local assembly, to teach these dear people and equip them so that they could do the work of service. Father, I pray that You would raise up others in this place to serve as elders, or at least, Father, to be qualified to be elders. I pray that You would raise up some young men who have it in their hearts because You placed it there, and because You've given them the character and the capacity and the craving. Lord, I pray that there would be young men in this church, who would want to give themselves, to spend themselves in the work of ministry. And, Father, I pray for all of us that You would build into our hearts and into our characters, and into our lives, the character that we've looked at tonight that's to be true of the elder. Lord, don't let any of us be content with anything less. We pray it for the glory of Christ and in His name. Amen.