

An Introduction to Elder Qualifications

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Last week we introduced the concept of elder leadership in the church and that's a very critical dimension to the establishment of the church. There is so much more to a church than gathering together and singing on Sunday and hearing preaching on Sunday. There is meant to be structure. There is meant to be leadership and the Bible calls the leaders of the local church "elders." What we saw last time was that God intends elders to serve at least three different functions in the church. They are meant to provide oversight to the church; they are meant to teach the church; and their lives are meant to serve as examples to the church to show what Christian living is supposed to be like. Elders set the pace for the church and set the pace for, as it were, for those who would want to follow Christ in the context of the local church which should be every true Christian.

Now, here's a question for you as we begin: how serious is this issue of spiritual leadership? How important is it that the right men would be leading the church of Christ when Christ is in heaven and he's delegated leadership to men, how important is that issue? Well, here is one measure that we could use, kind of stepping a little bit outside of the issue of elders today, but when our Lord Jesus Christ was on earth, he appointed 12 apostles. He appointed 12 men who would lead the church after he was ascended into heaven. He appointed 12 who would be with him for the three years of his public ministry and see how ministry is to be done and to learn at his feet. The Lord Jesus Christ who himself was the eternal Son of God, who had all the full command of deity because he was God himself in human flesh, the night before he appointed the apostles, he spent the entire night in prayer. The day that he appointed the apostles, that prior night, he spent the entire night in prayer so serious and urgent was the task. You can read about that in Luke 6:12-13. So the Son of God placed a premium on seeking the will of God as he appointed those who would lead the church after he was gone, those who would lay the foundation for all subsequent generations. Christ earnestly prayed before the Father as he sought to establish that. If the Son of God takes it that seriously so much that he would be on his face before the Father for an entire night before he appointed leaders, then it bears on us, it weighs on us to take it as seriously as well. But watch this, it's not just for us to pray as we seek to establish leaders. We should be doing that for sure but we don't simply pray in an uninformed vacuum and then simply go and choose whoever we wish because that's not the way that Christ has established it to be. Christ has given us in his word direction on who these elders should be. He has made it very clear in his word and

so we go to his word and we learn and we inform our minds and our understanding and then we submit to that and we seek men who would be qualified under those standards that he has appointed.

Today's message is an introduction to elder qualifications. We're going to answer the question: what do we look for in men who would be elders in the local church? Because these men who have the responsibility for oversight, for teaching and for being an example, have a position of great responsibility. There is a great weight of accountability that rests on their shoulders and we want to be sure that we get the right men in place, the ones who are biblically qualified for that office because they are going to be the ones who lead. They are going to be the ones who teach. They are going to be the ones who set examples. They are going to be the ones who deal with difficult situations. You wouldn't send a soldier into a firefight having simply put instruments in his hand and sent him out without training. Well, God has showed us who it is that are to lead us in the spiritual fight of this living for Christ in this wicked world and we're going to be able to examine that here today. I'm very encouraged to have this opportunity.

Titus 1:5-9 will set our text for this morning. We dealt with verse 5 last time but we'll read it here this morning just to set the text. Titus 1:5-9, what are the qualifications of those who would lead the church of Christ in a local assembly.

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

This is important. "Paul, how do I do that? What do we look for?" "Namely," you see Paul was always very calm about it. He just explained things. He just set forth here is what you are to do and here is how you are to do it and that's what we see here in verses 6-9, the qualifications for elders laid out for us.

6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

Now let me remind you just one more time before we dive into this, what we said last week, we looked at the function of elders: what are elders to do? And we said that they are to provide oversight, they are to teach and they are to be an example. Well, as you go through this passage, you see that the qualifications of an elder are directly aimed to help us evaluate and see that a man is capable and fit to do that. It addresses each one of those areas of function by showing how he is qualified for it and how we are to examine him before he is installed into that office. We're going to break today's message around two main points. We're going to see first of all the primary standard for being an elder. 1.

The primary standard and then secondly, we're going to see the specific applications of that standard. The primary standard and then the specific applications. Point 1, therefore is the primary standard, the primary qualification of being an elder and it's this and it's very simple: the primary standard for being an elder in the church of Jesus Christ is that a man be above reproach. That's what it says there in verse 6. Look at it with me. He says, "namely, if any man is above reproach." That's the overarching consideration. An elder must be a man of unquestioned integrity. He must be a man that no valid accusation could be brought against his character. There is no accusation of wrongdoing that he could be found guilty of. He is to be above reproach. Now that is a very high standard and we should understand what that standard is not in one sense. It's not that an elder is sinless. It's not that an elder is perfect in every area of his life. We know that that can't be the case. 1 King 8:46 says that "there is no man who does not sin," and so it is not the qualification to be an elder that he is sinless and it should not be your expectation of an elder that he live an absolutely perfect life. Your elders are always going to be somewhat flawed because the only pool of candidates we have to be of elders are those who have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And so we have to understand what the standard is not saying. It's not requiring absolute perfection in the men but there is this primary qualification that they are above reproach, that you could look at the man, you could look at the man in his character, in his family life, in his teaching and say, "There is nothing that I can rightly accuse him of. There is no prevailing prominent fault in that man that would make him unfit for spiritual leadership." That is the standard of being above reproach.

Elders. Remember the function of elders. I'll remind you of this a time or two here and this is just so foundational to the future of Truth Community that I always get lost in the marvel of how important what we're doing right now is. An elder is a man who is setting a pace. He's providing leadership and you have to provide good leaders in order to have a good church. This is essential. Think about it as though you were building a house. You are laying a foundation. Well, Jesus Christ is our foundation of the church. He is the head of the church but in a human sense, there are elders that are going to provide the foundation for the church and you have to pour the foundation level. You have to pour it well. You can't build in cracks and defects into the foundation or everything that you build on it is going to suffer and be out of line as a result. Well, it's the same way in building a church with elder leadership. You start with the right men and you make sure that you've got the men who fit the qualifications and therefore can fit the corners of the foundation that are being laid. This is essential.

Elders must exemplify moral character of the highest order because they set a pattern for others to follow. Ungodly leadership discredits a ministry and you all know what that's like. You all know of churches that have had men that have disqualified themselves from leadership and it brings a stain, it brings a wet blanket onto the ministry because credibility has been sacrificed. Look, you've got to understand this, we have to understand this, this is so very essential: we don't have the liberty to take chances as we establish elders. We don't have the liberty to be careless as we do this because it's not about us: it's not about us, it's not about a pastor, it's not about the name Truth Community in a large sense. Our overarching consideration is to protect the glory and

the reputation of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's what we care about and the way that the Lord has established that his name would be honored is in large part that men in spiritual leadership would be above reproach so that the Lord that they represent would not be subject to vicarious accusations because his leaders failed, because his leaders were disreputable, because his leaders were dishonest, because his leaders were not above reproach. So we seek to honor this primary standard of being above reproach because we have a Lord who is supremely above reproach. We have a Lord who is impeccable, who is sinless, who could never sin, who never did sin. And we love him because he laid his life down for us and so we want to protect his reputation by installing leaders who are a reflection of his holiness and godliness. That's the standard, that elders would be above reproach.

How important is this overriding standard? It's so important that Paul repeated it in verse 7. He emphasizes it. Repetition is often an indication of emphasis in the Scriptures and so he says in verse 6, "if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe," we'll look at that in a moment. But then he picks it up again in verse 7, "For the overseer," another word for the elder, reflecting the function that the elder serves, the oversight of the church, the one who oversees the church, "must be above reproach as God's steward," as the one who has been entrusted with the leadership of God's people. He has to be above reproach. He says it twice: verse 6, verse 7. He emphasizes this and if you will turn over to 1 Timothy 3, a parallel passage which also discusses the qualifications for leadership in the church, you'll see that Paul leads off that list as well with the same idea. 1 Timothy 3:1, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach." You see, Paul gives the overriding, the overarching standard at the head of the list and then everything that follows is simply a means to help you identify whether a man is above reproach or not. This above reproach is not one qualification alongside others, it's the one that binds them all together; it's the unifying theme in everything else that follows; it's the overarching consideration; it's the primary standard. An elder must be a man who is above reproach.

You can illustrate this in a negative way to see what it means. When a man's name is put before you, there should not be any sense of scandal or moral failure that is associated with his name. To give you an illustration from a negative standpoint, I was in ministry with a pastor many years ago who failed morally in the most egregious way and when you say his name, this isn't his name, the name is not important but let's say his name was Jim Brown. It wasn't but when you say the name Jim Brown now you think, "Jim Brown, ah, the man who committed adultery on his wife. The man who committed adultery in the midst of his ministry." That's the immediate association you make with that man's name. You can't avoid it. That man is permanently disqualified because he's no longer above reproach. There is a shame, there is a scandal that is attached to his name like white on rice and a man like that can never lead again because he's not above reproach, because when you think of that man's name, when you just say the name, you think of scandal and when a man is associated with scandal in an unbroken way like that, he can't stand up and represent the scandal free Lord. He can't stand up and represent a holy Lord. It discredits the ministry. It discredits the message. So we protect the

reputation. We protect the glory of Jesus Christ by being careful who we choose that there's no shame attached with them.

They are beyond that; their life is above that kind of accusation. And it's not just that kind of moral failure but the other things that we're going to see in the passage that follows. You see, spiritual leadership is serious. It's weighty. And for those of you that are new perhaps to the concept of elder leadership, let me say this, let me help you think through how you should be thinking about it if elder leadership is new to you: it's in these qualifications, it's in the high standards that the Lord places upon elders and the honoring of those standards that you find your protection from abuse of spiritual leadership. It's when the standards, the qualifications of the elders, are honored in a local assembly that you have the freedom and you have the rest to say, "I can trust these men in leadership because they have manifested consistently over time the character which Christ himself requires of those who would lead his people." That's where you find your rest. It's not in controlling them, by subjecting their leadership to a congregational vote every time they want to replace the carpet. It's by seeing in them the character that God requires and you say, "Okay, I can follow men like that because they show evidently the qualification that God requires in leadership." A church finds its rest, it finds its protection, it finds its confidence, it's serenity, in the leadership of the church as these qualifications are honored. That's why we take it so very seriously.

We've been at Truth Community Fellowship for 18 months and we're just now getting to elder qualifications. That's been a deliberate strategy that's been consciously intended. We didn't want to rush into this. I want to give you time to get a sense for what the church looks like, what preaching looks like, you know, what's going on and not rush this in a way that would understandably make people uncomfortable. Well, here we are. This is what God has for us. What are the elders to look like? You start with the fact that they are above reproach and it takes time for us to be together. Look, we come from a lot of different places: geographically, different spiritual roots, different churches in our background and all that. We come from a lot of different places and it takes time to get to know each other well enough to say, "Are we comfortable in looking at this together?" And so we say, "Okay, we've been together a while now. We're starting to know each other. We can address each other by name. We know something about each other's families," and so we say, "Okay, what does the Lord have for us in the midst of this that would be the next step in leadership? How do we go? How do we progress from being a collection of individuals from a lot of different places to becoming a body of one, so to speak, a body with unity?" Well, it starts with establishing the right kind of leadership and so that's why we're looking at these things today, to take our time, to be patient, to know each other. That's why we do it. And elders, it's obvious from what is said here, is that the elders of a church are going to be men that are known to the congregation well enough to be able to look at them and say, "I know him well enough that I could say this about his character. I know him well enough that I can affirm this from my own interactions with him." So this isn't done in a dark corner someplace where it's unknown and the people that are appointed are unknown to the broader people that are gathered together. These are men who are known, who are out out in the midst and known and understood. I remember many years ago, back when we were living in

Chicago and sometimes men would be brought into leadership and I'd just say, "Where did these guys come from? Where did you find them? I don't even see them on Sunday morning." Men like that. Men who were strangers could never be appointed to elder leadership because they've got to be known well enough that we can look at their lives and say, "Oh, okay, above reproach." So that's the primary standard and that's some of the reasoning behind it. So here at Truth Community, when we appoint elders in the future, there is a high standard. These men will be above reproach or they won't be elders. That's the only way that it can be because that's what Scripture requires and our desire, our responsibility is to honor Scripture. We don't get to write our own script in these things. We honor Scripture with the standards of Scripture and then we trust the Lord to lead through our obedience to these standards.

Now, with that said, what do we look at? Above reproach is kind of a general label. What do we look at specifically in order to be able to assess men in the future? What are the specific applications? That's point two. You've got the primary standard, point 1, point two, the specific applications. What do we examine to see if a man is above reproach? Well, in one sense, it's very intrusive to the man. It's very intrusive to the man. First of all, you look at his family life. There are three things that we're going to spell out here under the specific applications. They all flow very naturally from the passage in front of us and the first specific application that you make is that you look at the man's family life. The man's family life. Look at Titus 1:6, "namely, if any man is above reproach." Where does he have to be above reproach? First of all, he has to be above reproach in his family life. He's "the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion." There in one verse you have so many issues that that one verse could be a series of messages on its own. We're not going to do that here today. I'm committed to not getting bogged down in too much detail and too many hypotheticals or all of that. We just want to lay this out in an introductory fashion and understand generally speaking what it is that we are to look for to assess whether a man is above reproach.

Well, let's take a look at verse 6 here. First of all, we see, "if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife." The husband of one wife. Do you know what that immediately does? That phrase alone restricts church leadership to male leadership. It is men who lead the church because a woman can't be a husband. Despite the efforts of our society to redefine that here today, it's obvious that a man must be the one who is an elder because the man is called to be a husband of one wife and so we honor the principle of male leadership in the church. It's not that men are better than women. If you read through the gospel of Luke, for example, you'll see women being faithful to Christ in wonderful ways. It's just that the order of God is that there be male leadership in the church rather than men and women together. So "husband" shows that church leadership is restricted to men.

Now, let's look at this a little more closely. Look at verse 6 with me again. Keep your eyes on the text here because this is really important. "If any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife." That phrase translated "the husband of one wife" in the original language literally reads that he's a one-woman man. He's a one-woman man and so what

Paul is calling for here is that an elder must be a man who demonstrates an unquestioned pattern of relational fidelity and sexual purity. Sexual purity, relational fidelity is one of the specific primary things that you look for in a man to determine whether he is above reproach, to see if he qualifies to be an elder. He must be a one-woman man. You see, it's not merely a question of counting whether a man has been married more than once. That's part of it. It's an important part of it but that wouldn't be a character trait to see if you count to one or you count to two. It's just obvious that there's more to it than that when we're talking and evaluating whether a man is above reproach. But look at it from the other stage, the mere fact that a man has been married to only one woman is no proof of his character if he's an abusive, hostile husband. If he's a flirtatious man who maintains his physical distance but is flirtatious with women all around. He's not a one-woman man. He's not qualified for spiritual leadership. So we see that when we see the term "the husband of one wife," that it's pointing to a deeper reality than simply the number of marriage certificates that's in the man's cabinet. The real question raised by this specific application in relation to the man's family life is this: can that man be fairly said to be devoted to one woman. Is he free from adultery? Yes, that's the question that we ask. Is he free from adultery? Is he also free from a flirtatious spirit about him? This is the qualification of being a one-woman man. Look, I'll say a couple of brief points of application about this. In the ever-increasing promiscuous culture in which we live, it's harder and harder to find men like this and the fact that the culture is promiscuous and it's even because of the ease of access, it's so easy to access things that would violate that principle. That isn't a reason, listen to me, that is not a reason, the culture in which we live is not a reason to bring that standard down, it's a reason to uphold it all the more because the church is the last bulwark of resistance to that pervasive promiscuity that pervades everything that we see around us. So we have to have men that honor this principle and that have manifested a faithfulness to this principle over time.

There are a lot of hypotheticals that we could get into, "What about this? What about the man 30 years ago before he was a Christian?" We're not going to get into all of that today. We'll save that for when we actually have to deal with the question in practicality. What we want to see now, all we want to see right now is that Scripture calls us to look for a man who can fairly be said to be a one-woman man. Faithful. If he's unmarried, he's not a flirt. He hasn't bounced around from relationship to relationship in his unmarried state as he's being put forth as an elder. There's a loyalty. There's a devotion. Do you know why that's so important? Do you want to know why that is so important? It's essential about his family life but it points to an animating principle about what governs him. If a man can't be faithful to the woman that's in front of him, he's not going to be faithful to the Lord who is in heaven. You have to have a man who has manifested faithfulness to his wife, to the woman in his life, because that's going to be a reflection of whether he's going to be faithful to his Lord or not. You can't separate the two. We totally reject in the church the principle that animates politics now that a man can be a good leader and not be faithful to his wife. I realize that that's just assumed now and that we're used to a culture that divorces those two questions. No, not in the church. In the church, the question of whether a man is faithful to his wife is bound up centrally with whether he's faithful to his Lord or not. So he has to be a one-woman man. That is what is

required as an aspect of evaluating his family life to see whether the man is above reproach.

Now moving on. We come to a difficult interpretive issue here in verse 6. It says, "The husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion." Now, this word translated "who believe," it's the Greek word *pistos*. It's a word that is properly translated in many contexts "believing." It's also a word that means "faithful." Faithful or believing. And translators here in verse 6 have to make a choice about how they're going to translate it and you can see the fact that there is a difficulty or there is an ambiguity perhaps in the word, because if you look down in verse 9 right here in the same context, you see the same word translated "faithful" in verse 9. He must be someone who "holds fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching." That word "faithful" in verse 9 is the same word that's translated "believing" in verse 6.

Why are we focusing on that? This first raises this question: must an elder's children all be born again believers in Jesus Christ before he's qualified for office? Or is this verse talking in a broader sense that the elder's children can be fairly said to be faithful to their parents, faithful in their life responsibilities? Now, there are some very good men who think and teach that this verse requires all of an elder's children to be born again Christians. I think that they make this verse say more than it actually says and I want to show you why I say that. In the King James, if you pick up a King James version, you can see that the King James is translated as "having faithful children," and so you have a question here; there is an interpretation issue that you have to decide here. So when Paul says, "he has children who are *pistos*," what does he mean by that? That's the only thing we care about. We just want to know what Paul was thinking when he wrote that. Some men say "believing," some men say "faithful." We just want to get at what Paul meant by what he said and here's what I think is the easiest way to understand what he meant: what did he say right after he said that? They have to have children who are *pistos*. What do you mean by that, Paul? He says, "I'll tell you what I mean by that. His children are not accused of dissipation or rebellion." Paul explains what he means by having *pistos* children immediately by what follows. He says, "They are not accused of dissipation or rebellion." What he's saying here is that an elder's children should not be open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. You should be able to look at a man's family and say, "His house is in order. His family is in order."

Now, generally that's often going to mean that he has children who are believers but think about it this way: Scripture teaches us repeatedly that we often don't know who is truly regenerate and who is not. It tells us that all the time. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, it says you're not going to know what's wheat and what's a tare, what's a weed. You're not going to know wheat from weed sometimes until the harvest. We just saw in communion from Matthew 7 last week where Scripture says that there will be many on the final day who thought they were Christians and the Lord says, "Depart from me. I never knew you." They're shocked. So Scripture teaches us that it's not always easy to tell who a true believer is. Now, are we supposed to evaluate a man's qualifications for leadership based on that which Scripture tells us elsewhere cannot be readily discerned in many cases? If it was a question that this man's children all had to be believers, we are

desperately in need of some guidance here. When does that standard kick in? Is it when the kid is 3? Is it when he's 6? Is it when he's 10? There's no direction. If that is to be the qualification, this gives us absolutely no direction to be able to assess that point. Paul gave us the direction that we need right there in the verse when he said, "children who are pistos." He says, "You have to look at that man's family and say that he has children who are not accused of wildness or being disobedient or rebellious."

Turn back to that passage in 1 Timothy 3. Look, if a man's family are not Christians, you know what? They are going to live according to their nature and their children are going to manifest the fact that they are not believers by their eventual disobedient and rebellious behavior and so you'll be able to see it either way but you can't look at secret things. The church has to be able to look at external things to be able to judge this and so you see a clearer indication here in 1 Timothy 3 that helps us interpret Titus 1 properly in my judgment. 1 Timothy 3:4, he says the elder "must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity." There should be a dignity. There should be an appropriateness. There should be an honorable sense as you look at that man's family and the way that he's led his family. That's what Paul is calling for here. That's the test of leadership. A parent can't make his child become a Christian. That would contradict everything that we believe that salvation is, is that salvation must be a work of God, a powerful regenerating work of God on the human heart and it's outside the realm of human control. So what's not beyond the realm of a parent's control, however, is controlling and ordering and loving and setting up his children to be honorable, to be faithful in what they do. That's what Paul is talking about here.

So when we ask, "Does he have children who are pistos?" We're not looking for a profession of faith, an outward profession of faith, which may or may not be valid. Look, those of you that have come from certain churches, I'll leave denominational labels out of it but you'll know what I'm talking about instantly. Those of you that have been in churches where children have made professions of faith and been baptized at the age of 5 or 6 and you watch them over time and they become wild and disobedient in their teenage years, showing clearly that they were never born again to begin with. Those of us that come from that kind of experience should know instantly that here in Titus when Paul is talking about the essential qualifications of the men who would lead the church, he's not telling us to look for a mere external verbal profession of faith which may or may not prove to be valid. So many professions of faith at the final day of judgment are going to be shown to be invalid. They were never true. What he's telling us to do is ask a question that you can verify. Ask a question that you can look at and actually make a judgment about. You can't look in that child's heart but you can answer this question: is that man's children, are they under control? Do they honor their parents with affection? Which reminds us for those of you that are young people, still under your parents' authority, still under their roof, you have an obligation to honor your father and mother with affection and obedience. That is the call of God on your life and it is not acceptable for young people to be rebels against their parents. That is a sin against God. Forget about what you think about your parents. Look at the holy Son of God, look at the holy Father and he says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right." We look at an elder and we assess whether his family is in order, whether his children are a credit to his

leadership or whether they undermine it because a man's home leadership as observed in the children under his authority, that's a prediction of his spiritual leadership. A man who can lead a family has shown that he may very well be ready to lead a church. A man who can't lead his children into obedience and honor and affection, is a man who is not going to be able to reproduce that on a broader scale. So you look at his family life and you evaluate it carefully.

Secondly, you look at the man's personal life. Turn back to Titus. Titus 1:7. You look at a man's personal life by which we mean that you look at his character. You look at his character. Verse 7, "The overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled." I want you to make a simple observation about the passage right here that Paul in verse 7, he lists out a series of negative characteristics and then in verse 8 he lists out positive things and so there are things that should not mark a man and there are things that positively should mark a man and he starts by defining what should not mark an elder's character. Verse 7, look at it with me again. "The overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain." Theoretically, you could make a sermon about every single one of those attributes. We're not going to do that. We're just going to say simply that an elder is a man who is not arrogant. An arrogant man is disqualified from leadership. An elder is a man who is not inclined to anger. He's not quick-tempered. He doesn't have a short fuse. He doesn't burst out in angry words when someone contradicts him. He's not reliant on alcohol. He's not argumentative. He's not greedy. These are the marks that you look for in a man. They lead by example, not by force, one writer said. Think about it this way: an elder desires the office so that he can give to Christ's sheep, not get from them. Part of what he gives is a life of example and he feels the weight. A prospective elder feels the weight of living a holy life in part because he knows that others look to his example and he doesn't want to let them down. He wants to uphold a high example for the sake of being a vessel of encouraging others to holiness and godliness in their own lives. You could say this: he's earnest about the pursuit of holiness. He's not indifferent to it.

Do you know what one of the things is as we're talking about this thing, there should be something rising up in your understanding. The office of elder is not for men who want prominence. The office of elder is not a reward for someone's earthly success. It's not given to the most vocal, outspoken, administratively skilled guy who knows how to run over people to get things done. The office of elder is not a chief executive officer of a corporation. He's a shepherd. He loves the sheep. He cares for them. He knows that his life has an influence and an impact on them. It's not that he wants to control people and exercise authority over them and lord it over them, he wants to serve them. He loves the sheep of God and he wants to serve them. He wants to see them grow in godliness. Not just so that he can be a man of influence, that's really not even important to him. A true elder doesn't care about his influence, in that sense, that he'd be recognized as a man of influence, rather what he cares about is the fact that these people belong to Christ and it will please Christ and it will honor Christ if their lives are honoring to him. It will go well for these sheep in the day of judgment if they are obedient, holy, godly people. That's

what an elder cares about. It's not about having control and authority. It's about being in a position to lead by example, to teach a word not of his own, to oversee so that the sheep are protected. This isn't an office of power. If you want an office of power, run for political office. The elder is the place of service, of example, of loving oversight. So much so that an elder is willing to have his life appropriately examined. We are entitled as a congregation to say, "Is this man self-willed? Is he quick-tempered? Is he a fighter? Is he someone who argues? Is he greedy?" You're entitled to know those things about a man who would be an elder and it shows you that church leaders, pastors who insulate themselves from relationships, who you can only find on a Sunday morning in the pulpit and then they're gone and you don't know where to find them, that's not the pattern of biblical leadership because Scripture here obviously shows that this man's life is an open book for people to read. You can have enough of a relationship and you see him in enough different contexts and you say, "There's a pattern here and it's a good one."

So you look at these disqualifying factors in verse 7. What are the positive qualifications? Look at verse 8 with me, this man is "hospitable, he loves what is good, he is sensible, just, devout, he's self-controlled." We could say this: this man bears the mark of evident sanctification in his life over a considerable period of time so that we know that it's not a flash-in-the-pan, it's not a sudden urge, a sudden impulse that fades with time but there has been a mark of this man over time, over years, that shows that he has an enduring commitment to godliness that isn't with absolute perfection but there is a pattern, a reliable pattern. You know when you see that man that what he was like yesterday is what he's going to be like tomorrow. You just know that. That's what elder leadership looks like.

He should be a man who is approachable. His life should show proper affections. He's a man of sober judgment. He obviously pursues a godly life that is marked by discipline and self-control. A man who is wildly in debt is a man who is not ready to be an elder, for example, because there's not the element of self-control there. You can really sum it up with this statement if you want to put it in a theological term: a prospective elder must manifest consistent sanctification over time. That's what we look for in men who would be in church leadership. You can't look at a man's earthly success. Every one of you knows men who are successful who shouldn't be anywhere near influencing people spiritually, right? It can't be about earthly success. It can't be about that at all. We're looking at character, not a bank account. We're looking at sanctification, not earthly power. We're looking at the things that God cares about and we don't measure those things by earthly standards. An elder's qualification is independent of whether he's wealthy. It's independent of whether he's a man of earthly influence. Look, a man could be wealthy and be unqualified. He could be a man of great earthly influence and be elder qualified. The only point is that the earthly standard isn't what you measure it by. His earthly influence is secondary to whether his character is real or not. If he happens to be a man of earthly influence, so much the better but it's not what drives his life and it's evident that that's not what drives his life. So we just have to evaluate these things by what Scripture says. You don't consider a man for the office of elder based on what he has done. You consider him for the office of elder based on, watch this: who he is. It's

because we're looking at character shown in his family life and in his personal life by which we mean his personal character.

One more for today. Is he above reproach in his family life? Is he above reproach in his personal life? In his personal character, in other words? Finally, is he above reproach in his doctrinal life, we could say. Look at verse 9 with me here. Verse 9, is he above reproach in his doctrinal life because this is essential. Verse 9, this man who must be above reproach, before he's appointed as an elder, must be shown to be a man like this, he must be verse 9, one who is "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching." He understands Christian doctrine and he holds to it. He doesn't vacillate. He doesn't go back and forth, one day following this teacher and another day following another teacher and always talking about all kinds of different teachers obviously just being tossed from wave to wave, from shore to shore, with no rock of consistency in his theological and biblical convictions. You look for a man as an elder, it's a man who has established his theological pattern just like he's established his family pattern, his character pattern, his teaching and the beliefs and the convictions that he holds have stood the test of time. He holds it fast. He holds it fast. The faithful word, the word of God, the core doctrines of Christianity. He's not a man who questions justification or questions the resurrection or gets infatuated with the latest marketing fad book. Look, I'm going to say something that's going to offend a lot of you and I don't care if what I'm about to say offends somebody. An elder can't be someone who's running in every two years with the latest fad book and saying, "This is the book that we're going to follow now." "Forty Days with Christ," or "The Purpose Driven Life," or now it's going to be another book and he's just coming in and just chasing after whatever the most successful Christian marketing publishing has done to make the most prominent thing. That is not the mark of an elder who just chases the tail of whoever has the ear of Christian publishers and says, "This is what we're doing in the church today." That's not an elder. That's not an elder. That's not what we're going to do at Truth Community. An elder is one who holds fast the faithful word; who's not ashamed of the gospel; who's not ashamed of the simplicity of clear Bible exposition, understanding that that's what feeds the sheep and makes them strong. We're not trying to keep up with the fads here. We want to hold fast the faithful word and let the word of God set our agenda, not the latest director of marketing from some Christian publisher who is simultaneously publishing heretical works by unworthy men. Do you know what? Let's just be real and let's be faithful. That's what we want and those are the kind of men that we want to attract to leadership. Not men who love the fads, men who love the word. Men who hold it fast and can be a rock of Gibraltar against the pounding waves of shifting opinion in theological circles. That's what an elder is. That's what an elder does. He holds fast the faithful word. His teaching is consistent with apostolic doctrine.

It's not just what he holds inside in his heart of hearts. We're almost done here. Look at verse 9 with me, "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching." You know, an elder isn't trying to go out and establish his own realm of theology and make a mark for his name. Do you know what, if I came to the end of my life and people said, "He never had an original thought. He never said anything new and original. The only thing that you could say about him is that he was consistent with prior

generations of pastors who taught the word of God, that you could trace the themes of his teaching through generations of godly men who taught the word and were faithful." If you could say that about my life at the end, I'd be a happy man and I would be content for someone to say, "He never had an original thought in his life." I don't care about that. Just let me be found at the end having been faithful to what was handed down to us through the generations of those who shed their blood for the sake of the gospel. I don't want to be original. I don't want to be new. I want to be faithful.

That's not just me, beloved, that's what motivates every elder. We want to be faithful to the word that is in accordance with the teaching that's been passed down to me. Why is he that way? Verse 9, "so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." You see, in terms of giftedness, this is the one distinguishing mark of the elder. Everything that we've said up to this point, if you trace it through Scripture could really be said to be necessary for every believer in Christ. Every believer in Christ should be faithful to his or her marriage. Every believer in Christ should be developing the character of godliness. But Scripture tells us that not everyone is called to teach. This is a distinguishing mark of an elder, his ability to handle the word of God. An elder should be able to give positive instruction out of the word of God that causes teachable Christians to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the grace and knowledge of Christ. That's a requirement of an elder, that he's able to do that. The saints, those who are truly born-again, hear his teaching and affirm it and say, "That's true. That's consistent. That edified me. I grow. I understand things better when that man teaches." The saints are able to say that. The elder is able to exhort in sound doctrine and explain biblical truth in a way that people can appropriate it and understand it. If a man can't do that, that doesn't mean he's a bad Christian, it just means that he's not called to be an elder. You know, he serves in other ways that are equally important in some ways.

So he gives positive instruction so that teachable people can grow under his ministry and look at this at the end here of verse 9, "he is able to refute those who contradict." An elder has to have the ability to recognize false teaching and show why it's wrong from the Bible. He has to be able to contradict it, refute it, in that sense. And so he gives positive instruction. He's not just always haranguing about somebody else's bad teaching. He goes to the Bible and he teaches it. He explains it. He helps people understand. And then when error comes up on the radar in the life of a body, an elder is there to say, "No, that's not right and here is why it's wrong and here's what the truth is." That's what an elder does.

You see, we've come full circle with what we said last week. An elder, what does he do? Oversight. Teaching. Example. What do you have in the qualifications? You have exactly that which would let you sense that he is able to do that. Oversight, his family life is in order. Teaching, he's able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. Example, his character is what it should be from verses 7 and 8. One expositor said this talking about the teaching function and I like this quote, he said this and this goes back several hundred years, "The pastor," by which he means the elders as we're defining it here, "The pastor ought to have two voices: one for gathering the sheep and another for warding off and driving away wolves and thieves. The Scripture supplies him with the means of doing both for he who is deeply skilled in it will be able both to govern those

who are teachable and to refute the enemies of the truth." Two voices. An elder has two voices. Speaking to the sheep, they recognize the affectionate tender voice of their Lord in that man's voice and in his instruction and the sheep come and they find rest and protection and they say, "Ah, this is what it is." And the elder loves them and affirms them and encourages them and strengthens them over time throughout the mountains and valleys of life. That's what an elder does. But understand that the elder that loves the sheep, there are going to be times where you see a biblical elders step up and speak with a different kind of voice: in his actions, in the leadership that he provides, in the teaching. An elder is going to recognize a wolf and he's not going to love and embrace the wolf. The wolf is a threat. "Get out of here!" so to speak know. "No, we don't teach that here. No, you can't prey on vulnerable people in this place. You need to leave. You're not welcome here." When you see elders acting like that, it's not that they are violating their standards of being compassionate leaders of the church of Christ. When an elder steps up and says, "This can't be tolerated here in this body," he's doing what he supposed to do. He's protecting the sheep. You know, Paul said to the people in Ephesus in Acts 20, he said, "I know that wolves are going to rise up from your own midst. Even from among you, there will be wolves that rise up." You see, an elder recognizes that, understands that, and says, "God willing, God be gracious to me. Not on my watch. Not on my watch will there be wolves that are running loose among the sheep."

I was reading a sermon transcript of a pastor from Texas who went to be with the Lord a while back, 10 or 15 years ago or so. I never met the man but he was a great teacher of God's word. He said to his congregation, a little bigger than ours, he said, "I know as I stand here that there are wolves in our midst." He said, "I don't know who you are and I'm not going to go out and I'm not going to go looking and making accusations or anything like that. I just know biblically that there are wolves. As elders, when wolves become known, we're going to deal with them. We're going to address them. We're going to protect the flock. That's part of being an elder." It's sobering. It catches your breath but an elder embraces that, embraces a willingness that, "I have to refute those who contradict. I have to protect the flock of God from those who would harm it." Think about it this way, this is a very homespun illustration: sheep attract wolves. The light attracts bugs. It's inevitable that there will be people who shouldn't be here. Part of an elder's leadership responsibility that's entrusted to him is to recognize that, refute it, to maintain a protection over the flock.

As we wrap this up, as we talk about it, I'm really grateful that there are men who aspire after leadership and show the kind of character in our midst right now that could one day be elders in our flock. What I want us all to understand collectively is that the office of elder is a high and lofty and noble position and that what your elders need, I'm almost about to get emotional, almost, not quite. I keep my emotions under check probably more than I should sometimes. But you see, what Scripture calls people in the church to follow their elders, not to rule over them. What your elders need are your prayers. When we establish elders here, what we as a congregation want to be, we want to be people who have loving, affirming elders and that the congregation in response to their elders? Loving, affirming, prayerful. Recognizing that the great task to which elders are called, to which they are going to be held to a stricter judgment, it's a responsibility that they gladly

carry but it's a heavy responsibility. Elders need you to pray, to love them, to affirm them, to encourage them, to support them and to use the broadest verb possible, to support your elders, not to view them with suspicion but to love them and support them. When we think about elder qualifications and looking at the lives of men who would be elders, Scripture teaches us that he who has been faithful in a little will be faithful in much and so you look for a pattern of faithfulness from a man and Scripture teaches us the import of what we say here is that as we establish leadership here at Truth Community in the future whenever that comes, we're not going to take chances on unproven men. We're going to follow these principles so that we can honor Christ in the Scripture. And do you know what's going to happen as we do that? As we honor the principles of spiritual leadership that Christ has set forth in his word? Do you know what's going to happen? Christ is going to bless us and I can't wait to see how that works out. Can you?

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you that you've laid out in your word the qualifications for the men who would lead your church. Father, it's a lofty, noble call. It's not for every man but, Father, we just pray that you would raise up in our midst a group of men who show forth the qualifications that your word calls for and that as we anticipate that day, Lord, as we anticipate more formal leadership being established here in our midst, we pray that you would keep these men pure, that you would keep them faithful and you would make them evident to all of us who these men are that you have appointed for leadership from before the foundation of the world. Help us to recognize that which you've already determined to take place and help us to be faithful to it.

Father, this is in so many ways such a sweet time in the life of our church. There is such an evident spirit of unity. We get together at a restaurant or we get together at a ballgame and it's just so sweet to be together. We thank you for that, Father, we realize that's an overflow of your own love for us and we thank you for that and we pray that you would cultivate it and deepen it in each one of our hearts that we would even more show forth love for one another.

Father, we're mindful, we know from your word that wherever spiritual leadership rises up, opposition will come. The Lord Jesus Christ was opposed by the Pharisees and the leaders of his day. Christian leaders throughout the centuries have been opposed and persecuted and even martyred. Father, so we just pray that you would give us grace to rely on you and to depend upon you as we go forward. We look to you, Lord Jesus, as our great Shepherd, as the one who ultimately will defend and protect us and we cast ourselves gladly and wholly dependently at your feet. Lord, when the wolves come, when the bugs start to flicker around the light, Father, would you give us the grace to recognize them, to deal with them appropriately according to the principles of your word? That this might be a place of true sanctuary, of true protection for those who really love Christ and that the wicked influences that the devil would seek to inject into a growing church, Father, you would keep them at bay so that we could grow and so that we could honor you and that we could proclaim your word with faithfulness. Each one of

us from leader to the newest babe in Christ, that each one of us would find here at Truth Community a place where we could faithfully grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To that end we pray, our Father, in Jesus' name. Amen

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