

“So When They had Appointed Elders in Every Church...”

(By Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. I was asked to speak on the eldership. It is too profound a matter to consider in 40 minutes. I typically present this as seven 40 minute sermons
1. There are many things written in scripture about elders that must be considered before a congregation undertakes the task of appointing them; questions like:
 - a. What are elders and why do local churches need them?
 - b. What role and works do elders fulfill in the local church?
 - c. How do elders interact with the local church and what is the church's responsibility toward the elders?
 2. These matters must be considered before the qualifications are examined, because understanding the answers to these questions will clarify concerns about the qualifications.
 3. There are 22 qualifications for elders listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1; 18 of which are qualifications for all Christian men. The four remaining special qualifications are given to limit those who would serve as elders to men who have developed the ability to lead God's children.
 4. Not coincidentally, these are also the qualities over which brethren try to bind or loose more than is written.
 5. Time will not permit us to answer all of the arguments made on the multiple views that exist on these four qualifications. I will be available to answer any questions you may have. But be advised, I don't do opinions. Ask me what is written; don't ask me for my opinion.
- B. Why do 21st Century churches need elders? It is a New Testament command for New Testament churches.
1. They will help you to keep the imperative of the Lord for local churches
 - a. Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5 - "in every church"
 - b. About two years had passed between when the churches were planted and when Paul ordered elders appointed
 2. They will help you to be scripturally organized - Phil. 1:1
 - a. As opposed to remaining "scripturally unorganized" (H.E. Phillips)
 3. They will help you to be a peaceful, productive, healthy, loving congregation
 4. They will help you to minimize the damage caused by grievous wolves from within and without, and will speed your recovery as a congregation should spiritual trauma occur
 5. They will help increase your soundness and strength as a local church - Titus 1:9
 6. They will eliminate the need for the business meeting system, not only an inefficient means, but with a high potential for unqualified men to lead the church astray, and an even higher potential for factions and divisions over personalities
- C. Serving as an elder is a very difficult work and a very fulfilling service

1. I was appointed to serve as an elder at Tomlinson Run in May 2003, to serve along with five other men.
 2. I was 42 years old in body and 25 years old at heart. I have served for 15 years; I am 57 years old in body and 77 years old at heart
 3. I have never undertaken a more difficult work that has taken such a toll on my mind and spirit
 4. In my life, I have done many jobs including being a foreman in woodshop that hired ex-cons and have preached for six congregations in 41 years, and I have never done a work more demanding or more important than the work of an elder
 5. Nor have I ever done a work, including evangelism, that has been more rewarding spiritually, mentally, and emotionally
 6. You will spend yourself for the well-being of disciples who may not be aware of your sacrifices, and some who might not appreciate what you give of yourself even if they knew
 7. Short of dying for Christ, you will never perform a higher service for the Lord or the little sheep He places in your care than to serve as an elder
- D. While there are several other lessons about elders that should be considered first, let's talk about the first two qualifications for elders for introductory and illustrative purposes.
1. Is "desire the office" a qualification?
 2. The qualification "blameless"
 3. Applications and other considerations

I. IF A MAN DESIRES THE POSITION OF A BISHOP, HE DESIRES A GOOD WORK

- A. Desires - Greek "oregamai - to stretch oneself, reach out after, long for, desire" (Strong's)
1. The person desiring the position of elder could have either good or bad intentions. Paul assumes good intentions.
 2. What one does voluntarily is more esteemed than what he does when asked - 1Cor. 16:15
 3. It ought to be the desire of every Christian man in his youth to develop these qualities as he ages
 - a. 18 of the 22 qualifications listed in the combined lists from Titus 1 and 1Timothy 3 are characteristics ALL Christian men should have, regardless of whether they become elders or not
 - b. Of the remaining four, only one of them has anything to do with talent, "apt to teach," and that one can be cultivated
 - c. While the exigencies of life can impact the two family and one experience qualifications, there is no reason why every young Christian man in this congregation cannot desire and work toward becoming an elder, starting right now
- B. Office - There is no Greek word for "office." The Greek phrase literally translates as the "ministry or service as a Bishop."
1. It is not a position of legislative or executive authority; it is a stewardship
 - a. 1Peter 5:2-4; Acts 20:28

- C. A good work - The NIV calls this work a “noble task”
 - 1. It is work! You will lose sleep for weeks over church problems
 - 2. It is pressure! You will be constantly aware of the responsibility for the souls placed in your care
 - 3. It is the closest you will come to the sacrifice of our Lord, and you will help your brethren in proportion to your own sacrifices
- D. But is it a qualification?
 - 1. No. The qualifications follow. For those who want to be of service to the Lord, you must measure up to those characteristics.
 - 2. It is due to the logic fallacy of false categorical imperative that we include it in the list of qualifications. It appears similar; therefore, it must be the same.
 - 3. Anyone who wants to go to India to preach must: have the ability to preach, have a passport and visa, have enough support, and have a contact in India; desire to go to India is a false categorical imperative.
 - 4. We also include it because in our time, very few brethren want to do the work, including those who meet the qualifications in verses 2-7.
 - 5. They excuse themselves from it and deflect the pressure from others who ask them to serve by saying they are not qualified because they do not desire the office.
 - 6. Instead, they should be honest and say: “I am spiritually lazy,” or, “I am a moral coward.”

II. WITHOUT REPROACH (Blameless - KJV)

- A. To live in a way that charges of wrong doing are not believable as manifested by one’s proven character, or cannot be reliably proven.
 - 1. The Holy Spirit does not require that an elder must be above sin, but that he corrects his sins as God instructs - 1John 1:6-10
 - 2. Does not mean sinless; it means without reproach. Has a good name.
 - 3. Blameless - Greek anepilhpton - Literally means "cannot be laid hold of" inculpable, unrebukeable (Strong's)
 - 4. There is nothing in his life that an enemy can use against him or ruin his influence. He is not vulnerable to censorship.
 - 5. When anyone has something against him, he goes to that one and resolves the matter in a Christ-like manner - Matt. 5:23-24
- B. It is not an accident that this is the first qualification; many of the following qualifications develop from it
 - 1. An elder is defined by his integrity that earns for him a great deal of respect; it is something he works for a lifetime; it is not something he can order others to give him
- C. And with this, as with the other qualifications, it is not a matter that can be quantified in an objective way
 - 1. Many people turn the 22 characteristics of elders into 22 disqualifications by setting arbitrary standards
 - a. Apt to teach... at what level? Bob Waldron or Dee Bowman?

- b. Blameless... will you go back to mistakes of his youth that have long ago been repented and restored?
 - c. Not a novice... how old?
 - d. Hospitable... how often must he have guests?
- 2. The extent to which every man has these characteristics will vary from one man to another, and from one local church to another
 - a. When I was appointed, I did not have these qualities to the same extent as Carl Parsons, who was 85 and had been an elder for 40 years. Should I have been passed by because I did not measure up to his experience?
 - b. Do not elevate the standard to the point that no man qualifies. In my experience, most men who do that, do so because they are not qualified themselves and are unwilling to submit to a leadership that does not include them and their input in a business meeting arrangement
- 3. Beware, lest you elevate the qualifications to a standard that would exclude the apostle Peter.
- 4. Remember, when Paul instructed Timothy and Titus to appoint elders, those congregations had only been in existence for two years. Apparently, honorable Christian men were capable of developing all of these characteristics in two years.

III. APPLICATIONS

- A. Both of these matters are critical in dealing with the work of an elder
 - 1. You must strongly desire to be a servant the Lord and of your brethren in a self-less, sacrificial manner in order to be motivated to do this work
 - 2. You will find a reputation for integrity and honor that attends blamelessness to be your most effective asset in this work
- B. We have been through issues with the potential to hurt or divide the church almost on a yearly basis, most of it from outside
 - 1. And by the grace of God, we have come through the trials with the church growing in love, faith, and in number -- Acts and the early church
 - 2. When I am asked, "What is the hardest question you have ever faced as an elder?" my answer is: "The next question." Because elders can seldom anticipate what kind and from what direction problems will come
- C. We four elders at TR come from different backgrounds, occupations, educations, ages, etc., but when we sit down together to consider matters of behalf of the saints we love and serve, we are one.
 - 1. Elders consider their service the most important work they will ever do
 - 2. Elders love souls in their charge and are extremely protective of them
 - 3. The elders have resolved to get along regardless of the issue
- F. We could not do this without a strong desire to serve those that we love, nor could we do this without the integrity of character conferred by endeavoring to live, love, and lead without reproach

Invitation:

On October 2, 1954, First Lieutenant James O. Conway was taking off from Boston Logan Airport, flying a plane that carried a load of munitions. When his plane became airborne, he suddenly lost power over Boston's bay. In an instant, Conway faced a brutal choice—eject from the plane and save his own life, or crash the plane into the bay causing his own death. If he ejected, however, the plane would crash into an East Boston neighborhood filled with homes and families. Conway chose to crash the plane into the bay—giving his life for the lives of others.

In John 15:13, Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." The willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice to protect others shows a heart that cares more about the needs of others than the needs of one's self. Someone once said that "the measure of love is what one is willing to give up for it." God the Father loved so much that He gave up His Son. Christ loved so much that He gave up His life. What are you giving to God and Jesus out of love?