

Qualifications of Elders, Pt. 3 Their Abilities

This morning we come to the final section on the qualifications of elders. From the first sermon in this series I have tried to make it clear that the elders of a church have many different responsibilities. Among them are 1) Give oversight to \ rule \ administrate the flock. 2) Shepherd/feed the flock of God (Teach the Word). 3) Settle matters of Doctrine & Church policy (By teaching & refuting). 4) Protect the flock from false teachers. 5) Watch Over the Souls. 6) Set a godly example for all. 7) Train people to use their gifts in ministry in the body. 8) Pray over the sick. 9) Ordain others to ministry.

Think through these different responsibilities and it is easy to see that different men will have different abilities, strengths and weaknesses in carrying out these responsibilities. A.W. Tozer was known as a great preacher and writer, but he lacked in doing hospital visitation. I know a hospital chaplain that amazes me in his ability to bring comfort and the gospel to those who are seriously sick and in pain, but frankly, his preaching was mediocre. Some of the various elders I have met over the years have been absolute marvels in administration and organization, but lacked in other areas. The pastor I served within California could lead well enough as long as he had some specific plans to follow, but he had a very difficult time formulating such plans.

This is a very practical reason there needs to be plurality of elders in the church. No one man has either all the gifts or even the time to accomplish everything. A plurality of elders brings together men with different gifts so that all the responsibilities of elders can be carried out. This is certainly true in our own church for each man has different abilities, strengths and weaknesses. If any one of us had to do everything alone we would fail, but put everyone together as a team and there can be success.

Now having said that elders are necessarily different from one another, let me now flip the coin over and bring you back to Titus 1 where we find in the qualifications for elders three areas in which elders must be the same. Titus 1:5-9 - *For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 [namely,] if any man be 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, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.*

All elders must have their families in order. An elder must be a man who is completely faithful to his wife. He not only keeps his marriage vows, but like Job of old who said, *"I Have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin?"* (31:1). Whether single or married, an elder is not a girl chaser or a girl watcher. An elder is also a man that *manages his household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity* (1 Tim. 3:4). A man who has children who are characterized by rebellion or by dissipation is not qualified to lead God's people.

All elders must also be Christians who actively demonstrate a mature moral character as detailed out in verses 7 & 8. They see themselves as God's stewards who will give an account to Him of what they have been entrusted. They are separated from the world and no longer reflect the world's vices so they are not: self-willed, quick-tempered, addicted to wine, pugnacious or fond of sordid gain. Instead they now reflect the nature of Jesus Christ being those who are sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, hospitable, and loving what is good.

The final category in which all elders must be the same is in their ability with the Bible. Some elders will excel in this area, but all elders must have the same basic ability and be "apt" or "able to teach," as

Paul explains in 1 Timothy 3:1. Paul gives further definition here about what that means saying to *exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict* because they hold *fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching*. This is the major difference between the qualifications of deacons and elders - both must have their families in order, both must display a mature moral character, but here there is a difference. Deacons are to “hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience,” while elders must be “able to teach,” “holding fast the faithful word,” “able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.”

Let me now break down each of these phrases for you and explain what Paul is talking about and their importance.

HOLDING FAST THE FAITHFUL WORD

First, is holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching. “Holding fast” (*αυτεχω*) means to “cling or adhere to something or someone” as in Matthew 6:24 & Luke 16:13 where Jesus states that, “*No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to (αυτεχομαι) one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*” This word carries the idea of allegiance and loyalty. Elders are to hold fast, be loyal to, cling to, the faithful word.

What “word” is faithful and is to hold our allegiance? Many things may claim to be the source of truth, but context here clear Paul is talking about the faithful word we now call the Bible, for only it is in accordance with the teaching of the prophets, Christ and the apostles. It is the Bible that is the inspired Word of God that is “*profitable for teaching (doctrine), for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*” (2 Tim. 3:16).

The importance of this cannot be stressed enough. If the church is to be and do what God created her for then she must be solidly built upon the Scriptures. No other foundation will do. Ephesians 2:20 states that the church is *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner [stone]...*”

Lou Sheldon gave a very good message here a couple weeks ago calling the church to be the church for if the church was doing what it was supposed to be doing there would not have been such a rapid moral decline in our nation - a decline that is picking up speed. And if the church would be the church then that decline could be halted and even reversed. But why is it that the church has failed and continues to fail in doing what she should be doing? There are many factors, but when you analyze them all it comes down to the failure of the leaders of the church to hold fast to the faithful word. When the leaders no longer follow the scripture the people follow along. Every moral issue simply becomes a debate over opinion and preference instead of truth and accountability to our creator.

So many of the denominations that once were used by God so mightily in this nation and around the world have altogether turned their backs on the Scriptures because they no longer believe them to be true. They reject the Bible as inspired by God and instead view it as the product of many religious and pious men who were putting forth their own wisdom. No longer was the Bible taught, but rather religious philosophy lectures and social activism. But beware for the evangelical church is not doing much better. Failure to hold fast the faithful word has led to the shallow “sermonettes for Christianettes” that is so common today. Thoughtful Biblical exposition has been largely replaced with clever speech makers, storytellers and entertainers. John Piper has called this the “slapstick of evangelical worship.” Sermons expounding “thus sayeth the Lord” have been replaced with “thus sayeth the popular psychologist.” The wisdom from above has been replaced with the wisdom of men (James 3:13-18).

When the leaders of the church are unsure of what God has said and what is true, then the people are going to be at an even greater loss and filled with confusion. Why should you be obedient to what the Bible says if you are unsure if it is true. Why should you put yourself in a position that is unpopular and might even lead to some sort of persecution - even if that is just name calling - if you hold competing

opinions to be as valid as the Bible. Just go with the flow. Pick the idea that causes the least amount of trouble and furthers your self interest the most. Truth is relative and what is true for you is not true for me and vica versa. You are now subject not only to every changing wind of doctrine, but every kooky idea that comes down the pike too.

There are a lot things competing with the Bible to be the standard of truth, to be the guide by which you live. There are of course the false religions. Some of their ideas are usually rejected out right, but many of their ideas can work their way in if you are not careful to hold fast to the Scriptures. For example, the Hindu sacred writings say the earth rests on the backs of four elephants which in turn stand on top of a giant turtle - I don't know what the turtle stands on. Job 26:7 says that God, "*He stretches out the north over empty space, And hangs the earth on nothing.*" Which is true? Hinduism also claims that the soul is continually reincarnated as it strives to reach the state of Nirvana. The Bible says that man's soul will be reunited to his body in resurrection to either eternal glory in heaven or eternal torment in hell. Which is true? It is amazing how many people professing to be Christians want to believe both, but they are mutually exclusive.

There are also all the various cults. The Jehovah's Witnesses say that earth is eternal and that those good Jehovah's Witnesses who do not attain to the 144,000 that will be in heaven will dwell eternally on a restored earth. Revelation 7 says that the 144,000 are all Jewish - 12,000 from each tribe and 2 Peter 3:10 says, *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.*" Which is true?

Almost all the cults develop some system of works by which they will earn their way into heaven. They have to keep the ten commandments, or their good deeds have to outweigh their bad deeds, or they have to give so much to charity, or spend so much time doing religious acts, or get whatever else you can think off. No one except Jesus Christ has ever kept the Ten commandments. A few examples. #8 Thou shall not steal. Ever snitch a pen or paper clip from work? You are a thief. #6 Thou shall not murder. 1 John 3:15 says that *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer...*, and from what Jesus says in Matt. 5:21,22 - a person who says, "You fool," shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." #3 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain...". Have you every said God, Jesus or Christ in any way other than praise and adoration? Yes, then you're guilty. I doubt we even need to mention the other commandments.

No one is good enough and no one can earn their way into heaven by any means. Romans 3:10-12 quotes Psalm 14 saying, "*There is none righteous, not even one; 11 There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; 12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one.*" Isaiah 64:6 says that all our righteous deeds are like a filthy rag. The only means of salvation is stated by Paul in Eph. 2:8,9 *by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, [it is] the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.* You decide what you want to believe - the Bible or men? Do you still want to try to earn your way to heaven or receive salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Competition to the faithful word also comes from man's philosophy and its handmaiden modern psychology. Philosophers say that God is a myth. Psalm 14:1 says, "*The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'*" Psychologist say that you have to high self-esteem before you can love others. Phil. 2:3 says, "*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.*" Parenting philosophers say that a child is naturally good and as long you don't mess him up that natural goodness will come out. Proverbs 22:15 says that "*foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child...*". David said he was "*brought forth in iniquity*" (Psalm 51:5). Paul said we "*were by nature children of wrath*" (Eph. 2:3). It is the parents' responsibility to intervene and teach the children proper behavior and thought. They must raise the children in the "*discipline and instruction of the Lord*" (Eph. 6:4). Modern child "experts" say that spanking is wrong.

Proverbs 13:24 says, *4 He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.*

True science confirms the Bible, but the atheistic evolutionary philosophy that masquerades as science today is competition to the Bible. These pseudo-scientists tell us that mankind evolved from the apes. The way some people act you might be tempted to agree, but the Scriptures are plain. God created man in His own image (Gen. 1:26). These same scientist talk about all sorts of catastrophes in the earth's past, yet they fail to recognize the most important catastrophe of all time. 1 Peter 3:3-7 comments, *3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with [their] mocking, following after their own lusts, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For [ever] since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." 5 For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God [the] heavens existed long ago and [the] earth was formed out of water and by water, 6 through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. 7 But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.*

There is even competition with the Bible within the church by various factions wanting a blessing on their selfishness, by theological camps that distort scriptures to prove their theory and by traditionalists that fail to be students of the Scriptures themselves and simply rely on the practices of their forefathers as the standards of righteousness.

Feminists ignore Paul's writings on male - female relationships simply by claiming he was a culturally biased male chauvinist. I guess God is too since He is the one that established the roles of man and woman starting in Genesis 1:20,21 when He created woman as a helper suitable for Adam. Homosexuals who want both Christ and their sin have distorted many scriptures trying to justify themselves. Yet how much clearer can you get than Lev. 18:22, *"You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination."*

Theological camps strike against the scriptures. I had to deal with a group once that sincerely and adamantly believed that Jesus' blood was not human, but only divine and that all of it, including what was shed at the cross was miraculously taken to heaven where it is now kept in a special fountain where people are cleansed from their sins. The only problem is that there is no Scripture to back up the claim.

Traditionalism also competes with the scriptures. Traditions can be good, but as soon as they become devoid of Biblical meaning or even worse - start distorting or covering up Biblical teaching they are dangerous. Traditions can become the basis of both legalism and license. For example, traditional teaching in many conservative churches is that going to the theater/movies is a bad thing to do. Without going back to the Scriptures, the reasons for what may be an appropriate caution can get lost and the tradition allows a person to think they are pretty good spiritually because they don't go to the theater, yet in practice they expose themselves to the same garbage in their own home by playing the same movie on their VCR.

Folks, this is my heart and what drives me. Elders must be men of the word. They must be men who love it like King David. They must be men who diligently strive to understand it and live by it because they love the one who wrote it. They must be men who take the flak and stand up to all the critics of it. Elders must be men who hold fast to the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching.

EXHORT IN SOUND DOCTRINE

It is not enough to silently hold to sound doctrine. The Scriptures must be men proclaimed. Some of you will remember from our study of Ephesians that among the gifted offices God has given to the church are pastors and teachers. Remember that elders are pastors. Why are they given? Eph. 4:12 states, *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.* The teaching of the Bible is crucial for it

alone contains everything we know about God, how to approach Him, how to worship Him, how He wants us to behave, what He wants us to do, how we are to deal with one another and with the world. The teaching ministry of the church is a major aspect in the equipping of the church to both do the work of ministry and to become mature.

But take note that the teaching ministry is to be more than intellectual exercise. Here in Titus 1:9 we find the elders are to “exhort in sound doctrine.” Exhort (παρακλεω) literally means to “come alongside of” and so has the sense of “urge, beseech, encourage.” This is much more than lecturing, it is coming beside the individual and helping them to understand and live according to sound doctrine. This is done by *speaking the truth in love*, so that *grow up in all [aspects] into Him* - that is, into the image of Christ. The result, Eph. 4:14 states is that *...we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.* Sound doctrine both matures and protects the flock from every wind of doctrine. Sound doctrine is healthy and wholesome and leads to Christian maturity. Every wind of doctrine comes from all directions causing confusion and shipwreck of the soul. The elder must know the Scriptures well enough that he can teach them in very practical ways to the people so that they can live accordingly.

REFUTE THOSE WHO CONTRADICT

The elder must also be able to refute those who contradict. Titus was going to have to do this and the elders he was appointing would have to continue after he was gone. As we shall see next week there were many problems in the churches of Crete because there were those who held to beliefs and practices contrary to the Scriptures. Some of these people were in the church and some were outside of the church. The elder must be able to withstand and correct both.

Paul gave stern warning to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-30, *“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.* Danger from without and within. Savage wolves would come from without and seek to plunder the flock, but there would also be those from within that seek after their own followers by speaking perverse things.

Timothy was also warned about apostasy within the church several times. Paul told him how to deal with it in 2 Tim. 4:1-4, *4:1 I solemnly charge [you] in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season [and] out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but [wanting] to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.*

All elders must have their families in order. All elders must display a mature moral character. All elders must hold fast to the faithful word and be able to both exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. Anything less than these qualifications brings a man into a position he will not be able to fulfill. He will not have the capabilities of carrying out the responsibilities and he will not set the proper example to the people.

Paul makes an interesting comment in 1 Timothy 5:17 that sheds a little light on this. His context of the passage has to do with the congregations treatment of the Elders, but in what Paul says we see that all elders are not the same. *“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”* The emphasis in context is on the quality and effort of work that is done by these particular elders being worthy of not just the respect that comes with being an elder, but also financial compensation for their time too - the “double honor” - as verse 18 goes on to state more explicitly. What I want to bring to your attention here is a minor point in context,

but one relevant to our study this morning. The elders will differ from one another in ability and availability.

First, some elders will rule well and others will not. This can be from a host of reasons including giftedness (i.e. their particular abilities), time constraints because of their jobs or family responsibilities, or it might even be some physical limitation slows them down from being able to accomplish all that they might otherwise.

Second, some elders are going to work hard at preaching and teaching while others will not - again for many of the same reasons. This is not to be a matter of judging which elder is better, but simply recognizing that they are different from one another.

The financial compensation aspect of this is simply so that those particular elders who do rule well and those who work hard at preaching and teaching might not be hindered from that work by having to use their time in earning a living doing something else. Financial compensation simply allows them to put more time into the work they are already doing.