

The Biblical Qualifications and Responsibilities of Elders

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[0 : 00] A couple weeks ago, Mike knew I was about to have a birthday. He knew I was about to turn 76. And he said, do we need to install a handrail here at the platform for you to get up on the stage?

I made it this morning, thankfully. Almost 18 years ago, I, along with my wife, walked into Grace Bible Church in Leesville, Louisiana.

Thinking that we're going to fill in for that one Sunday, because two weeks prior to that Sunday, the pastor of that church got up on that Sunday morning and addressed the congregation and said, I'm out of here, and walked out the back door to a stunned congregation, which was made up then of about 11 people.

But two weeks after that, Barbara and I found ourselves up there, and I thought we were going for that one Sunday, and we wound up being there 12 1/2 years.

And we saw a great many changes during those 12 1/2 years, and being the fresh new kid on the block up there, I learned a lot of lessons.

[1 : 15] It was an on-the-job training type pastorate. Every day was a new day there that I was not prepared for. When I went, there was a board made up of about four elders and deacons, and within the first six months, three of those board members died.

Every other month, I was doing a funeral for a board member. And so I was down to one board member and me doing the administrative duties of the church and the oversight and overseeing of the church.

It was difficult, but it was a great job. It was a great life. And I look back on that and wonder how in the world I made it, but I made it through the grace of God.

If you had the opportunity to go start a church, where would you start to start your church?

What would you do, and where would you go to find out what you would do if you were going to start your church? Would you start with a building? I mean, we have a building, and this is where we are.

[2 : 25] You go to a building when you go to church. Churches are characterized by the church on the corner, that church down the street. When we say those terms, it's usually a building.

When we get up in the morning on Sunday mornings or Wednesday and we say we're going to church, we're going to a building usually. So is this where we'll start? We're going to start with a building, and if we build it, they'll come, right?

Well, it's true if you're Starbucks, you know, but maybe not true for a church. Or is it the body, the people?

And as I look around this room, I know that we all know that it is the body that starts the church. So, let's focus on the body as a starting place for our new church.

Got to have bodies to have a body. So let's go get some people to start a church. Let's go. But where are we going to go? Where are we going to go to get our people to start the church?

[3 : 33] Do we go next door to Tommy Bay Road Baptist Church and say, Anybody want to come with us and start a new church? And then go down to the Cowboy Church and say, Any of you cowboys want to come to join our church?

We're starting. There's a word for that, proselytizing. And we don't want to be found guilty of that as a means of starting our new church. But, if we are honest with ourselves, we do want people who look like they belong in church, right?

And are you ready for this? We probably would want to start our church with people who believe like us, for sure. But, who think like us, look like us, dress like us, smell like us, vote like us.

In other words, a white, conservative, Republican, male and female. And they have to come to our new church ready to hit the ground running.

They ought to know something about the Bible. They ought to be able to at least serve in some capacity in our new church. If they play an instrument, come on, play an instrument.

[4 : 52] If you have a voice and you can sing, come on, sing. If you can keep the nursery, go keep the nursery. If you can teach, teach. But most definitely, if you're coming to our church, you need to know how to make finger foods and potato salad.

We don't need to know about your religion. We do need to know about your recipes. And if you will share them with us. That's very important. But let me take you back to the Acts chapter 2 church.

And so we've been in Acts for some time now. And we visited Acts chapter 2 some months ago. And Peter got up and he preached his first message ever.

To a church? In a church? No. There was never a church at that point in time.

And the people he preached to didn't know anything about church. This is how the first century Christians started their church. Peter preached to unbelievers and here's what he said basically.

[6 : 01] Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Jesus Christ is in the family line of David. Jesus Christ was here but He's not here now.

Why? Because you had a hand in killing Him. You killed the Messiah because you didn't believe that He was. Jesus Christ is in the Bible. Not only did Peter preach to unbelievers.

He preached to people who had a hand in killing Jesus. They might not physically have put Jesus on the cross and stuck a spear in His side. But probably some of those were yelling give us Barabbas instead of giving us Jesus.

So the people who heard this message thought wow. We killed Jesus? We killed the Christ? That sermon convicted the same people who had a hand in putting Jesus Christ to death.

And as a result they were saved and they started the church. This is an awesome thing. You know we think about being selective in who we share our message with.

[7 : 10] But Peter shared his message with people who had a hand in killing Jesus Christ. Hmm. And so here's the deal. The first church started not with a group of seasoned Christians.

But with a group of people who hadn't believed in Jesus up until the very point that Peter preached his message. Peter didn't ask what can you do to help us start our church.

Peter said what can I do to help you know who Jesus Christ is? We'll figure out later if you can make potato salad or finger foods. We don't have a building.

We don't have bylaws. We don't have a board. We don't have a praise team. But we do have Jesus. If you put your faith and trust in Him you will be saved.

Let me ask you a question. Well let me ask you two questions. First question. When was the last time you shared Jesus Christ with an unbeliever? Second question.

- [8 : 13] When was the last time a visitor came to this church and you asked them not about their gifts, not about their talents, not about their recipes, not about what they can do in our church if they started coming to our church, but about their relationship with God?
- What if someone came in here looking for Jesus? Most likely they wouldn't know that they were looking for Jesus, but would we help them find Jesus anyway?
- Would it not be a good idea to find out if somebody is a follower of Jesus before we have them teaching our youth? Would it not be a good idea to know about a person's relationship with God before we have them standing up here and playing an instrument or singing?
- I think we put the cart before the horse sometimes. What can you do for us? Not what can Jesus do for you? Here's the deal.
- Peter's first message was to unbelievers. What has happened to the church that we only want cleaned up, studied up, praised up, dressed up people in our pews?
- [9 : 25] What about the lost who are on their way to hell and are going to continue on that journey unless somebody steps in and shows them there's another way?
- That way is Jesus Christ. I think we've become guilty of a good Samaritan complex.
- Not the good Samaritan. He was the good guy in this parable that Jesus gave. But two people, two religious people, passed by this hurt, beaten, robbed man laying on the street.
- A priest and a Levite walked by, crossed the street, and went on the other side, left him laying there bleeding until the good Samaritan came along. Are we guilty of that?
- Are we walking on the other side of the street from an illegal immigrant? A homosexual? A robber?
- [10 : 29] A leftist? A Muslim? A Muslim? We're going to walk this way. Listen, before we start checking out boxes for a perfect little church, Sunday morning services, evening services, Wednesday, Awana, Sunday school, praise team, good looking, hand raising, praising people, we might ought to take a look at how we're doing with Matthew 28, beginning of verse 18.
- We've forgotten about the going. We've become focused on the coming. Y'all come on to our church.
- Not, let's go get them and bring them to our church. So all Peter did was get up before some Jews who didn't believe in Jesus.
- He told them the Messiah was here, but you killed him. They were convicted. They were saved. And the church grew basically from people who previously were unbelievers.
- If an unbeliever walked in here, what would you do? Send him to pastor? You need to speak to the pastor. Or James?
- [11 : 50] Listen. You, you, you, you, you, you, me, should be able to lead a lost person to Jesus Christ.
- We shouldn't put that responsibility on somebody else when we have Jesus in our hearts and are able to share what Jesus has done in our lives with somebody else. That should be the point.
- And if that's not the point, what is the point? We can meet on Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday night. And that's all well and good.
- Fellowship is important. Being here is important. But if we don't have a passion to rescue the perishing, what is the point? We need to act like an axe church.

So Peter preached. The Lord added to the church. The new church was growing, and suddenly the apostles have a problem on their hands. And we'll look at this a few weeks back with the pastors.

[12 : 52] He's going through the book of Acts. But it's a good problem. The apostles realize that their time is being consumed by taking care of the needs, the physical needs of the new church, mainly widows, serving, waiting.

And so in Acts chapter 6, the apostles say to each other, this day-to-day business of taking care of the people and the church is consuming all of our time that we don't have time to spend in the Word and in praying, doing things that we should be doing.

That's priority number one. The other stuff is important too, but we need to appoint somebody who can take care of those needs to free us up to do what we need to do.

And so they appointed seven men to basically take care of the needs of the people. Some say these were the first deacons, and as Pastor Bart pointed out, the word deacon does not appear in that passage.

However, two words do appear in that Acts chapter 6 passage. The first word is wait, and the second word is serve. The Greek word for both wait and serve as it is used in that passage is diakonos, which literally means a deacon.

[14 : 01] Now, I've read some commentaries on whether these seven were the first deacons, and the conclusion is there is no conclusion. It might have been just for that moment in time that these seven men were appointed.

The same idea comes up again when Paul writes to Timothy and Titus, and that's when we see the word deacon actually surface, it comes to use. But still, the intent is the same. Diakonos, deacon, means waiter, a server.

Now, this is the reason that I'm here this morning. This is why Pastor Bart has asked me to share with you this morning. The annual congregation meeting is coming up soon. Church business is discussed at this meeting, but church leaders are also elected for the coming year, and so the pastor has asked me to talk about some roles and responsibilities of church leadership, the requirements of elders and deacons.

And so that's what I'd like to share with you this morning, just for a few minutes. The requirements for the two roles of elder and deacon. They're almost identical, except for just a couple of exceptions.

If we're going to have a church leadership pattern after scripture, then we have to recognize that the two offices are not the same. The church has a board made up of two, this church.

[15 : 19] But did you know the word board in regard to church leadership does not appear in scripture? That's a corporate term of an institution.

You have a board. Barbara works at Memorial Hospital. They have a board of trustees. But the Bible doesn't refer to elders and deacons as board members. They refer as the role of elder and deacon.

It's boring to have a board. I've been to many board meetings, and I know that that's a fact. So this morning we're going to look at elders, and in a couple of weeks we'll look at deacons.

They're separate in the nature of their work in the church. Deacons are basically ministers. They minister to the body of believers. The elders are overseers.

They oversee the church, mainly the spiritual needs. They're shepherds. What do shepherds do? They watch over the sheep.

[16 : 25] They protect the sheep. So I have two points this morning. Point number one is the responsibilities of an elder. Point number two is our response to an elder.

Elders have responsibilities, but did you know that we have responsibilities to our elders as well? More on that in a minute. So let's begin with the requirements. What are the requirements of an elder?

And I would invite you to turn with me to 1 Timothy 3, verses 1 through 7. 1 Timothy 3, verses 1 through 7.

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This is a faithful saying, If a man desires to be a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous, one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence.

[17 : 52] For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God? Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.

Moreover, he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. From this passage, what's the very first requirement you see there for an elder?

Blameless? To desire. You've got to want to do the job. That's true of anything.

You've got to want to do it before you can do it and do it well. So don't overlook that as a fundamental qualification for the position of an elder. He has to want to do the job.

And shortly we'll see that Peter takes that a step further and he says, you shouldn't coerce or force someone to be an elder. We need you to be an elder, you need to be on the board. It's a sacrifice. It can be hard shepherding sheep.

[19 : 09] I want you to remember this next sentence. And it's a hard sentence. But we have to say it. The spiritual health of any church is determined by the quality of its leadership.

We'll say that again. The spiritual health of a church is determined by the quality of its leadership. If you see an unhealthy church, look at the top. Start at the top if you see an unhealthy church.

Look at the leader. What is the main thing that determines if somebody is a leader? Is somebody following? Leaders need to turn around and look behind them and see if there's anybody there following to determine if they're a leader or not.

So it begins with desire. You've got to want to do the job. Next, an elder must be blameless. Everybody say must. Must. Don't overlook that word must.

The word must means to be found blameless in certain areas of an elder's life is non-negotiable. It's not debatable. We'll just let that slide.

[20 : 23] No. Blameless. Finding no fault in what? Well, Paul addresses several areas of behavior. He begins with the husband of one wife. In other words, a one-woman man.

Faithful would be better terminology. And we can read into that the classic idea of divorced men cannot serve in a capacity of leadership.

But that opens up the door for all kinds of possibilities. What if this person was divorced and remarried before he became a Christian? Would that exclude him from being in leadership?

There are biblical reasons why a person could get divorced. The Bible does say God hates divorce.

So, there's all these doors that can be opened into whether or not a divorced person can serve in leadership. So, we're not going to go there this morning. We just leave it at this, that the husband of one wife, a one-woman man.

- [21 : 25] And some of the things that fall under the blameless category are all pretty much self-explanatory. And remember, these are non-negotiable. Must be blameless.
- Temperate means easygoing and in control. I love Galatians 5, 22 and 23. If you want to examine the standard of any person's life who is a Christian, it's the fruit of the Spirit.
- It's a good way to examine ourselves. You know, how are we doing in these areas of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, chilliness, faithfulness, self-control? Not given a wine? Sober-minded? Of good behavior? Hospitable? Not violent? Not greedy for money, but gentle? Not quarrelsome? Not covetous? One who rules his own home well?
- His children must be reverent and respectable? Why? Because if an elder can't take care of his home, then he can't take care of God's home either. What if we went to an elder candidate's wife and their children and asked them, what kind of husband is he?
- [22 : 43] What kind of dad is he? What if we took it a step further and went to the job and said, what kind of employer, employee, is this elder candidate? What if we check the credit score?
- In other words, what if we did a background check? If we pull the curtains back on elder candidates, what would we see? Would we want to see it?
- Well, we should want to see it because we want them to lead our church, and they must be blameless. And he can't be young in the faith. He can't be puffed up or arrogant because pride goes before what?
- A fall. And finally, he has to have a good testimony inside the church and outside the church. He must, everybody say must, must be blameless, no debating, no negotiating on that point.
- So these are the requirements of elders. What about the requirements or the responsibilities for the rest of us, you and me, to the elders? That's my second point.
- [23 : 46] We're going to jump over to 1 Peter, chapter 5, verses 1-11.
- 1 Peter, chapter 5, verses 1-11. 1 Peter, chapter 5, the elders who are among you, I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed, shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly, nor as being lords over those who entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock and when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.
- Likewise, you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders, yes, all of you, be submissive to one another and be clothed with humility for God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.
- Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour but resist him steadfast in the faith knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world by your brotherhood in the world but may the God of all grace who called us to His external glory by Christ Jesus after you have suffered a while perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.
- To Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. So Peter tells us three things about elders and about the people under the leadership of elders.
- [25 : 51] Elders are the shepherd, the people are to submit, and together we stand. The elders are to shepherd, the people are to submit, and together both elders and the people are supposed to stand firm in the faith.

Why is it important for us to stand firm in the faith? Well, Peter says because the devil is out looking for whom he may devour. And if we're not standing firm together in the faith, then the devil may have his way.

That's the point of having biblical leadership and overseer and the people willing to submit to that leadership. Anytime either one of those two dynamics fail, unity in the church may also be missing.

We don't like that word submit. Wives, submit to your husbands. We don't like to preach on that, do we, Bart? But it's in the Bible.

And leaders aren't supposed to lord over the flock so that people have a reason not to submit. But if the devil can distract us from what we're supposed to be doing, the shepherds aren't going to shepherd and the people aren't going to submit and the church is going to fall apart.

[27 : 09] That's how the devil works. The devil is the author of a lot of things. Confusion, chaos is a couple. So yes, the devil can and will use us if we're not sober and vigilant.

But just a couple of things about this passage. Peter starts out the way Paul started out. He says the main requirement for an elder is that he wants to do it. And, he adds, they should not be forced or coerced into being leadership.

And he adds something else. He said teaching elders should be paid for what they do. Peter said elders should eagerly want to shepherd the church but not for money.

Pastoring is not a job. Church leadership is not a job. It is work but it's not a job.

Back in November we had the Pastors and Wives Fellowship. Camp Pearl Ministry Pastors and Wives met here. And one of the things that a lot of the pastors who are on the on the prefaces of retiring saying they're having a hard time finding new pastors because new pastors have a preset condition of where they want to go and how they want to be paid.

[28 : 37] A package of benefits is on their mind more than coming and shepherding a flock. So young shepherds are hard to find these days for pastors who are ready to retire.

Then Peter turns his attention from the elders to the people. Here's our main responsibility yours and mine. We should be submissive to our elders. But Peter takes it a step further. We also should be submissive to each other as well.

Paul said in Romans chapter 12 don't think too highly of yourself than you ought to. Elders have requirements and responsibilities. We have requirements and responsibilities to our elders too.

This is a biblical prescription for how we should do church. It's in the Bible. Shouldn't we want to do what the Bible says?

I think so. We are faith Bible church not faith we'll do it our way church. One of the jobs of the elders is to guard the church as I said and we cannot allow the enemy to destroy the church because we don't do what the Bible says we're supposed to be doing.

[29 : 59] This morning we're at the beginning of a new year and I ask you to make a commitment for this new year and as we approach the congregational meeting if you're an elder and there's only one in this room right now pastor will you commit to leading the flock in a way that God will be honored?

Pastor will you pastor this flock in a way that you will not mishandle this flock? Did you know that the Bible says that if you deal harshly with God's flock he will deal harshly with you?

Wow. That's just not to the pastor that's to all of us. If you beat the sheep God will beat you. But now let me turn to you.

If you're a sheep will you commit to submitting yourself to the leadership of the elders of this church? Right now there are two. There's a pastor and there's James.

And together can we commit ourselves to submitting to each other? To simply make it a point to get along.

[31 : 29] To be unified so the devil doesn't get a foothold in faith Bible church. The devil will use you. The devil will use me with his main focus on destroying this church.

Can we commit to not allowing the devil to do that? Because if a commitment is not there it opens the door for Satan to walk right in those doors and sit right down in these pews and wreak havoc on this church.

I believe we can do that. And if we do, if we keep our focus on the lost, I believe God will bless Faith Bible Church.

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