

CHAPTER 1

Pastoral Leadership

"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you...shepherd [pastor] the flock of God."

1 Peter 5:1a,2a

While attending a music concert, I received an insightful lesson in ecclesiology. As I walked into the main foyer of the church where the concert was held, I immediately noticed the pictures and names of the senior pastor and his staff. The pictures were arranged in a pyramid with the senior pastor at the top, his three associate pastors below, and the rest of the church staff completing the base of the pyramid. As I walked further into the building and down a side hall, I saw another glass encasement with the pictures and names of the church elders. I immediately thought, *What a superb illustration of how the church elders have been pushed aside to a scarcely visible position in the church!* This is quite different from the New Testament model of eldership.

When most Christians hear of church elders, they think of an official church board, lay officials, influential people within the local church, or advisers to the pastor. They think of elders as policymakers, financial officers, fund raisers, or administrators. They don't expect church elders to teach the Word or be involved pastorally in the lives of people. Victor A. Constien, a Lutheran official and author of *The Caring Elder*, explains this common view of the elders' role: "Members of a congregation's board of elders are not assistant pastors. They assist their pastor...Through the senior pastor, elders establish a caring link with each person on the professional staff, whether assistant pastor; director of Christian education, evangelism....But, even more

important, elders help facilitate and strengthen the working relationship of the church staff."¹

Such a view, however, not only lacks scriptural support but flatly contradicts the New Testament Scriptures. One doesn't need to read Greek or be professionally trained in theology to understand that the contemporary, church-board concept of eldership is irreconcilably at odds with the New Testament definition of eldership. According to the New Testament concept of eldership, elders lead the church, teach and preach the Word, protect the church from false teachers, exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine, visit the sick and pray, and judge doctrinal issues. In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church. Let us now consider the New Testament model for pastoral care by shepherd elders.

SHEPHERD ELDERS

The biblical image of a shepherd caring for his flock—standing long hours ensuring its safety, leading it to fresh pasture and clear water, carrying the weak, seeking the lost, healing the wounded and sick—is precious. The whole image of the Palestinian shepherd is characterized by intimacy, tenderness, concern, skill, hard work, suffering, and love. It is, as former London Bible College professor Derek J. Tidball remarks in his book, *Skillful Shepherds*, “a subtle blend of authority and care,” and “as much toughness as tenderness, as much courage as comfort.”²

The shepherd-sheep relationship is so incredibly rich that the Bible uses it repeatedly to describe God and His loving care for His people. In one of the most beloved of all the Psalms, David, the shepherd turned king, wrote: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures: He leads me beside quiet waters” (Ps. 23:1,2). The Bible also uses shepherd imagery to describe the work of those who lead God's people (Ezek. 34).

Thus when Paul and Peter directly exhorted the elders to do their duty, they both employed shepherding imagery. It should be observed that these two giant apostles assign the task of shepherding the local church to no other group or single person but the elders. Paul reminds the Asian elders that God the Holy Spirit placed them in the flock as

overseers for the purpose of shepherding the church of God (Acts 20:28). Peter exhorts the elders to be all that shepherds should be to the flock (1 Peter 5:2). We, then, must also view apostolic, Christianized elders to be primarily pastors of a flock, not corporate executives, CEOs, or advisers to the pastor.

If we want to understand Christian elders and their work, we must understand the biblical imagery of shepherding. As keepers of sheep, New Testament elders are to protect, feed, lead, and care for the flock's many practical needs. Using these four, broad, pastoral categories, let us consider the examples, exhortations, and teachings of the New Testament regarding shepherd elders.

PROTECTING THE FLOCK

A major part of the New Testament elders' work is to protect the local church from false teachers. As Paul was leaving Asia Minor, he summoned the elders of the church in Ephesus for a farewell exhortation. The essence of Paul's charge is this: *guard the flock—wolves are coming*:

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.... "*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. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert....*" (Acts 20:17,28-31a; italics added).

According to Paul's required qualifications for eldership, a prospective elder must have enough knowledge of the Bible to be able to refute false teachers:

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, namely, if any man be above reproach...holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, *that he may be*

able...to refute those who contradict [sound doctrine] (Titus 1:5,6,9; italics added).

The Jerusalem elders, for example, met with the apostles to judge doctrinal error: "And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this [doctrinal] matter" (Acts 15:6ff). Like the apostles, the Jerusalem elders had to be knowledgeable in the Word so that they could protect the flock from false teachers.

Protecting the flock also includes seeking lost, straying sheep—a critical aspect of shepherding that many church shepherds totally neglect. Moreover, protecting the flock involves disciplining sin, admonishing improper behavior and attitudes (1 Thess. 5:12), and stopping bitter infighting. Although the New Testament emphasizes the elders' role in protecting against doctrinal error, the elders cannot neglect seeking the lost and correcting sinful behavior.

Protecting the flock is vitally important because sheep are defenseless animals. They are utterly helpless in the face of wolves, bears, lions, jackals, or robbers. Phillip Keller, writing from his wealth of experience as a shepherd and agricultural researcher in East Africa and Canada, explains how unaware and vulnerable sheep are to danger, even inevitable death:

It reminds me of the behavior of a band of sheep under attack from dogs, cougars, bears, or even wolves. Often in blind fear or stupid unawareness they will stand rooted to the spot watching their companions being cut to shreds. The predator will pounce upon one then another of the flock raking and tearing them with tooth and claw. Meanwhile, the other sheep may act as if they did not even hear or recognize the carnage going on around them. It is as though they were totally oblivious to the peril of their own precarious position.³

Guarding sheep from danger is clearly a significant aspect of the shepherding task. The same is true for church shepherds. They must continually guard the congregation from false teachers. Although the guarding ministry is a negative aspect of shepherding, it is indispensable to the flock's survival. Charles E. Jefferson (1860-1937), pastor and author of *The Minister as Shepherd*, underscores this vital point: "The journey from the cradle to the grave is hazardous....if every man

is surrounded by perils, if the universe is alive with forces hostile to the soul, then watchfulness becomes one of the most critical of all the pastor's responsibilities."⁴ Elders, then, are to be protectors, watchmen, defenders, and guardians of God's people. In order to accomplish this, shepherd elders need to be spiritually alert and must be men of courage.

Spiritually Alert

A good shepherd is always on the alert to danger. He knows the predator well and understands the importance of acting wisely and quickly. So too, shepherd elders must be spiritually awake and highly sensitive to the subtle dangers of Satan's attacks. It's hard, however, to be alert and ready to act at all times. That is why Paul exhorts the Asian elders "be on the alert" (Acts 20:31). He knows the natural tendency of shepherds to become spiritually lazy, undisciplined, prayerless, and weary. The Old Testament proves that. The Old Testament prophets cried out against Israel's shepherds because they failed to keep watch and be alert to protect the people from savage wolves. Israel's leaders are vividly depicted by Isaiah as blind city watchmen and dumb dogs:

All you beasts of the field,
All you beasts in the forest,
Come to eat.
His watchmen are blind,
All of them know nothing.
All of them are dumb dogs unable to bark,
Dreamers lying down, who love to slumber;
And the dogs are greedy, they are not satisfied,
And they are shepherds who have no understanding;
They have all turned to their own way,
Each one to his unjust gain, to the last one.
"Come," they say, "let us get wine, and let us drink
heavily of strong drink;
And tomorrow will be like today, only more so"
(Isa. 56:9-12).

Shepherd elders must be watchful and prayerful. They must be aware of changing issues both in society and the church. They must

continuously educate themselves, especially in Holy Scripture, diligently guard their own spiritual walk with the Lord, and always pray for the flock and its individual members.

Who can calculate the damage done during the past two thousand years to the churches of Jesus Christ because of inattentive, naive, and prayerless shepherds? Many churches and denominations that once stood for sound, orthodox doctrine and life now reject every major tenet of the Christian faith and condone the most deplorable moral practices conceivable. How did this happen? The local church leaders were naive, untaught, and prayerless and became inattentive to Satan's deceptive strategies. They were blind watchmen and dumb dogs, pre-occupied with their own self-interests and comforts. When their seminaries jettisoned the truths of the gospel and the divine inspiration of the Bible, they were asleep. They naively invited young wolves in sheep's clothing into their flocks to be their spiritual shepherds. Hence they and their flocks have been devoured by wolves.

Courageous

Shepherds must also have courage to fight fierce predators. King David was a model shepherd of outstanding courage. First Samuel records David's experiences as a shepherd protecting his flock from the lion and the bear:

Then Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth."

But David said to Saul, "Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock,

I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him.

Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God."

And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you" (1 Sam. 17:33-37).



“We have somehow
got hold of the idea
that error is only that
which is outrageously wrong;
and we do not seem
to understand that
the most dangerous person of all
is the one
who does not emphasize
the right things.”

(D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Sermon on the Mount*, 2: 244)



Courage such as David possessed is an essential leadership quality. An internationally known statesman was once asked by reporters, "What is the most important quality for a national leader to possess?" His answer: "Courage." This is true not only for political leaders, but for church elders as well. To discipline sin in the church (especially the sin of prominent members or leaders), to confront internal strife, and to stand up to powerful teachers and theological luminaries who expound high-sounding false doctrines requires courage. Without courage to fight for the truth and the lives of God's people, the local church would be washed away by every new doctrinal storm or internal conflict.

There are many weak, immature, and unstable believers, so the elders must act as a wall of safety around the people, protecting them from the fearsome danger of savage wolves and other destructive influences. The hireling, on the other hand, " 'beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep'" (John 10:12b). A good shepherd elder, like the "Chief Shepherd," however, is ready to lay down his life for the local flock. He will die before he allows wolves to devour the flock.

FEEDING THE FLOCK

Throughout the New Testament, extraordinary emphasis is placed on the centrality of teaching God's Word. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was preeminently a teacher, and He commissioned others to teach all that He had taught (Matt. 28:20). To Peter He said, "'Feed [teach] my sheep'" (John 21:17, NIV). The apostles were teachers, and the early Christians steadfastly devoted themselves to teaching (Acts 2:42). Barnabas sought Paul to come to Antioch to help teach (Acts 11:25,26). Paul exhorted Timothy to give attention to "the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13). In the order of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28, the teaching gift is listed third, after apostle and prophet. So, teaching is one of the greater gifts a congregation should desire (1 Cor. 12:31).

James Orr (1844-1913), a Scottish theologian and apologist, is best known as general editor of the enduring, multi-volume Bible encyclopedia, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. He readily

observed the preeminence of teaching in the early Christian Church. He wrote, "If there is a religion in the world which exalts the office of teaching, it is safe to say that it is the religion of Jesus Christ."⁵

Unlike modern board elders, all New Testament elders were required to be "able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). In the list of elder qualifications in his letter to Titus, Paul states, "[the elder must hold] 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*" (Titus 1:9; italics added). In an extremely significant passage on elders, Paul speaks of some elders who labor at preaching and teaching and who thus deserve financial support from the local church:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially *those who work hard at preaching and teaching*. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages" (1 Tim. 5:17,18; italics added).

Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he had taught them and the church the full plan and purpose of God: "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27). Now it was time for the elders to do the same. Since elders are commanded to shepherd the flock of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2), part of their shepherding task is to see that the flock is fed God's Word.

The importance of feeding sheep is evidenced by the fact that sheep are nearly incapable of feeding and watering themselves properly. Without a shepherd, sheep would quickly be without pasture and water, and would soon waste away. So, as Charles Jefferson aptly reminds us, "everything depends on the proper feeding of the sheep. Unless wisely fed they become emaciated and sick, and the wealth invested in them is squandered. When Ezekiel presents a picture of the bad shepherd, the first stroke of his brush is—'he does not feed the flock.'"⁶

The Christian community is created by the Spirit's use of God's Word (1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18). The community also matures, grows, and is protected by the Word. Therefore, it is a scriptural requirement that an elder "be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). The elders protect, guide, lead, nourish, comfort, educate, and heal the flock by teaching and preaching

the Word. Indeed, many pastoral needs of the people are met through teaching of the Word. The failure of church elders to know and teach the Bible is one of the chief reasons doctrinal error floods churches today and drowns the power and life of the church.

Commenting on the biblical requirement for elders to know the Bible and to be able to teach and defend the Word, Neil Summerton, church elder and author of *A Noble Task: Eldership and Ministry in the Local Church*, remarks:

Hence to both Timothy and Titus, Paul is crystal clear that the indispensable quality, which incidentally distinguishes the elder from the deacon, is the ability to master Christian doctrine, to evaluate it in others, to teach it, and to debate it with those who teach falsehood (*1 Timothy* 3:2; *Titus* 1:9-16).

The pastor-teacher ministry is also one of the principle means by which the elders' leadership and vision is communicated to the congregation, and the ability to communicate is one of the key requirements of effective leadership.

There may well be those who are inclined to rebel against this emphasis and to argue that elders need more practical gifts in order to ensure that their administration is smooth and efficient. In answer, it may be said, first, that this mistakes the emphasis which both Old and New Testaments place on the need for the flock of God to be led by shepherds who will ensure that it is fed spiritually. For this purpose soundness of character needs to be brought together with the reception and transmission of the word of the Lord as the means of feeding, protecting and restoring individual members of the flock. This ministry does not necessarily have to be exercised from the platform and the centre of gravity of the gifts of one elder may be towards teaching while that of another may be towards pastoring. But all need a sound grasp of the Faith and the ability to teach and instruct in small groups and one-to-one in the pastoral situation.

Secondly, if elders lack practical skill in such administration as is necessary in the flock, let them appoint a person or persons (perhaps as deacons if they have the high spiritual qualities also demanded for that office) to assist them. Moreover, in an eldership of any size one or more of the body may be able to discharge these tasks so long as they do not prevent them from giving priority

to the overseeing tasks. But at all costs the error of appointing those who lack either the character and spiritual qualities, or eldership gifts, or both, should be avoided.⁷

LEADING THE FLOCK

In biblical language, to shepherd a nation or any group of people means to lead or to govern (2 Sam. 5:2; Ps. 78:71,72). According to Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5, elders shepherd the church of God. So to shepherd a local church means, among other things, to lead the church. To the church in Ephesus Paul states: "Let the elders who rule [*lead, direct, manage*] well be considered worthy of double honor" (1 Tim. 5:17a). Elders, then, lead, direct, govern, manage, and care for the flock of God.

In Titus 1:7, Paul insists that a prospective elder be morally and spiritually above reproach because he is "God's steward." A steward is a "household manager," someone with official responsibility over the master's servants, property, and even finances. Elders are stewards of God's household, the local church.

Elders are also called "overseers," which signifies that they supervise and manage the church. Peter uses the verb form of *overseer* when he exhorts the elders: "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight" (1 Peter 5:1a,2a). In this instance, Peter combines the concepts of shepherding and overseeing when he exhorts the elders to do their duty. Hence we can speak of the elders' overall function as the pastoral oversight of the local church.

Leading and managing a flock is important because, as Jefferson remarks, sheep are born followers:

Sheep are not independent travelers. They must have a human conductor. They cannot go to predetermined places by themselves. They cannot start out in the morning in search of pasture and then come home at evening time. They have, apparently, no sense of direction. The greenest pasture may be only a few miles away, but the sheep left to themselves cannot find it. What animal is more incapable than a sheep? He realizes his impotence, for no animal is more docile. Where the shepherd leads, the sheep will

go. He knows that the shepherd is a guide and that it is safe to follow him.⁸

Sheep must be led to fresh water, new pasture, and relief from dangerous summer heat. This often means traveling rugged roads and narrow paths through dangerous ravines. The sheep must also be made to rest. At evening, they must be brought into the fold. Thus shepherds must know how and where to lead their flock. They must use land and water supplies wisely, constantly planning for future needs and anticipating problems.

Management Skill

The same leading and managing principles involved in shepherding sheep also apply to shepherding the local church. A congregation needs leadership, management, governance, guidance, counsel, and vision. Hence all elders must be, to some measure, leaders and managers.⁹ The eldership must clarify direction and beliefs for the flock. It must set goals, make decisions, give direction, correct failures, affect change, and motivate people. It must evaluate, plan, and govern. Elders, then, must be problem solvers, managers of people, planners, and thinkers.

A healthy, growing flock of sheep doesn't just appear; it is the result of the shepherd's skillful management of sheep and resources. He knows sheep and is skillful in caring for them. A good shepherd elder knows people. He knows how sensitive they are. He knows their needs, troubles, weaknesses, and sins. He knows how they can hurt one another. He knows how stubborn they can be. He knows how to deal with people. He knows that they must be slowly and patiently led. He knows when to be tough and when to be gentle. He knows peoples' needs and what must be done to meet those needs. He knows how to accurately assess the health and direction of the congregation. And when he doesn't know these things, he is quick to find answers. He loves to learn better skills and methods for managing the flock.

Since shepherd elders must lead and manage a congregation of people, the New Testament requires that all elder candidates evidence management ability by the proper management of their own households: "He [the prospective elder] must be one who manages his own household well...but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim. 3:4,5).

The Scripture also says that "the elders who rule [manage, lead, direct] will be considered worthy of double honor" (1 Tim. 5:17). So elders who manage the church well deserve to be recognized for their leadership and management ability and service.

Hard Work

Not only does leading and managing a flock demand skill and knowledge, it requires lots of hard work. Shepherding is hard and often uncomfortable work. Sheep don't take vacations from eating and drinking, nor do their predators vanish. Observe Jacob's description of his life as a shepherd: "Thus I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes" (Gen. 31: 40). Because a good shepherd must work hard, a self-seeking shepherd is, according to the biblical writers, a bad shepherd (Ezek. 34: 2, 8). An idle, lazy shepherd is a disgrace and danger to the flock (Nah. 3:18; Zech. 11:17).

Pastoring God's flock requires a life of devoted work. That is why Paul exhorts believers to highly honor and love those who work hard at caring for the flock (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17). What J. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905), founder of the China Inland Mission, said of missionary service can also be said of shepherding a flock of God's people: "The work of a true missionary is *work* indeed, often very monotonous, apparently not very successful, and carried on through great and varied but unceasing difficulties."¹⁰ When the church eldership is viewed as a status or board position in the church there will be plenty of volunteers, but when it is viewed as a demanding, pastoral work, few will rush to volunteer.

One reason there are so few shepherd elders or good church elderships is that, generally speaking, men are spiritually lazy. Spiritual laziness is an enormous problem in the Christian community. Spiritual laziness is a major reason why most churches never establish a biblical eldership. Men are more than willing to let someone else fulfill their spiritual responsibilities, whether it be their wives, the clergy, or church professionals.

Biblical eldership, however, cannot exist in an atmosphere of nominal Christianity. There can be no biblical eldership in a church where there is no biblical Christianity. If a biblical eldership is to function effectively, it requires men who are firmly committed to our Lord's principles of discipleship. Biblical eldership is dependent on men who

seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33), men who have presented themselves as living sacrifices to God and slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:1,2), men who love Jesus Christ above all else and willingly sacrifice self for the sake of others, men who love as Christ loved, men who are self-disciplined and self-sacrificing, and men who have taken up the cross and are willing to suffer for Christ.

Some people say, "You can't expect laymen to raise their families, work all day, and shepherd a local church." But that is simply not true. Many people raise families, work, and give substantial hours of time to community service, clubs, athletic activities, and/or religious institutions. The cults have built up large lay movements that survive primarily because of the volunteer time of their members. We Bible-believing Christians are becoming a lazy, soft, pay-for-it-to-be-done group of Christians. It is positively amazing how much people can accomplish when they are motivated to work for something they love. I've seen people build and remodel houses in their spare time. I've also seen men discipline themselves to gain a phenomenal knowledge of the Scriptures.

The real problem, then, lies not in men's limited time and energy but in false ideas about work, Christian living, life's priorities, and—especially—Christian ministry. To the Ephesian elders Paul said, "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:34,35). How do working men shepherd the church yet maintain family life and employment? They do it by self-sacrifice, self-discipline, faith, perseverance, hard work, and the power of the Holy Spirit. R. Paul Stevens, author and instructor at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, sets us on the right track when he writes:

And for tentmakers to survive three full-time jobs (work, family and ministry), they must also adopt a sacrificial lifestyle. Tentmakers must live a pruned life and literally find leisure and rest in the rhythm of serving Christ (Matt. 11:28). They must be willing to forego a measure of career achievement and private leisure for the privilege of gaining the prize (Phil. 3:14). Many

would like to be tentmakers if they could be wealthy and live a leisurely and cultured lifestyle. But the truth is that a significant ministry in the church and the community can only come by sacrifice.¹¹

CARING FOR PRACTICAL NEEDS

In addition to the familiar, broad categories of protecting, feeding, and leading the flock, elders also bear responsibility for the practical care of the flock's many diverse needs. For example, James instructs sick members of the flock to call for the elders of the church: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James. 5:14). Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders to care for the weak and needy of the flock: "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner *you must help the weak* and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35; italics added).

As shepherds of the flock, the elders must be available to meet whatever needs the sheep have. This means visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved; strengthening the weak; praying for *all* the sheep, even those who are difficult; visiting new members; providing counsel for couples who are engaged, married, or divorcing; and managing the many day-to-day details of the inner life of the congregation.

We must, however, balance what we have been saying about the elders' ministry with the parallel truth of every-member ministry. Although the elders lead and are officially responsible for the spiritual oversight of the *whole* church, they are not the total ministry of the church. They are not *the* ministers. Ministry is the work of the whole church. Ministry is not the work of one person or even one group of people.

The local church is not only a flock; it is also a body of Spirit-gifted, royal priests who minister to the Lord and His people. Thus, the care of the local body is not the sole responsibility of the elders, but of all the members. Each member of Christ's body is equipped by the Spirit to minister to the needs of others. The elders are dependent upon the gifts and skills of others (some of whom may be more gifted than any of the elders in certain areas of ministry) for the overall care

of the local church. Biblical elders do not want to control a passive congregation. They desire to lead an active, alive, every-member-ministering church.

Furthermore, the deacons are the church's ministers of mercy. Like the elders, they are to attend to the people's many practical care needs (Acts 6:1-6). So the elders need to delegate to the deacons many of the practical mercy needs of the congregation. Like the apostles, the church elders must remember that although they are involved in ministering to practical care needs, their priorities must always be "prayer, and...the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

Love for the Lord's People

The secret to caring for sheep is love. A good shepherd loves sheep and loves to be with them (2 Sam. 12:3). The best elders, likewise, are those who love people, love to be with them, and are fervently involved with them. Charles Jefferson admirably summarizes this quality when he writes, "This was the crowning virtue of the shepherd—his self-sacrificing love."¹²

The shepherd's love for his sheep is widely recognized by those who know sheep and shepherds. Old Testament professor John J. Davis discovered this truth while doing research on shepherds. He questioned a modern Palestinian shepherd named Mohammad Yaseen about the attitudes required of a good shepherd and reports that the shepherd "constantly mentioned the fact that the best shepherds are those who genuinely love their sheep."¹³ Phillip Keller, in his delightful book on Psalm 23 (which should be required reading for every elder), also takes note of the shepherd's love: "All the care, all the work, all the alert watchfulness, all the skill, all the concern, all the self-sacrifice are born of His Love—the love of One who loves His sheep, loves His work, loves His role as a Shepherd."¹⁴

The loving heart of a true pastor is dramatically displayed in the life of Paul. Reminding the troublesome Corinthians of his deepest motives and feelings, Paul writes: "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not that you should be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you" (2 Cor. 2:4). D. A. Carson, professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, describes Paul's life and prayers as "a passion for people." Detailing Paul's passionate love for the new Christians in Thessalonica, Carson writes:

Here is a Christian so committed to the well-being of other Christians, especially new Christians, that he is simply burning up inside to be with them, to help them, to nurture them, to feed them, to stabilize them, to establish an adequate foundation for them. Small wonder, then, that he devotes himself to praying for them when he finds he cannot visit them personally.¹⁵

If you were to ask the average Christian what he or she most wants from spiritual leaders, the answer in most cases would be, "To be loved and cared for!" Nothing ministers to people's deepest needs more than genuine Christian love. There is an old saying that should be inscribed and placed on the wall of every elder's home: "Man before business, because man is your business."¹⁶

The elders' work is people-oriented work. If a body of elders lacks certain gifts or dynamic personalities, the elders' love for the people can compensate for such deficiencies. There is, however, no compensation for a lack of love and compassion on the part of the elders. Without love the eldership is an empty shell. Without love an elder is "a noisy gong," "a clanging cymbal," a spiritual zero (1 Cor. 13:1,2). So, like the Lord Jesus Christ, a good shepherd elder loves people.

CLARIFYING OUR TERMINOLOGY

Before ending this chapter we must return to a tough, deeply rooted problem that we raised at the beginning of the chapter—the definition of the term *elder*. Although the term *elder* is the predominate New Testament term used to describe local church leaders and is especially suited to the nature of the New Testament churches, it conveys to the overwhelming majority of Christians and non-Christians today ideas that are different from those found in the New Testament. People today think of church elders as lay, church-board members who are separate and distinct from the professional, ordained pastor (or clergyman). I refer to these elders as "board elders;" they are not true New Testament, Christian elders. They are advisers, committee men, executives, and directors.

A true biblical eldership is not a businesslike committee. It's a biblically qualified council of men that jointly pastors the local church.

So to communicate the New Testament idea of eldership, we need to reeducate ourselves as to the New Testament usage of the term *elder*, and in some cases choose a different term.

The New Testament uses a term other than *elder* to describe local church leaders. That term is *overseer*, and it comes from the Greek word *episkopos*.¹⁷ The term *overseer* was a common designation used by Greeks for a variety of officials. In contrast to all priestly or lordly titles, nothing in the title *overseer* (or *elder*) violated the local church's family character, humble-servant nature, or priestly and holy status. The fact that the apostles and first Christians used the term *overseer* as a synonym for *elder* demonstrates flexibility in the use of leadership terminology and the desire to communicate effectively among Greek-speaking people.

The New Testament apostles, led by the Holy Spirit, were extremely careful in choosing the vocabulary they used to describe the person and work of Jesus Christ, His "new creation" the Church (Gal. 6:15), and those who provided leadership for the people of God. It is critically important for Christians today to understand that the language we use to describe our church leaders has the power to accurately reflect biblical thinking and practice or, conversely, to lead us far away from the true Church of Jesus Christ and into the false church. The term *episkopos* (*overseer*), for example, developed a meaning that was quite different from the New Testament usage. It became one of the most significant ecclesiastical titles of the hierarchical church. We know the term in English as *bishop*, meaning a church official who presides over many churches and the lower clergy. Thus the original sense of the term *episkopos*, which was synonymous with *elder* and indicated a local church official, was lost.

If we choose to use the term *elder*, which many Protestant churches do because it is a key biblical term for church leaders, it is necessary to explain that the term *elder* means "pastor elders," "shepherd elders," or "pastors." I use these terms interchangeably depending on the audience to which I am speaking. Throughout this book I use these descriptions in order to distinguish between "board elders," which is a misleading concept, and "shepherd elders," which is the biblical concept. In some churches the term *elder* is used in its full New Testament sense, thus no need to search for another term exists. The people in these churches know that the elders are their spiritual leaders, but this is true of very few churches.

I know some churches that sought to implement a biblical eldership but weren't able to make it work effectively until they dropped the term *elder* and called their elders "pastors." In these churches the term *elder* was so deeply entangled with temporary, committee-board connotations that the term was a hindrance to the practice of biblical eldership. Even the elders were helped by the language change. They started thinking of themselves as pastors who were responsible for the spiritual care of the flock and began to function as pastors. Despite the clerical and professional connotations of the term *pastor*, it best communicated what the church wanted to say about their elders' function and position.

Many times I use the word *shepherd* because it does not carry all the unbiblical connotations that people usually associate with the terms *pastor* or *elder*. However, even the term *shepherd*, like all the other terms, has its own problems: it is a word devoid of religious meaning for most people outside the church, and some inside as well. Some people might think you are referring to a literal shepherd and may want to know where your farm is located!

Whatever terminology you choose to describe local church leaders will have advantages and disadvantages. In the end, every local church is responsible to teach its people the meaning of the terms it uses to describe its spiritual leaders, whether it be elders, overseers, ministers, preachers, or pastors. Biblically sensitive church leaders will insist that the terminology they use represents, as accurately as possible, the original biblical terms and concepts of a New Testament eldership. False teachers have had their greatest triumphs when they redefine biblical words in a way that is contrary to the original meaning. Listen to the judicious counsel of Nigel Turner, one of the world's foremost Greek grammarians:

The Church today is concerned about communicating with the contemporary world and especially about the need to speak in a new idiom. The language of the Church had better be the language of the NT. To proclaim the Gospel with new terminology is hazardous when much of the message and valuable overtones that are implicit in the NT might be lost forever. "Most of the distortions and dissensions that have vexed the Church," observed the late Dean of York, "where these have touched theological understanding, have arisen through the insistence of sects or

sections of the Christian community upon words which are not found in the NT."¹⁸

Nowhere is this definition problem more evident than with the vocabulary Christians use to describe their church officials. Much of our church vocabulary is unscriptural and terribly misleading. Words such as *clergyman*, *layman*, *reverend*, *minister*, *priest*, *bishop*, *ordained*, and *ministerial* convey ideas contrary to what Jesus Christ and His apostles taught. Such terminology misrepresents the true nature of apostolic Christianity and makes it difficult, if not impossible, to recapture it. As a result, most of our churches are in desperate need of language reform. I hope that this book will challenge church leaders to more faithfully adhere to the true meaning of biblical terms and concepts.

possibly unfit men had become elders since Paul had left the church, and some of the elders may have become false teachers. It is obvious that the elders weren't able to stop the false teachers, which is why Timothy had to remain in Ephesus. Even for Timothy, stopping these strong-minded men and women was difficult. Therefore, Paul felt the church needed fresh instruction on eldership, particularly on the character and discipline of elders.

The fact that the elders at Ephesus had failed should not surprise us, however. It is not easy to stop determined and energetic false teachers. The elders of the churches of Galatia were also unable to stop the invasion of false teachers. The tragic history of Christianity demonstrates the inability of many Christian leaders to keep churches pure from doctrinal error. The desperate need for sound teaching leads Paul to address one of the most important issues of the local church—the moral and spiritual qualifications of its elders.

THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR AN OVERSEER

Paul sets the stage for his catalog of elder requirements with what he calls a "trustworthy statement." This is one of five trustworthy sayings in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 3:8). Each saying is given special attention by the formula, "a trustworthy statement" (or "faithful is the saying"). This quotation formula both emphasizes and makes a positive commendation about the saying with which it is associated. In effect, it says that what is stated is indeed true and deserves constant repeating among the Lord's people: "It is a trustworthy statement; if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do" (1 Tim. 3:1). Although we don't know whether this saying originated with Paul or within the collective body of early Christians, the "trustworthy statement" indicates a widely accepted view that the work of the office of overseer is a fine work.

The phrase, "the office of overseer," represents one word in Greek, *episkopē*, which can be literally rendered "overseership." It represents the position and function of the church official called the overseer (*episkopos*) who is mentioned in verse 2. The overseer of verse 2 is not someone different from the elders of 1 Timothy 5:17-25 who lead and teach the church. Paul plainly demonstrates that *overseer* is used

interchangeably for *elder* when he switches from the term "elders" to the term "overseer" within the Titus list of elder qualifications (Titus 1:5,7).

The singular form of the word "overseer" does not imply that there was only one overseer in the church at Ephesus. We know that in Paul's previous speech to the Ephesian elders (the same church leaders mentioned in 1 Timothy), he addresses a plurality of overseers (Acts 20:17,28); to the church in Philippi, Paul greets a plurality of "overseers." The reason that the term "overseer" in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:7 is singular is because Paul uses a generic singular, that is, the singular name representing an entire class or type when speaking about the overseers. Thus, the singular "overseer" stands for *all* overseers—all elders.

This use of the generic singular is not an unusual way for Paul to express himself. Paul freely uses the generic singular—"woman," "widow," "elder," and "the Lord's servant"—when referring to special classes of people (1 Tim. 2:11-14; 5:5,19, and 2 Tim. 2:24). The only occasions that Paul uses "overseer" in the singular are in his lists of qualifications for the office (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7). In both cases, *overseer* is preceded by the singular construction "if any man" (1 Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:6). When he addresses the overseers directly, however, he uses the plural form because he is addressing a council of overseers, not a single overseer (Phil. 1:1; Acts 20:28). From Paul's use of singular and plural constructions, we can conclude that the church structure of 1 Timothy is pre-Ignatian and still follows the simple, brotherly, elder system of oversight that is recorded in Acts.

Paul goes on to say that overseership is "a fine work." "Fine" renders the Greek word *kalos*, which here conveys the idea of "excellent," "good," "worthwhile," or "noble." "Work" is used in the sense of a specific "task" or "job." Acts 20:28 explains why overseership is an excellent work: overseers shepherd God's Church that He purchased with His own blood. To God, the Church is the most precious thing on earth. In the face of many problems and labors, the greatest encouragement and incentive an elder can have is to know that he performs an exceedingly excellent work—one that is worthy of the sacrifice of one's life.

In brief, this early Christian saying declares the great value of the work of the office of overseer (eldership) while also encouraging those who desire this work. It is equally important that congregations today

realize the worthwhile character of the elders' task. They need to realize its significance so they will support and encourage the elders in their work on behalf of the church.

Since God declares the office of overseer to be an excellent work, it follows that an overseer must be a man of excellent Christian character. A noble task naturally demands a noble person. To assure that only men of good character assume the role of overseer, Paul provides the local church with public, observable qualifications to protect both the office and the church:

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:2-7).

The verbal construction "must be" indicates what is necessary, compulsory, or fitting. So the overseer "must be" of a certain moral and spiritual character to qualify as an overseer. Paul emphasizes this point because it is probably where the church failed, as many churches do today. God wants us to know that a properly qualified elder is a non-negotiable requirement for the government of God's household.

God provides objective, observable qualifications to test the subjective desire of all who seek the office of overseer. Desire alone is not enough; it must be matched by good character and spiritual capability. In his summary of Paul's fourteen specific qualifications, George Knight writes: "The items focus on two areas: (1) personal self-discipline and maturity, and (2) ability to relate well to others and to teach and care for them. These two are intertwined, although there seems to be a tendency to move from the personal to the interpersonal."⁶

ABOVE REPROACH: Heading the list of qualifications stands the general, overarching, "all-embracing" qualification: "above reproach"

(*anepilēptos*). To be above reproach means to be free from any offensive or disgraceful blight of character or conduct, particularly as described in verses 2-7. When an elder is irreproachable, critics cannot discredit his Christian profession of faith or prove him unfit to lead others (Neh. 6:13). He has a clean moral and spiritual reputation. Since all God's people are called to live holy and blameless lives (Phil. 2:15; 1 Thess. 5:23), since the world casts a critical eye at the Christian community (1 Peter 3:15,16), and since Christian leaders lead primarily by their example (1 Peter 5:3), an irreproachable life is indispensable to the Christian leader. Job, for example, was an elder among his people (Job 29:7,21,25; 31:21), and he, the Scripture says, was morally above reproach: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil" (Job 1:1).

Paul now begins to delineate concrete, observable qualities that define what it means to be irreproachable.

THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE: In both of Paul's qualification lists, he places the qualification "the husband of one wife" immediately after "above reproach." So the first and foremost area in which an elder must be above reproach is in his marital and sexual life.

The phrase, "the husband of one wife," and its related phrase, "the wife of one man," occur four times in the New Testament. Each occurrence is in the context of qualifications for overseers, deacons, or widows:

- An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2).
- Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households (1 Tim. 3:12).
- Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man (1 Tim. 5:9).
- If any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion (Titus 1:6).

The phrase "husband of one wife" is made up of three words in Greek: *mias gynaikos andra*. The words literally mean:

- *mias*, one
- *gynaikos*, wife or woman
- *andra*, husband or man

The phrase "of one wife" is placed first in an emphatic position to stress the idea of "one wife." It modifies the noun "husband." Thus we can translate the phrase in the following ways: "one-wife husband," "one-woman man," or "husband of one wife." There is broad disagreement, however, on the proper interpretation of this little phrase. We will consider four possibilities:

- elders must be married
- elders must not be polygamists
- elders may marry only once
- elders must be maritally and sexually above reproach

It's not uncommon to hear people say that an elder must be married because Scripture says he must be "the husband of one wife." This, however, is not an accurate interpretation. If Paul requires elders to be married, he flatly contradicts what he teaches in 1 Corinthians 7 where he outlines the distinct advantages of singleness in serving the Lord and even encourages singleness for the purpose of more effective, undivided service (1 Cor. 7:32-35; cf. Matt. 19:12). If an elder is required to be married, Paul should have qualified his statements about the advantage of singleness because singleness would disqualify an aspiring elder or deacon. However, Paul didn't write, "an elder must be a man who has a wife." Rather, he says that an elder must be a *one-wife man*, which is quite a different point.

Using similar logic, some people also conclude that an elder must have children because of the qualification that an elder manage "his own household well, keeping his children under control" (1 Tim. 3:4). I've talked with some men, for example, who don't believe they can serve as elders or deacons because they have only one child. They say that Paul's qualification requires "children." Paul, however, is not requiring an elder to father two or more children. We must realize the limitations of Paul's language. He wouldn't use "child" because people

would then think that an elder could have only one child. He is simply saying that an elder who has offspring must manage his home well.

The fact is, most men are married and have children. Scripture requires that these men have their homes in order and that their marital relationships exemplify what Christian marriage should be. These qualifications obviously don't apply to elders who are single or childless.

A number of biblical commentators believe that the phrase, "the husband of one wife," means "married to one wife." They say that Paul's intent was to prohibit polygamy—having two or more wives at the same time—and conclude that elders must not be polygamists.

This seems like a good interpretation on the surface, but the related phrase, "the wife of one man" (1 Tim. 5:9), makes this interpretation nearly impossible. First Timothy 5:9 lists the qualifications for widows who receive living assistance from the church, and specifies that a woman must have been "the wife of one man." Certainly Paul wasn't referring to women who had two or more husbands at one time, which is called polyandry. Polyandry was abhorrent to Jews as well as to Romans and definitely was not a problem in the church. So it is unlikely that the phrase, "the husband of one wife," is intended primarily to address polygamy.

Some prominent biblical commentators believe that this phrase means "married only once in a lifetime." Paul, they say, prohibits remarriage for any reason, even remarriage following the death of a spouse. Thus a man who was divorced and remarried or a widower who had remarried wouldn't qualify to be an elder or deacon. This interpretation, however, is plainly at odds with the rest of the Bible's teaching on the sanctity of marriage.⁸ "Nowhere else in the N.T.," writes biblical expositor J.E. Huther, "is there the slightest trace of any ordinance against second marriages."⁹

By itself, the phrase "the husband of one wife" doesn't indicate whether Paul means one wife in an entire lifetime or one wife at a time. This phrase must be interpreted within the larger context of Paul's overall teaching on marriage. It must never be allowed to contradict God's clear, general teaching on marriage. Therefore, from a New Testament perspective it is unthinkable that this phrase is meant to disqualify remarried widowers. A remarried widower could still be called "the husband of one wife."

Other commentators interpret this phrase to mean that men who have remarried following a divorce cannot be elders. Among Jews,

Romans, and Greeks, it was easy to divorce and remarry. In the case of remarriage following a divorce, two or three living women could have been married to the same man. Some have termed this *successive polygamy*. They believe Paul prohibits a remarried, divorced man from office because of the potentially embarrassing situations his ex-wife (or ex-wives) creates for the elder and the congregation.

The correctness of this interpretation seems impossible to prove one way or the other. In fact, the problem with this interpretation as well as the previous ones is that they create more problems than they solve. The interpretation, married only once in a lifetime, particularly raises a hornet's nest of mind-puzzling theological and marital questions. Regarding the issue of whether or not a divorced or divorced and remarried man (whether the divorce took place before or after his conversion) can become an elder, the New Testament doesn't directly comment. Commentator Philip H. Towner is on target when he writes, "the point is not how often one can be married, nor precisely what constitutes a legitimate marriage (that the marriage of the candidate is legitimate is assumed), but rather how one conducts himself in his marriage."¹⁰

A final interpretation, and the one favored here, is the simplest and least problem creating. It contends that the phrase "the husband of one wife" is meant to be a positive statement that expresses faithful, monogamous marriage. In English we would say, "faithful and true to one woman" or "a one-woman man." This latter phrasing closely follows the Greek wording.

Negatively, the phrase prohibits all deviation from faithful, monogamous marriage. Thus it would prohibit an elder from polygamy, concubinage, homosexuality, and/or any questionable sexual relationship. Positively, Scripture says the candidate for eldership should be a "one-woman man," meaning he has an exclusive relationship with one woman. Such a man is above reproach in his sexual and marital life.

What does 1 Timothy say about sexual and marital sins committed before a person's conversion to Christ? What about people who have legally divorced and remarried (assuming the local church allows for such)? What about the forgiveness and restoration of a fallen spiritual leader? These and many other painful and controversial questions are not answered directly here. They must be answered from the whole of Scripture's teaching on divorce and remarriage, forgiveness, grace, and

restoration, as well as its teaching on leadership example and the full spectrum of elder qualifications.

All deviations from God's standard of marital behavior confuse and perplex us. Sin always confuses, distorts, and divides, so there will always be diverse opinions on questions such as these. This in no way, however, diminishes the local church's obligation to face these issues and make wise, scripturally sound decisions. In all these heartbreaking situations, the honor of Jesus' name, faithfulness to His Word, and prayer are the supreme guides.

TEMPERATE: In Greek, the word "temperate" (*nēphalios*) can mean sobriety in the use of wine. Here, however, it is used to mean mental sobriety.¹¹ "Temperate" denotes self-control, balanced judgment, and freedom from debilitating excesses or rash behavior. Negatively, it indicates the absence of any personal disorder that would distort a person's judgment or conduct. Positively, it describes a person who is stable, circumspect, self-restrained, and clear-headed.

It is necessary that elders, who face many serious problems, pressures, and decisions, be mentally and emotionally stable. Elders who lack a balanced mental and emotional perspective can easily be snared by the devil or false teachers.

PRUDENT: Similar to the word "temperate," "prudent" (*sōphrōn*) also stresses self-control, particularly as it relates to exercising good judgment, discretion, and common sense. To be prudent is to be sound-minded, discreet, and sensible, able to keep an objective perspective in the face of problems and disagreements. Prudence is an essential quality of mind for a person who must exercise a great deal of practical discretion in handling people and their problems. Prudence tempers pride, authoritarianism, and self-justification.

RESPECTABLE: "Respectable" (*kosmios*) is associated with the word "prudent" (1 Tim. 2:9). A sensible-minded person will also be a well-behaved person. *Kosmios* conveys the ideas of self-control, proper behavior, and orderliness. Although the word is used to describe properness in outward demeanor and dress in 1 Timothy 2:9, its usage here conveys the more general meaning of "'orderly' ... 'well-behaved,' or 'virtuous' ... that which causes a person to be regarded as 'respectable' by others."¹² An elder cannot expect people to follow him if he is not respectable.

HOSPITABLE: It is also necessary for an elder to be hospitable. Hospitality is a concrete expression of Christian love and family life. It is an important biblical virtue:

- Job, the exemplary Old Testament elder, was a model of hospitality: "The alien has not lodged outside, For I have opened my doors to the traveler" (Job 31:32).
- Paul exhorts the Christians at Rome to pursue hospitality (Rom. 12:13).
- Peter writes, "Be hospitable to one another without complaint" (1 Peter 4:9).
- The author of Hebrews bids his readers: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13:2).

These New Testament commands to practice hospitality are all found within the larger context of Christian love. Unfortunately, most Christians, and even some Christian leaders, are unaware that hospitality is a biblical requirement for pastoral leadership in the church. Some may even argue against such a seemingly insignificant point being a requirement for church shepherds.

Such thinking, however, shows an inadequate understanding of authentic Christian community, agape love, and the elder's work. For an elder to be inhospitable is a poor example of Christian love and care for others. The shepherd elder is to give himself lovingly and sacrificially for the care of the flock. This cannot be done from a distance—with a smile and a handshake on Sunday morning or through a superficial visit. Giving oneself to the care of God's people means sharing one's life and home with others. An open home is a sign of an open heart and a loving, sacrificial, serving spirit. A lack of hospitality is a sure sign of selfish, lifeless, loveless Christianity.

In my work as a pastor elder, I have found my home to be one of the most important tools I possess for reaching out to and caring for people. Although the shepherd's ministry of hospitality may seem like a small thing, it has an enormous, lasting impact on people. If you doubt this, ask those to whom a shepherd has shown hospitality. Invariably they

will say that it is one of the most important, pleasant, and memorable aspects of the shepherd's ministry.

In His mysterious ways, God works through the guest-host relationship to encourage and instruct His people. So we must never underestimate the power of hospitality in ministering to people's needs. Those who love hospitality love people and are concerned about them. If the local church's elders are inhospitable, the local church will also be inhospitable and indifferent toward the needs of others.

ABLE TO TEACH: Like Israel, the Christian community is built on Holy Scripture. So those who oversee the community must be able to guide and protect it by instruction from Scripture. According to Acts 20, the elders must shepherd the flock of God. A major part of shepherding the flock involves feeding it the Word of God. Therefore, elders must be "able to teach" in order to do their job.

The ability to teach entails three basic elements: a knowledge of Scripture, the readiness to teach, and the ability to communicate. This doesn't mean that an elder must be an eloquent orator, a dynamic lecturer, or a highly gifted teacher (of which there are very few). But an elder must know the Bible and be able to instruct others from it.

In his parallel list of elder qualifications in Titus, Paul expands on the meaning of "able to teach." He writes, "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he [the elder] may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). An elder, then, must be able to open his Bible and exhort and encourage others from it. He must also be able to discern false doctrine and refute it with Scripture. God's Word brings growth to the church and protects it from falsehood. Therefore, shepherd elders must be able to teach God's Word.

NOT ADDICTED TO WINE: An elder must be above reproach in his use of alcohol. Paul uses strong language here that means not preoccupied or overindulgent with wine. Drunkenness is sin, and persistently drunken people require church discipline (see 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9,10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18; 1 Peter 4:3). So a person in a position of trust and authority over other people can't have a drinking problem.

The Bible contains many warnings against the potential dangers of wine and strong drink (Isa. 5:11,22; Prov. 20:1; 23:30-35; Hos. 4:11). It specifically warns leaders about the dangers of alcohol:

It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
It is not for kings to drink wine,
Or for rulers to desire strong drink,
Lest they drink and forget what is decreed,
And pervert the rights of all the afflicted
(Prov. 31:4,5; cf. Lev. 10:8,9; Isa. 28:1,7,8; 56:9-12).

Drunkenness has ruined countless lives. It is reported that nearly half of the murders, suicides, and accidental deaths in America are related to alcohol. One in four families has some problem with alcohol, making alcohol one of the largest health problems in America.¹³ The misery and heartbreak that alcoholism has caused multitudes of families is beyond imagination. No one who has worked with the people or families who are its victims jokes about its destructive power. Alcoholism reduces life expectancy, breaks up families, and destroys people financially. It's a moral and spiritual problem of the greatest magnitude.

Elders work with people, often those who are troubled. If an elder has a drinking problem, he will lead people astray and bring reproach upon the church. His overindulgence will interfere with spiritual growth and service, and it may well lead to more degrading sins.

Note, however, that Paul says, "not addicted to wine." He is not presenting an absolute prohibition against drinking wine. He is prohibiting the abuse of wine (or any other substance) that would damage a man's testimony and work for God.

NOT PUGNACIOUS: A pugnacious man is a fighter, a bad-tempered, irritable, out-of-control individual. The Greek word is derived from the verb "to strike" and suggests a violent person who is prone to physical assault on others. Wives and children especially feel the blows of a pugnacious man, and anyone who seriously frustrates a pugnacious man is a potential target for verbal, even physical, assault.

Elders must handle highly emotional interpersonal conflicts and deeply felt doctrinal disagreements between believers. Elders are often at the center of very tense situations, so a bad-tempered, pugnacious person is not going to solve issues and problems. He will, in fact, create worse explosions. Because a pugnacious man will treat the sheep roughly and even hurt them, he cannot be one of Christ's undershepherds.

GENTLE: "Gentle" is one of the most attractive and needed virtues required of an elder. No English word adequately conveys the fullness of this word's beauty and richness. "Forbearing," "kind," "gentle," "magnanimous," "equitable," and "gracious" all help capture the full range of its meaning. Forbearance comes from God and is a chief source of peace and healing among His people. So in his letter to the Philippian Christians, who were experiencing internal as well as external conflict, Paul says, "Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men" (Phil. 4:5).

The gentle man stands in vivid contrast to the pugnacious man. A gentle man exhibits a willingness to yield and patiently makes allowances for the weakness and ignorance of the fallen human condition. One who is gentle refuses to retaliate in kind for wrongs done by others and does not insist upon the letter of the law or his personal rights. "Graciously amenable," says one commentator, "yielding wherever yielding is possible rather than standing up for one's rights."¹⁴

Forbearance is a characteristic of God: "For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive [the same Greek word used in the LXX meaning forbearing or gentle], and abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon Thee" (Ps. 86:5). Gentleness also characterized the life of Jesus on earth: "Now I Paul myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:1). God fully expects His undershepherds to shepherd His people in the same way He does. He will not let His people be driven, beaten, condemned, or divided. Thus the shepherd must be patient, gracious, and understanding with the erring—and at times, exasperating—sheep. So many wrongs, disagreements, faults, hurts, and injustices exist in this sinful world that one would be forced to live in perpetual division, anger, and conflict were it not for forbearance. So elders must be "gentle" and "forbearing" like Christ.

UNCONTENTIOUS: Along with being gentle, it is important that an elder be uncontentious or peaceable. Since the day Cain killed Abel, his brother, men have been fighting and killing one another (Gen. 4:5-8). This is one of the wretched consequences of man's sinful nature. Christians, however, are commanded to be different, "to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men" (Titus 3:2).

God hates division and fighting among His people: "There are six things which the Lord hates...A false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers" (Prov. 6:16-19). Yet fighting

paralyzes and kills many local churches. It may be the single, most distressing problem Christian leaders face. Therefore, a Christian elder is required to be "uncontentious," which means "not fighting" or "not quarrelsome." Positively stated, an elder must be a peaceable man. As Paul writes, "And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition" (2 Tim. 2:24,25a).

FREE FROM THE LOVE OF MONEY: An elder must not love money or be greedy. So this qualification prohibits a base, mercenary interest that uses Christian ministry and people for personal profit. Both Paul and Peter condemn what we would call "being in it for the money" (1 Peter 5:2; Titus 1:7). False teachers, Paul points out, are overly interested in money and in personal financial gain (1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11). The Pharisees were lovers of money who devoured widow's houses (Luke 16:14; Mark 12:40). The chief religious leaders of Jesus' day turned the temple into a merchandise mart for their own profit (Mark 11:15-17).

Like a powerful drug, the love of money can delude the judgment of even the best men. Scripture sternly warns against the love of money: "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang" (1 Tim. 6:10). Elders, then, cannot be the kind of men who are always interested in money. They cannot be men who need to control the church's funds and who refuse financial accountability. Such men have distorted spiritual values and set the wrong example for the church. They will inevitably fall into unethical financial dealings that will publicly disgrace the Lord's name.

In stark contrast, an elder should be content with God's provision. In Hebrews 13:5 the writer exhorts his readers, "Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.'" Paul states the matter this way: "For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction" (1 Tim. 6:7-9). Elders, then, must model godly contentment and faith in Christ's loving provision for them.

In summarizing verse 3, George Knight observes, "In short, the bishop's life is not to be dominated or controlled by wine or money, nor may it be one of strife, but rather it must be one of peace and gentleness."¹⁵ In contrast, a man who is controlled by money or alcohol is not controlled by the Holy Spirit. He is not stable, self-controlled, sound-minded, or respectable. He is controlled by base desires that will inevitably lead to other sins and public reproach.

A MAN WHO MANAGES HIS HOUSEHOLD WELL: A prospective elder must be able to manage (*prohistēmi*: lead and care for; see 1 Thess. 5:12) his household "well." The key measurement when evaluating a man's management of his household is his children's behavior. So Paul requires that he keep "his children under control with all dignity." This means he must be a responsible Christian father, husband, and household manager. He must have a reputation for providing for his family, financially, emotionally, and spiritually. Concerning this qualification, Donald Guthrie, former professor at London Bible College, remarks, "A most important principle, which has not always had the prominence it deserves.... Any man unable to govern his children graciously and gravely by maintaining good discipline, is no man for government in the Church."¹⁶

A well-managed family means that the children obey and submit to the father's leadership. The way in which that relationship is manifested is especially important: it is to be "with all dignity." The father is not to be a spirit-crushing tyrant who gains submission by harsh punishment. Elsewhere Paul writes, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Thus a Christian father must control his children in an honorable, respectful, and dignified way. Of course there are no perfect, problem-free children in this world. Even the best Christian fathers and mothers have child-rearing problems, but these parents resolve the problems and are involved with their children in responsible, caring ways. They guide their children through the many storms of life.

We must note that the children referred to in verse 4 are children who live at home, under their father's authority: "keeping [present tense] his children under control with all dignity." In the Titus 1:6 passage, the verb in the phrase "having children who believe" also indicates that the children are presently in the home and under the father's authority.¹⁷ I

mention this because some people believe that a man is not a viable candidate for eldership until all his children have reached adulthood. But this is not what the passage says. Some men still father children at the age of forty or forty-five, and God does not intend for them to wait until they are nearly seventy years of age before they are qualified to serve as elders. Furthermore, we must note that the passage doesn't teach that an elder must have children. This instruction simply applies to men who do have children.

The critical importance of this requirement is immediately underscored by the rhetorical question Paul asks in verse 5: "But if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?" The answer to that question is a resounding negative—he can't care for the church of God if he doesn't know how to manage his own household. The Greek word rendered "care for" (*epimelēsetai*) stresses the loving, personal attention of meeting the church's various needs. It doesn't, however, eliminate the idea of leading or directing, which is an essential part of caring for the church.

NOT A NEW CONVERT: Scripture prohibits a "new convert" from serving as an elder. A new convert is a beginner in the faith, a baby Christian, a recent convert. No matter how spiritual, zealous, knowledgeable, or talented a new convert may be, he is not spiritually mature. Maturity requires time and experience for which there is no substitute, so a new convert is simply not ready for the arduous task of shepherding God's flock.

There is nothing wrong with being "a new convert." All Christians begin life in Christ as babies and grow to maturity. An elder, however, must be mature and know his own heart. A new Christian does not know his own heart or understand the craftiness of the enemy, so he is vulnerable to pride—the most subtle of all temptations and most destructive of all sins. Pride caused the devil's ruin (Ezek. 28:11-19; Gen. 3:5, 14, 15). Like the devil, the prideful elder will inevitably fall. "Pride goes before destruction," the Bible says, "And a haughty spirit before stumbling" (Prov. 16:18; cf. 11:2; 18:1; 29:23). Biblical history shows that pride has destroyed the greatest of men (2 Chron. 26:16; 32:25).

The position of elder (especially in a large, well-established church such as the one in Ephesus) carries considerable honor and authority. For a recent convert, the temptation of pride would be too great. Pride

would destroy the man, causing personal disgrace, loss, exposure, divine chastisement, and possibly wrecking his faith. It would also hurt the church. So Paul warns against appointing a new convert as an elder, "lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil."

As to why this qualification is not listed in the Titus catalog of qualifications, we can only guess. It may have been that leadership by new converts was a real problem in the church at Ephesus. Perhaps new converts were deceived about their giftedness and spiritual intelligence and stirred up confusion in the church.

A MAN WITH A GOOD REPUTATION AMONG NONBELIEVERS: Finally, and of significant importance, an elder "must have a good reputation with those outside the church." Both the apostles Paul and Peter express deep concern that Christians have a good reputation before a watching, nonbelieving world (1 Cor. 10:32; Phil. 2:15; Col. 4:5,6; 1 Thess. 4:11,12; 1 Tim. 2:1,2; 5:14; 6:1; Titus 2:5,8,10; 3:1-2; 1 Peter 2:12,15; 3:1,16). If all believers are required to have a good testimony before nonChristians, then it is imperative that the leaders have a good reputation with unbelievers. The church's evangelistic credibility and witness is tied to the moral reputation of its leaders.

In reality, the nonChristians may know more about the character and conduct of the prospective elder than the church. Quite often the prospective elder's nonChristian fellow workers or relatives actually have more daily contact with the church leader than do the people in church. So "Paul is concerned," writes George Knight, "that those who may judge less sympathetically but perhaps also more realistically and knowledgeably will render a 'good'...verdict both from the perspective of their own consciences...and also from their awareness of the particular man's commitment and consistency in terms of his Christian faith."¹⁸

An outsider's opinion of a Christian leader's character cannot be dismissed, for it affects the evangelistic witness of the entire church, "the pillar and support of the truth." That is why Paul emphatically states "he must have a good reputation." The verb "must," the same verb used in verse 2, again stresses the absolute necessity and importance of this matter.

The reason for emphatically insisting on this qualification is that an elder with an unfavorable or sinful reputation among nonChristians

will "fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" in a far more destructive way than those he leads. If a pastor elder has a reputation among nonbelievers as a dishonest businessman, womanizer, or adulterer, the unbelieving community will take special note of his hypocrisy. NonChristians will say, "He acts that way, and he's a church elder!" They will ridicule and mock him. They will scoff at the people of God. They will talk about him and will generate plenty of sinister gossip. They will raise tough, embarrassing questions. He will be discredited as a Christian leader and suffer disgrace and insults. His influence for good will be ruined and he will endanger the church's evangelistic mission. The elder will certainly become a liability to the church, not a spiritual asset.

But that is not all. Fully aware of the devil's ways (2 Cor. 2:11), Paul adds that the defamed elder will also fall into "the snare of the devil." The devil is pictured as a cunning hunter (1 Peter 5:8). Using public criticism and the elder's own inconsistencies, the devil will entrap the unwary Christian into more serious sin—uncontrolled bitterness, angry retaliation, lying, further hypocrisy, and stubbornness of heart. What may begin as a small offense can become something far more destructive and evil. Therefore, an elder must have a good reputation with those outside the Christian community.

QUALIFICATIONS DEMAND EXAMINATION

Thus far we have talked about the elders' qualifications, but following the list of qualifications Paul presents an equally important subject—the examination of elders. The fifteen qualifications for elders presented in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 are just empty words without the requirement (v. 10) to examine a candidate's qualifications for office. The text insists that no one can serve as an elder until he is first tested (examined) and approved:

And let these [deacons] also [like the overseers] first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach (1 Tim. 3:10).

Starting in verse 8, Paul lists the qualifications for deacons, just as he has just done for elders. In the middle of the deacon's list of

way, as biblical commentator R.J. Knowling says, "The verb implies at all events an exercise of authority."¹

The verb *kathistēmi*, however, conveys no special religious or clerical connotations. It is the common word used for appointing judges, governors, or anyone to an official position. Thus to translate the verb as "ordained," which some scholars do, communicates wrong concepts.

Titus was instructed to designate qualified brothers from within the local churches as elders, not to ordain sacred priests or clerics. Elders are not priests. They have no sacred ordination status, such as that of the Old Testament priests (see chapter 14). Moreover, *kathistēmi* suggests nothing about the actual procedures leading up to the installation of elders. The appointment by Titus was the final act in the process and thus summarizes the whole process.

The phrase "in every city" is another way of saying "in every church." As the New Testament writers consistently record, the local church embraced all believers within a particular city (see Acts 20:17). The New Testament never speaks of *churches* within a city, only *the church*. Thus, in each city, that is, each church, Titus was to designate a plurality of elders. "Thus Titus," writes F.J.A. Hort, "was in this respect to do what Paul and Barnabas had done in the cities of Southern Asia Minor on their return from the first missionary journey."²

A key point of emphasis is that Titus is to make his appointments according to Paul's guidelines: "as I directed you." The "I" is emphatic in the original language, so it is an authoritative directive from the apostle himself. The verb "directed" (*diatassō*) means "command," "ordered," or "charged." Paul gave specific, apostolic directives on this vital matter so that neither Titus nor the local Christians could do as they pleased. These apostolic directives remain universally binding for local churches today.

THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS

What exactly were Paul's directives for appointing elders? Our translation reads: "Namely, if any man be above reproach." In order to better grasp what Paul is saying, we need to expand his words a bit: "Appoint elders as I had directed you, that is, consider only the kind of man who is above reproach in moral character for appointment to eldership." F.F. Bruce's paraphrase conveys Paul's meaning quite well:

The reason I left you behind in Crete was this: I wanted you to set right the things that remained to be dealt with, and in particular to appoint elders in each city, in accordance with my directions.

You remember those directions of mine about the kind of man who is fit to be appointed as an elder—one who is beyond reproach.... The man who exercises pastoral leadership must be beyond reproach because that befits a steward in God's house.³

As in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, the apostolic qualifications are the basis for appointment to eldership. These qualifications represent God's standards that no man or organization has the right to change. Christian elders must be qualified according to God's criteria:

...[5b] 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. [10] For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, [11] who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain (Titus 1:5b-11; verse references added).

Note that Paul does not change subjects in verse 6, although he does change from the plural, "elders" (v. 5), to the singular, "any man [whoever]" (v. 6). So in verse 6, Paul is still speaking about elders, although he uses the singular term "any man." Paul uses the same singular construction, "if any man aspires to the office of overseer," in 1 Timothy 3:1.

ABOVE REPROACH: The term "above reproach" (*anegklētos*, a synonym of *anepilēptos*, 1 Tim. 3:2) means "unaccused," that is, one whose character or conduct is free from any damaging moral or spiritual accusations. This first qualification, as in 1 Timothy, stands out as

the fundamental qualification under which all other qualifications are subsumed. John Calvin's summary of this overarching qualification is worth repeating: "By *anegklēton*, blameless, he does not mean someone who is free from every fault, for no such man could ever be found, but one marred by no disgrace that could diminish his authority—he should be a man of unblemished reputation."⁴

Paul immediately lists two critical areas of the prospective elder's life that especially must be above reproach: the elder's marital-sexual life and the management of his children.

THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE: See comments on 1 Timothy 3:2.

HAVING CHILDREN WHO BELIEVE: Not only is an elder to be maritally faithful, "a one-woman man," he must also have proper control of his children. The translation, "having children who believe," is better rendered as "having faithful children," which is the choice in the *Authorized King James Version*. The Greek word for "believe" is *pistos*, which can be translated either actively as "believing" (1 Tim. 6:2) or passively as "faithful," "trustworthy," or "dutiful" (2 Tim. 2:2).

The contrast made is not between believing and unbelieving children, but between obedient, respectful children and lawless, uncontrolled children. The strong terms "dissipation or rebellion" stress the children's behavior, not their eternal state. A faithful child is obedient and submissive to the father. The concept is similar to that of the "faithful servant" who is considered to be faithful because he or she obeys the Master and does what the Master says (Matt. 24:45-51).

The parallel passage in 1 Timothy 3:4 states that the prospective elder must keep "his children under control with all dignity." Since 1 Timothy 3:4 is the clearer passage, it should be allowed to help interpret the ambiguity of Titus 1:6. "Under control with all dignity" is closely parallel with "having trustworthy children." In the Titus passage, however, the qualification is stated in a positive form—the elder must have children who are trustworthy and dutiful.

Those who interpret this qualification to mean that an elder must have believing, Christian children place an impossible burden upon a father. Even the best Christian fathers cannot guarantee that their children will believe. Salvation is a supernatural act of God. God, not good parents (although they are certainly used of God), ultimately brings salvation (John 1:12,13).

In striking contrast to faithful children are those who are wild or insubordinate: "not accused of dissipation or rebellion." These are very strong words. "Dissipation" means "debauchery," "profligacy," or "wild, disorderly living" (cf. 1 Peter 4:3,4; Luke 15:13). "Rebellion" means to be "disobedient," "unruly," or "insubordinate." Wild, insubordinate children are a terrible reflection on the home, particularly on the father's ability to guide and care for others. A man who aspires to eldership but has profligate children is not a viable candidate for church leadership.

The unquestionable necessity for a prospective elder to be above reproach as a husband and father is reinforced in verse 7a: "For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward." Paul's repetition of the idea that an elder must be "above reproach" shows the intensity of his feelings on this matter. The conjunction "for" in verse 7a shows the close, logical connection in thought with verse 6. Verse 7a illuminates a profound reason for the necessity of the qualifications that appear in verse 6: an elder is God's household manager. Since an elder must manage God's household, it logically follows that he must be able to manage his own family. This is the same reasoning Paul uses in 1 Timothy 3:5: "if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?"

In verse 7a, Paul switches to the title "overseer" (*episkopos*): "For the overseer must be above reproach." Some scholars try to assert that the change in terminology indicates a change of subject. They claim that Paul is no longer talking about the elders but about the church overseer. They say that the church overseer is selected from among the elders, who comprise an informal body of senior members. The overseer is then the official leader of the church.⁵ Thus, they conclude, Titus was instructed to appoint from among the elders an "overseer" for each city.

This interpretation, however, violates the natural reading of the passage. The text does not say that the overseer is chosen from the body of elders. Furthermore, if verse 7 begins a list of qualifications for someone other than the elders of verses 5 and 6—someone superior to the elders—it is a most confusing and awkward subject change. Such a change makes complete nonsense out of the transitional word "for" that connects verses 6 and 7. The clear message of verse 5 is that Paul left Titus in Crete to appoint "elders," not to appoint elders and an overseer or an overseer from among the elders. It is best to affirm the

standard interpretation that "overseer" is an interchangeable term for *elder*, and that there is no change of subject between verses 6 and 7.

The term *overseer* stresses function more than honor, and in this case is better suited to the image of the household manager than the term *elder*. The singular form "overseer" can be explained as a generic singular just as is the case in 1 Timothy 3:2. Paul has already switched from the plural "elders" in verse 5 to the singular "any man" [any elder] in verse 6, so we should not be surprised by his use of the singular "overseer," which agrees with the singular "any man" in verse 6 and focuses the reader's attention on the individual character of the overseer.

An overseer must be above reproach because he is "God's steward" (*oikonomos*). The Greek word *oikonomos* means house manager (*oikos* is the Greek word for "house" or "household"). Thus a steward is a manager, administrator, or trustee of someone else's household, property, or business (Luke 12:42; 16:1-8; Gal. 4:2). A steward acts on behalf of another's interests or possessions. He is accountable and responsible to another for what is entrusted to his care.

"Steward" is an appropriate description for an elder. Since the local church is called the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15), an elder who manages it can be rightfully called a steward. Paul's point in using the household steward imagery is simple and profound: since an elder is God's household steward, he must be morally and spiritually above reproach. E.F. Scott succinctly expresses Paul's logic: "In an ordinary household the most trusty servant was chosen as steward, and the same rule must obtain in the household of God."⁶

We should also note that Paul's emphasis is on God as the steward's Master and owner. The steward is *God's* household manager, not the church's. Thus the household belongs to God, not to the elders. God demands that those to whom His precious children are entrusted be morally and spiritually fit. He will not have unfit, untrustworthy stewards caring for His children and the truth of the gospel.

After masterfully demonstrating why an elder must be above reproach in verse 7a, Paul continues his list of qualifications in verse 7b, where he enumerates five sinful vices. When any one of these vices controls a person's life, it renders that person "reproachful" and disqualifies him from being a steward of God's household:

- "self-willed"
- "quick-tempered"
- "addicted to wine"
- "pugnacious"
- "fond of sordid gain"

We would not want a person who is controlled by any one of these vices to manage our family or our possessions, and neither does God.

SELF-WILLED: To be self-willed or arrogant is the opposite of being "gentle" [forbearing], which is one of the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:3. A self-willed man wants his own way. He is stubborn, arrogant, and inconsiderate of others' opinions, feelings, or desires. A self-willed man is headstrong, independent, self-assertive, and ungracious, particularly toward those who have a different opinion. A self-willed man is not a team player, and the ability to work as a team is essential to eldership.

We must remember that the local congregation belongs to God, not to the overseer. The overseer is God's servant, not a master or owner, thus he has no right to be self-willed when caring for God's precious people. A self-willed man will scatter God's sheep because he is unyielding, overbearing, and blind to the feelings and opinions of others (2 Peter 2:10).

QUICK-TEMPERED: One of God's attributes is that He is slow to anger, so His stewards must also be slow to anger. Man's anger is a hindrance to the work of God, "for the anger of a man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). Since an elder must deal with people and their problems, a "hothead" will quickly find much material to fuel his anger. Proverbs warns against the perils of an angry man: "An angry man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression" (Prov. 29:22). With his ugly, angry words, a quick-tempered man will destroy the peace and unity of God's family. The fierce looks and harsh words of the quick-tempered man will tear people apart emotionally, leaving people sick and destroyed in spirit. So a man who desires to be a church shepherd must be patient and self-controlled.

Of course, everyone experiences anger, and leaders who must deal with contentious situations often may experience a great deal of anger.

Hudson Taylor, for example, confessed his own struggle with anger: "My greatest temptation is to lose my temper over the slackness and inefficiency so disappointing in those on whom I depended. It is no use to lose my temper—only kindness. But oh, it is such a trial."⁷ The issue is whether or not an individual who aspires to pastoral eldership recognizes and controls his anger. If he isn't controlled, he's a powder keg ready to go off in the midst of the next problem.

ADDICTED TO WINE AND PUGNACIOUS: Both of these qualifications are covered in 1 Timothy 3:3.

FOND OF SORDID GAIN: The Greek word, *aischrokerdēs*, used here is very similar in meaning to *aphilargyros* ("free from the love of money") used in 1 Timothy 3:3. See comments on 1 Timothy 3:3.

After listing five vices, Paul next lists seven virtues. Verse 8 begins with "but," which contrasts the five vices of verse 7 with the seven virtues of verses 8 and 9. God requires His stewards to be characterized by these virtues.

HOSPITABLE: See comments on 1 Timothy 3:2.

LOVING WHAT IS GOOD: Closely associated with hospitality, "loving what is good" is a positive virtue that is required of those who seek to help people and live as Christlike examples. The Greek word used here is *philagathos*, which one Greek lexicon defines as "one who willingly and with *self-denial* does good, or is kind."⁸ William Hendriksen explains the word as "ready to do what is beneficial to others."⁹ The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* states: "According to the interpretation of the early Church it relates to the unwearying activity of love."¹⁰

King David was a lover of goodness. He spared his enemy Saul, who had to reluctantly admit: "And you have declared today that you have done good to me, that the Lord delivered me into your hand and yet you did not kill me. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely?" (1 Sam. 24:18, 19a). David sought to show kindness to his deceased friend Jonathan, Saul's son, by taking Jonathan's crippled son, Mephibosheth, into his own house (2 Sam. 9).

Job's friends had to admit that he was a lover of goodness: "Behold, you have admonished many, And you have strengthened weak hands.

Your words have helped the tottering to stand, And you have strengthened feeble knees" (Job 4:3,4). But the greatest example of one who loved goodness is our Lord Jesus Christ, who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38b).

An elder who loves goodness seeks to do helpful, kind things for people. He will be loving, generous, and kind toward all and will never sink to evil, retaliatory behavior (Acts 11:24; Rom. 12:21; 15:2; Gal. 6:10; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Peter 3:13). In contrast, Paul prophesied that in the last days more people will be "lovers of self, lovers of money...without self-control...haters of good." (2 Tim. 3:3). A society that is led by lovers of good rather than haters of good is truly blessed.

SENSIBLE: For some unexplainable reason, the *New American Standard Bible* translates the same Greek term, *sōphrōn*, as "prudent" in 1 Timothy 3:2, and "sensible" in Titus 1:8. *Sensible* is the better choice of the two English translations. See comments on the word "prudent" in 1 Timothy 3:2.

JUST: "Just" (*dikaíos*) means "righteous" or "upright." To be righteous is to live in accordance with God's righteous standards, to be law-abiding. John writes that "the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous" (1 John 3:7).

An elder who is righteous can be counted on to be a principled man and to make fair, just, and righteous decisions for the church (Prov. 29:7). Job is a good example of a just man:

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil (Job 1:1).

"I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
My justice was like a robe and a turban.
I was eyes to the blind,
And feet to the lame.
I was a father to the needy,
And I investigated the case which I did not know.
And I broke the jaws of the wicked,
And snatched the prey from his teeth" (Job 29:14-17).

God's steward, then, must be like Job. He must live a morally upright life and be clothed in practical righteousness.

DEVOUT: To be "devout" (*hosios*) is to be firmly committed to God and His Word. It is to be separated unto God and pleasing to God. Despite the changing winds of culture and circumstances, the devout person faithfully clings to God and His Word.

One of the terrible facts of Israel's history is that many of its leaders were not "just" and "devout," so the people were led astray. An elder must not lead people astray! He must model godly commitment, character, and conduct, and thereby lead people in righteousness and devotion to God.

SELF-CONTROLLED: God's steward must be characterized by self-control and self-discipline in every aspect of life, particularly in his physical desires (Acts 24:25; 1 Cor. 7:9; 9:25). An undisciplined man has little resistance to sexual lust, anger, slothfulness, a critical spirit, or other base desires. He is easy prey for the devil.

Solomon warns against the undisciplined man's vulnerability to all the enemies of his soul: "Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit" (Prov. 25:28). In Solomon's time, walls were a strategic part of a city's defense system. A strong and secure city fortified its walls. Solomon likens a person's power of self-control to the walled fortifications of a city. Without self-control, a person is exposed to attack and becomes easy prey for any enemy.

Self-control is an essential part of the Spirit-controlled life (Gal. 5:23). Leaders who lack discipline frustrate their fellow workers as well as those they lead. Not only are they poor examples, but they cannot accomplish what needs to be done. Consequently, their flock is poorly managed and lacks adequate spiritual care.

HOLDING FAST THE FAITHFUL WORD...ABLE BOTH TO EXHORT IN SOUND DOCTRINE AND TO REFUTE THOSE WHO CONTRADICT: Verse 9 presents the final and crucial point in the Pauline catalog of elder qualifications. This is the heart of Paul's concern. The verses following this qualification elaborate on why this qualification is so indispensable to an elder and to the local churches of Crete (Titus 1:10-16). This last requirement is more than just

another personal character quality, it is a specific task the elder must be able to do: to teach correct doctrine and reprove false teachers.

In order for an elder to exhort in sound doctrine and reprove false teachers, he must first be wholeheartedly committed to sound doctrine. So Paul begins by saying that an elder must "[hold] fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching." By "word" (*logos*), Paul means the original preaching or oral proclamation of the gospel message which they heard and received. It is God's message of salvation and life in Christ. This "word" is described as (1) "faithful" (trustworthy) and as (2) "in accordance with the teaching." The "word" is "faithful" because it is in full agreement with "the teaching." "The teaching" refers to the apostolic message, that is, the authentic, authoritative, fixed body of doctrine taught by Christ and communicated by His holy apostles. There is only one apostolic doctrine (Acts 2:42; Eph. 4:5), one standard, and one teaching, and it is absolutely "faithful." Any teaching that contradicts the apostles' teaching as recorded in the New Testament is false, untrustworthy, and from the devil (Titus 1:10 ff; Gal. 1:8,9).

God requires that an elder be "holding fast" to His Word. "Holding fast" (*antechō*) means "cling firmly to," "be devoted to," or "adhere wholeheartedly to." "Paul...calls for the overseer's firm acceptance of [the faithful word],"¹¹ writes George Knight. This term implies unshakable, fervent conviction and commitment. Newport White says that this requirement for elders suggests "the notion of withstanding opposition."¹² A man who doesn't tenaciously adhere to orthodox, biblical doctrine doesn't qualify to lead God's household because he, who is himself in error and unbelief, will mislead God's people. Such a man is no match for "deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). The priests, kings, and leaders of the Old Testament who did not hold firmly to God's law were swept away by the pressures of idolatrous religion. So, too, an elder who rejects or is uncertain about biblical doctrine will, along with the flock, be devoured by wolves.

The reason an elder is required to adhere firmly to the Word is so that he "may be able," that is, "equipped" to perform two specific tasks: (1) exhort believers and (2) refute opponents. "A pastor needs two voices," writes Calvin, "one for gathering the sheep and the other for driving away wolves and thieves. The Scripture supplies him with the means for doing both."¹³

Without question, Paul requires *all* elders, not just some, to be able

to exhort in sound doctrine and rebuke false teachers. In 1 Timothy 3:2, Paul requires all elders to be "able to teach." Titus 1:9 expands on 1 Timothy 3:2 by adding that an elder must "be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute" false teachers. We must require the same from *all* our elders.

Exhortation is closely associated with teaching (1 Tim. 4:13; 6:2), but while teaching primarily relates to the intellect, exhortation chiefly influences the conscience, heart, will, and actions of the hearer. Exhortation urges people to receive and to apply the truth that has been taught.

Specifically, elders are to exhort believers "in sound doctrine." The word "sound" means healthy or physically whole (Luke 5:31; 3 John 2). Here it is used metaphorically to describe teaching, so it means "correct," "wholesome," or "sound" teaching. "Sound doctrine" is in direct contrast to false teaching, which is diseased, corrupted, and defiled. Diseased doctrine ruins the lives of its adherents (1 Tim. 6:3-5), while sound doctrine produces godly, clean, wholesome, healthy lives (Titus 1:13; 2:1). The congregation's health and well-being depends upon elders who continually "exhort in sound doctrine." No man qualifies for eldership unless he is able to use God's Word in such a manner.

As in Acts 20:28-31, an elder's duty is to protect the church from false teachers—those who speak against "sound doctrine." Thus an elder must be able "to refute those who contradict" sound doctrine. A more accurate translation of the word "refute" (*elenchō*) in this context is "rebuke" or "reprove," which is used in verse 13. Verse 13 is actually a concrete application of verse 9, so the purpose of rebuking a false teacher would be "that they may be sound in the faith." To qualify for eldership, then, one must be able to detect false teaching and confront it with sound doctrine.

The climactic significance of this last qualification is made clear in verses 10-16: "For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain" (Titus 1:10,11). The situation in Crete was alarming. There were "many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers." In such a threatening environment the churches' greatest need was for shepherd elders who maintained unwavering allegiance to God's Word and had the ability to exhort, teach, and reprove.

Without the appointment of qualified elders, the churches of Crete were destined to remain weak and disorderly. With Titus' effort to appoint qualified elders, however, there was every reason to believe that the churches would flourish despite the surrounding dangers.