



Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 6 – THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH
LESSON 102 – QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY – LOUIS BERKHOF, PGS. 532-582
BIBLICAL DOCTRINE – JOHN MACARTHUR, PGS. 739-826
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY – WAYNE GRUDEM, PGS. 853-1090

Shepherding the Flock

- ▶ By God's design, churches depend upon faithful leadership in order to be strong, healthy, productive, and fruitful. Scripture teaches that God has given elders to each local congregation in order to oversee and lead His people.
- ▶ Elders who are tasked with leading, feeding, and protecting the flock will one day give an account before the Lord for the souls under their spiritual care.
- ▶ Spiritual leadership, unlike the world, is characterized by Christlike humility and a desire to serve (Mark 10:43-45). Any who wish to lead in the church must demonstrate personal holiness, doctrinal purity, self-sacrifice, spiritual discipline, and Christ-centered devotion.

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- ▶ The office of elder entails a responsibility that must not be taken lightly (Luke 12:48), as highlighted especially in the sober warning of James 3:1, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”
- ▶ We also find a warning not to be hasty, or partial in appointing elders to lead in the church. Many a church has suffered division and even spiritual abuses by appointing as elders men who were not qualified.
- ▶ 1 Timothy 5:21 I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality. 22 Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.

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- ▶ Although elders lead the local church, the church does not belong to them. It is not their church. It is Christ's church, and the elders will give an account for their stewardship (1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28).
- ▶ 1 Timothy 3:5 indicates that the primary role of the elder is to "care for God's church." As overseers (*episkopas*), they manage the ministry of the church and lead by example and through teaching and preaching the Word of God (1 Tim. 5:17).
- ▶ Their leadership is not by compulsion (forced), but is to be willing service – that is, their authority is actually and truly serving in submission to Christ and calling the church into obedience to His Word in the Scriptures.
- ▶ 1 Peter 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

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- ▶ Qualifications for those who would serve as elders include a list of character qualities that should be produced in the life of a man who is living in obedience to Christ and His Word.
- ▶ 1 Timothy 3:1 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

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- ▶ Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— 6 if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. 7 For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, 8 but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.
- ▶ In both of these texts the overarching standard is that elders must be “above reproach.” This speaks to his spiritual and moral character.

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- ▶ In every sphere of his life the elder is to be above reproach – marriage, family, community, church.
- ▶ The qualities listed modify the first quality given, to be blameless (above reproach):
 - ▶ 1. Blameless – above reproach and disrepute
 - ▶ 2. The husband of one wife – literally a “one-woman man.” This does not refer to marital status, but to purity in relationships and exclusivity and faithfulness if married.
 - ▶ 3. Temperate – vigilant and serious minded
 - ▶ 4. Sober-minded – self-controlled, curbing one’s own desires and impulses
 - ▶ 5. Of Good Behavior – well arranged, seemly

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- ▶ 6. Hospitable – “lover of strangers”, generous
- ▶ 7. Able to Teach – a skillful teacher
- ▶ 8. Not Given to Wine – one who does not abuse or become addicted to wine
- ▶ 9. Not Violent – not a “bruiser” or given to fights
- ▶ 10. Not Greedy for Money – generous, not controlled by a desire for money
- ▶ 11. Gentle – reasonable, fair
- ▶ 12. Not Quarrelsome – not contentious or looking for trouble
- ▶ 13. Not Covetous – not controlled by desire for possessions

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- ▶ 14. One Who Rules His Own House and Children Well – Manages his family rightly as a husband and father, having a submissive and godly wife and obedient children
- ▶ 15. Not a Novice – not a new convert, to be mature in the faith
- ▶ 16. Having a Good Testimony among Those Outside – an upstanding reputation even to those outside of the church
- ▶ 17. Not Self-willed – not self-pleasing or arrogant
- ▶ 18. Not Quick Tempered – not prone to get angry quickly, not hot headed
- ▶ 19. A Lover of What is Good – loving and desiring what is good (beneficial)

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- ▶ 20. Just – upright
- ▶ 21. Holy – devout, pleasing to God
- ▶ 22. Self-controlled – disciplined
- ▶ 23. Holding Fast the Faithful Word – Believing and being convinced of the truth of God's Word and offering the truth to others
- ▶ 24. Male – The New Testament makes no provision for women to serve as elders (pastors).
- ▶ 1 Tim. 2:11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. 12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

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- ▶ Since teaching is one of the primary functions of the elder and women are restricted from teaching in authority over men, the office of elder is reserved by God's design to men.
- ▶ This does not preclude women from teaching as they are in fact commanded to teach other women and children within the church (Titus 2:3-4; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15).
- ▶ This also does not preclude women from discipling men – as we have an example where Apollos was discipled by Aquila and Priscilla in their home where they explained the Word to him (Acts 18:24-28).

Appointing New Elders

- ▶ In identifying future, or new elders, the starting point must be a God-given desire in the heart of the individual (1 Tim. 3:1). Stated negatively, those who do not desire to be elders are not qualified to hold the office. Neither does a desire to hold the office automatically qualify a man for the task.
- ▶ Potential elders should not be coerced or manipulated into pursuing the office, since a humble willingness is required to be qualified.
- ▶ An inward call (desire) coupled with a recognition from the congregation of a man being willing and qualified opens the door for service.

Supporting Elders

- ▶ The New Testament indicates that it is appropriate for elders to be compensated financially by the church for their ministry labors.
- ▶ 1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. 18 For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer is worthy of his wages.”
- ▶ The word “honor” is “remuneration.”
- ▶ 1 Cor. 9:4 Do we have no right to eat and drink? 5 Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? 7 Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? 8 Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” Is it oxen God is concerned about?

Supporting Elders

- ▶ Paul decided not to receive financial support, as was his Scriptural right, choosing instead to work as a tent maker (Acts 18:3) so that he might proclaim the gospel without adding any financial burden to the church (1 Cor. 9:18ff; 1 Thess. 2:9).
- ▶ “Full time” or “bi-vocational” ministries are both allowable according to Scripture. There is no distinction in the qualifications or duties of elders (no matter the label applied – full-time, bi-vocational, pastors, lay elders – all men who serve as elders must meet all of the qualifications for the position of service within the church.
- ▶ See more on the Roles and Duties of Pastors here:
<https://timeintheword.org/2007/02/27/the-role-and-duties-of-pastors/>

Plurality

- ▶ The clear norm in Scripture is that there be a plurality of qualified men serving as a team of elders, often with a leader among them, but all being equal in position.
- ▶ There are times when a single elder is present at a church in the New Testament, however the encouragement is that as soon as can be done in accordance with Scripture, elders are to be appointed (Titus 1:5).
- ▶ Churches where providence has led to a position of having only one elder/pastor should seek help from other churches for accountability and in the event that a disagreement needs to be resolved. Church associations or denominations can help serve this purpose, even if there are multiple elders in a church. (See Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689, Chapter 26, Paragraph 15).

Accountability of Elders

- ▶ Ephesians 4:11 – Christ as Lord of His Church gives pastor-teachers to the Church
- ▶ Acts 20:28-31 – the Holy Spirit leads in the appointment of elders
- ▶ 1 Timothy 4:14; Titus 1:5 – The elders, with the congregation, appoint new elders
- ▶ Hebrews 13:17 – The elders are accountable to God for his work and his flock
- ▶ Ephesians 5:23 – Christ is head (Lord) of the Church
- ▶ 1 Timothy 5:19-22 – The elders are accountable to each other and the Church

Next Week: Lesson 103 – Qualifications for Deacons