

For The Sake of God's Elect, Appoint Elders

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[0 : 00] 5 of 7 on life in the Father's house. Next week we'll be on the office of deacons and also because Sunday school we'll be looking at 1 Timothy 3 quite a bit. I wanted to broaden it so today our sermon text will come from Titus chapter 1. Please turn to Titus chapter 1.

1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are the pastoral epistles. They're letters giving instructions on pastors and elders. So the author of this letter is Paul and he's writing to Titus but he's really writing to the entire congregation. This congregation, it's really a series of congregations throughout the island and the Greek islands, the Mediterranean. The name of this island is Crete.

That's the context of this. As I read it, remember we're reading God's very own word to you, his people. We believe that it is inspired, inerrant, infallible, clear, and sufficient. If you believe that when we're done reading the scripture, I'll say this is the word of the Lord. We'll respond with thanks be to God. Titus 1, we'll start at verse 1, we'll go all the way through verse 9.

Paul, a servant of God, an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie promised before the world began, but hath in due times manifested his word through preaching which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior. Verse 4, to Titus, mine own son, after the common faith, grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior. For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly, for a bishop must be blameless as the steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not even filthy lucre, but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, and he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Thanks be to God. Indeed, you may be seated. The Bible says that the grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever. Would you pray with me?

[3 : 04] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Man, let's pray.

chief shepherd of our souls. We pray that you will minister to us for your glory, Lord. May you be glorified in this little congregation. Amen.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Bible calls every congregation to appoint elders. I need to confess that after one year of being part of this church plant alongside each one of you, maybe it's true that the sermon titles are starting to reflect my personal desires.

Take a look at your bulletin. What's the sermon title? Well, it comes from verses one and five. This is what I'm asking. For the sake of God's elect, appoint elders. When you think of an elder, I mean, that topic for most of us, it does bring up different emotions and not all of them are good.

[4 : 38] Is that true for you? God's word says a lot about how he orders the church. And what we're called to as a church. But yet we enter it trembling, you know.

The fool storms in where angels dare to tread. And that's exactly what we have with the church. When you think of an elder, the type of person you would want to appoint, it's probably a different image as our ideal, as the type of elders God has actually used throughout all of the New Testament and all of church history.

Let me give you just one example. reflecting back on his late teenage years, this eventual elder in the 1700s who had been a sailor and eventually a sea captain, he wrote this.

At that time in my life, I was capable of anything. I had not the least fear of God before my eyes, nor, so far as I remember, the least sensibility of conscience.

That's a scary 19-year-old. And that describes every one of us until the Lord saves us and gives us a new nature and conforms us into Christ's likeness.

[5 : 58] The name of this eventual elder and pastor was John Newton. And his story got darker before God redeemed him. John Newton worked as a sailor and his ship then was going to Sierra Leone, which I believe is on the west coast of Africa.

And so you know triangular trade in the 1700s. This was his lot in life. It's what he started to do for work. And when he became a sea captain, the ship he was in charge of, it was a slave trading ship. Well, the part of his story that's less known is that before he became the captain of that ship, he had already been working in Sierra Leone because he was an indentured servant, basically a slave himself.

So John Newton was a slave in Africa, then eventually was able to break away, get onto this ship, and he became this captain that was taking slaves to go work for people in forced labor.

God saved this man. God saved John Newton. Not only did God save him, God showed him the depths of his sin and God grew him in his faith.

[7 : 08] And then God matured him into godliness. So the righteousness of Christ was growing into him more and more. But John Newton never lost that sensitivity of how far God had saved him.

You know John Newton because he's the pastor who also wrote many hymns. The most famous is Amazing Grace. Amazing Grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

And as a Christian, he would reflect back and he described slave trade as abominable. And he worked alongside William Wilberforce in English Parliament to abolish slavery in England quick and first.

So he was on the forefront of that because he knew the depth from which God had saved him and redeemed him. The pattern we see in the New Testament with the elders and apostles and then throughout church history, that's why biographies are so encouraging is that every single one will be the first to say, I am the worst of sinners.

Amazing Grace that saved a wretch like me. They'll be the first ones to say that. And that's the phrase I want you to latch on to. Why does God do that?

[8 : 18] Why does God grow his church and serve his church using wretches that he saved? And the answer is in verse one. God uses elders for the sake of the faith of God's elect.

So I'm going to use just your auditory as you're listening. Okay, I'm going to use seven times that phrase for the sake of God's elect. And these are seven pleas I see from the text. You can listen for them. So first, what does Paul tell the church and also Titus is the need for elders?

Do we even need elders? Can't we just have this gathering like we imagine maybe Acts 2 where a bunch of Christians, thousands of Christians just show up and they just worship God in whatever way they want.

In spirit and in truth. Just why even be organized in a church with elders? Well, on one hand, it's true. God does not need elders. It's not God who needs elders, right?

God does not need a wretch that he's saved to speak gospel truth. God can speak through a donkey. In fact, he has done that. Remember Balaam's donkey in the Old Testament? Would it be so much better?

[9 : 25] Pick your favorite preacher, Alistair Begg, or whoever you... It would be better to hear God directly through the donkey than any man. It would be. God does not need elders. Who is it that needs elders, according to Scripture?

Because Paul is having to write this letter. Peter, apparently there is insubordination and rioting in these islands of Crete. Apparently there is much disorder. We're going to see there are empty talkers that are coming in and they're deceiving many.

And Titus has been undermined. Nobody cares really what Titus thinks. It's going to have to have something in your hand from someone we all do respect, Paul. And you bring this letter and then we can see if we can even talk with you, Titus.

So there's a need right now in Crete. There's no order. There's division. And who should we listen to, Titus or these empty talkers over here? They're confused. So I agree with John Calvin that this little epistle was more for the congregation than it was for Titus.

He says, do what you already know I told you to do. That's why I left you. Have this letter in hand to do those very things now. He says in verse 5, appoint elders in every town.

[10 : 32] Well, God gives elders. Look at verse 1. It's for the sake of the faith of God's elect and your knowledge of the truth. It's the same pattern that Paul is describing for himself.

Why was Paul an apostle? First of all, so that they can know the truth. Secondly, so that they can grow in the knowledge of Christ. And then thirdly, they can accord with godliness. It works its way out.

And for that same reason, God will use elders to carry on that pattern of growth within his church. We see the connection then, okay, as the word of God is preached and ministered, look at what happens in verse 2.

You grow in your hope of eternal life. The role of the elders is to minister to the people of God the promises of God through preaching. God is truth.

There's no lying in God. And the promises that God has gave since before the ages began, all of the Bible is the gospel. You need to have the gospel through all of the Bible ministered to God's people.

[11 : 33] He's manifested his gospel truth at the proper time, we're told in verse 3, through preaching. Many think they're being creative and being wiser than God by trying to organize Socratic discussions or maybe theater and drama, because those are way more effective, way more stimulating than preaching.

And on one hand, I agree. However, God is the most wise. It's somehow, it's mysterious, but God, through elders, ministering the gospel promises from all of the Bible through the word of God to a congregation, that's how God works the hope of eternal life.

That's how God establishes his people in the faith of knowing God and that knowledge of God conforming in godliness. So that's, biblically, the reason for that apostolic ministry from Paul to Titus to elders to the congregation.

It's the same continuous purpose that God has. I'll point out that in verse 5, he says, to appoint, the next word is elders. Every time that word is used in the New Testament, it's used in the plural.

There's always an S at the end of it. Our constitution that we're proposing, it says, the responsibility of every elder, so there's a plurality here, all of them, every elder has the same responsibility, and that's to exercise biblical authority.

[12 : 54] Each elder will give an account to Christ for the souls entrusted to their care. Therefore, our proposed constitution says, decisions shall be reached with prayerful consideration and a spirit of humility with each elder regarding one another before himself.

You see the need for checks and balances and plurality and accountability. There's so much at stake. It's the faith of the elect that is at stake. That faithful ministry, it's for the good of God's people.

Paul says, it's the very ones that Christ purchased with his own precious blood. And this is why Christians, as we gather, we become a body, we become a congregation.

And this congregation is organized. God has said a lot in his word in all the New Testament to organize his church. We shouldn't be having to guess or it should never turn into power struggles. It should be spirit of humility and submission searching his word and organizing ourselves, reforming ourselves as a church more and more and more according to the word of God.

We defer to one another. We listen to one another. We are seeking to, with the spirit of unity, listen to the congregation. In our Constitution, there are so many opportunities and expectations where the congregation is responsible for voting and giving assent or pausing, pumping the brakes.

[14 : 14] All of that is because these are wretches that God has saved and he's ordered his church this way because it pleases him. So I agree with another pastor from the 1800s, Charles Bridges.

He says, the gospel does not shut us up in our own private interests as if we had no love for our neighbor. But everything done in the name of Christ and his local congregation is because the gospel grows our love for the neighbor, for one another within the body.

Well, the first observation is simply the pattern that Paul sets.

It's for the sake of the faith of God's elect that Paul tells Titus to appoint elders. And now let's also see from these first five verses setting up the list of qualifications.

When you do appoint elders, we're recognizing layers of authority above those elders. So what are those? What are the authorities above elders that rule over them?

[15 : 19] Paul says in verse one, it's Jesus Christ. Through the ministry of Jesus Christ, Christ appointed apostles. These are the ones through whom the New Testament revelation came.

The Holy Spirit breathed out the epistles and letters and the prophecies of the New Testament. So we have Jesus Christ, the apostles. Elders are to be, if an apostle calls himself a slave of God, an elder is to be a slave, much more so.

They've been entrusted in verse three with the command of God, our Savior. So it's the command of Christ given through his word that rules over the elders as well. And you're growing in the people a knowledge of the truth.

So the elders are under the truth and who has a knowledge of the truth? It's the congregation and it's manifested in God's word through preaching. So there's so much that is over the elders.

The elders are under God's word. They're under the congregation that's growing in the knowledge of God. They are under Jesus Christ himself and under the apostolic authority. In other words, when an elder is no longer aligning with the green pastures of the truth that God has made really clear through his word, they've gone over here away from the green pastures where there's wolves and thistles and cactus.

[16:36] They are no longer under the authorities. They have no authority. I know some of you have been in churches like that where it seems like someone standing up here is way out of line with God's word.

The further you go away, the less authority you have. In fact, you have no authority the minute an elder departs from what God has said in his word. And this is so important that we understand. So much of the hurt and the pain is probably because an elder being fallen, being a saved wretch has done that.

So maybe the Lord needs to heal you. You need to confess to the Lord, Jesus, I trust you. You're the chief shepherd of my soul. I have a hard time with a church and with fallen elders who might hurt me that way again.

And ask for the Lord to heal you. There are authorities that rule over elders. Elders are under God's word. An elder can never be self-appointed.

It's Christ through the Holy Spirit affirmed by the congregation that appoints an elder. An elder does not self-appoint. I'll clarify something a bit further here that we mentioned in Sunday school.

[17:44] In verse 5, Paul tells Titus to appoint elders. And this is what the church in the Middle Ages and then in some cases a magisterial model of church government, they still have a role of bishop.

So they would view Titus as a bishop. He's in charge of the region of Crete and he's going to appoint elders in every single one of the congregations. We see this as, we don't see Titus as a bishop.

We see this being unique to the New Testament where God is, he is setting the New Covenant church in motion. He's breathing out scriptures. He's giving, you know, the letter to Titus.

This is part of the New Testament. And there are no more apostles. We believe that if someone claims to be an apostle with a new revelation, they're going to say this is now scripture as well, that they are a false teacher.

And that's what we need to guard against that. We believe that God has given all of his full counsel in his word and that as Paul wrote to Timothy that the church is fully equipped to do every good work that God calls them to.

[18:44] So we see here that Titus is having a letter in hand from Paul and it's to teach the congregation this biblical way of appointing. We see in Acts that the congregation was worshiping, they were praying, they were fasting.

And with the leadership of the Holy Spirit, they laid hands and sent off Paul and Barnabas on ministry. So how does God appoint? And how does Titus appoint?

He appoints through this biblical process, this pattern that we see of the church gathering for prayer and fasting and then a laying on of hands. And then we read that it was the Holy Spirit who appointed, the Holy Spirit who sent out.

The Holy Spirit sends out, raises up, and appoints through his church. That's the biblical pattern. I'll highlight from our Constitution that elders have a real authority.

There are all these layers of authority over elders and therefore all of the authority delegated into this one office, it is real because it's not self-claimed authority, it's the authority of scriptures for the office of elder.

[19:51] The scriptures, according to our Constitution, the scriptures designate the elders as those who rule in the church, citing 1 Timothy 5.17 and Hebrews 13.17. We see this office as

synonymous.

So the terms shepherd and pastor are the same. We see bishop as being the same and elder as the same. It's all the same term in overseer and ruler. It's synonymous.

So the principle here is even important. The Bible doesn't care as much for the church what it's called. It's really the emphasis on what that office does. And what is the office of elder?

It's to care for the church of God. And there's more, but I want to emphasize it's less about the title or the label. If you have someone chasing a title, chasing that position, instead of understanding the work that an elder does, then it's a wrong focus.

And it's most likely a red flag. So it's not about title. It's about function within the body. God's people are therefore required to submit to the office of elder when such authority is biblically exercised.

[20 : 58] The scripture is made a lot clear. And when an elder is aligned with scripture, seeking to fulfill the function that scripture has called upon, then the congregation will respect and honor that office.

We see the congregation as being the ones who set apart the elders. And therefore, as representatives, there is that real authority entrusted to that office. While we are a church plant, are we out of order?

And in a sense, yes. We are needing to appoint elders to remain biblical. biblical. It's similar to a position that actually most of you are in. I'm not a member. Should I be taking the Lord's Supper? Well, you need to understand that the Lord's Supper is for those who belong to Christ. You need to be taking steps toward membership. You need to be pursuing that and moving toward that. So I feel like it's so important that we be honest and truthful about where we are, but where we're heading, what we see as the biblical order, what God is calling us to.

And in terms of accountability, there's no decision made for this congregation without the elders of the sending church acting on behalf. But I am asking you to pray that God will raise up elders because if Crete could come up with elders for every single city with all of their problems, God will do that here too.

[22 : 15] He will do that. So we need to be moving toward that biblical norm. And my point here that I want you to simply see that it's for the sake of God's elect that he promises he will never leave any congregation without elders.

It's ultimately Christ's responsibility to raise up the elders. You know, we often want to try to become man-centered and not trust in him, but you need to join me. We need to trust him.

He will do what he has promised and he promises he will raise up elders for every congregation. He will feed his people through those men that he raises up. All right, so that's the authority that rules over the elders.

Before I get to the list of qualifications, because that's what the congregation in Crete needed to look at. Well, how do we know? How do we discern this? How can we vote yes or no? Give us something tangible to look at.

So before I even get to that, I want to go to the parallel text, which is 1 Timothy 3. You're welcome to turn there. 1 Timothy 3.1. Many of you, this will be very familiar.

[23 : 23] 1 Timothy 3.1. This is what Paul is encouraging Timothy with. Timothy, as I mentioned, he was the pastor in Ephesus and God is calling him to raise up men to whom you can entrust the gospel, who will be able to provide sound teaching and doctrine and minister and provide that biblical care for the flock.

Here's what Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1.3. The saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

The reason I feel this is important to mention here is because the qualifications is what the congregation can look at. These are what we would use as the criteria for the external call.

Well, remember, no man can appoint himself to be elder. It has to be a congregation appointing a man and calling a man to be their overseer, to be one of the elders and shepherds. Well, who is it then that should even be put forward for consideration?

And what Paul tells Timothy is that if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Those two words, aspire and desire, those are less about an external call from a congregation.

[24 : 37] It's looking more internally. Is a man aspiring? They say you aspire when you perspire. Is a man sweating, serving, working, laboring?

Is he reading? Is he studying? Is he growing in doctrine? Does he have a care for the souls already? Is he doing the work? Is he one that others want them to have this man pray for me? I just want you to know and to intercede on my behalf. The Lord says he will hear the prayer of his people. And so that's what it looks like to aspire. It's to do the work.

And if a man desires that, he desires a noble task. It's work. It's work. It's labor. And it is a desire. It's internal. That same pastor I mentioned, John Newton, he gives three criteria, three criterion, I guess, of how you can know if a man should be considered for elder.

Here's the first one. It's the internal call. John Newton says it's a warm and earnest desire to be employed in the service of the church.

[25 : 46] A warm and earnest desire. And if you desire that, you desire a noble task. Why is that so needed? That there will be an internal aspiring and desiring before the church sets you aside to do it?

It's needed because the work of being an elder, this noble task, it is hard and there will be times where you first of all will question yourself. I'm a wretch. God saved a wretch like me?

Who am I? Who am I to minister God's word? And Satan will be the first one to accuse you even more. So why is this needed? Charles Bridges said, discouragements properly sustained and carefully improved become our most fruitful sources of eventual encouragement while love to our work bears us on above our difficulties.

qualities. That's why you need that internal call. I think you need to hear what Charles Spurgeon said about this internal call. Even if it's flowery Victorian language, maybe exaggerated, I just want to share an example.

I ask a pastor, he's a Presbyterian pastor in the area, and I just ask him, what do you most appreciate about this congregation? And his point of reference was a congregation in a different state, another PCA church, that he just said the other elders were really like a governing board.

[27 : 10] He didn't feel like any of them necessarily had a desire or aspiring to do it. They were doing it because they thought they were helping God out. And that was the hardest thing for him.

But he felt like at this congregation God had raised up, truly raised up men who aspired and desired to care for the flock and to provide that oversight. So listen to how Charles Spurgeon describes this. There must be an irresistible, overwhelming craving, enraging thirst for telling others what God has done for your own soul. If any man could be content to be a newspaper editor, a grocer, a farmer, or doctor, a lawyer, or senator, or a king, in the name of heaven and earth, let him go do this instead. For a man so filled with God would utterly weary in any pursuit but that for which his inmost soul pants. who is aspiring?

Who is aspiring to do the work of overseeing, of caring for the souls of others, beginning with your own wife and children if you have a family? In congregation, I think it's also important that we all together as a congregation be really clear.

[28 : 27] There's two separate decisions, I think biblically and also in our bylaws. One is, should these other men become elders? Are they aspiring to do this? Do they fit the biblical criteria?

Then we should appoint them. That's one decision. The other decision is, should the church ask a man to not be distracted or entangled in any other worldly affairs because the church wants to compensate that man for working fully on behalf of the church?

Because the Bible also says it's more shameful than an unbeliever if you can't provide for your own family. But those are two separate decisions. The church can decide, you know, we believe these men are biblical elders and we want to appoint them.

And then the church at the right time can also make that separate decision. Do one or more of these elders, do we want to set them aside, not let them have to worry about working another day job? But those are two separate decisions.

It's easy to go in our mind to the just, well, full-time ministry is the only way. So that's the internal call. For the sake of God's elect, Christ is the one who personally calls.

[29 : 31] He is the one who stirs that desire. And Christ is the one who will provide the means for men who do aspire to become elders according to his will for each congregation.

All right, well, on the internal call, a little bit of context. Now we move on to our sermon text again, back to Titus chapter 1 verse 6. And this is the external test.

I've broken the external test into three parts. So the first part is, what is the man's reputation inside and outside of the church?

This is so important because for us to be in biblical order, we will need to appoint more elders according to God's timing. And we won't rush it because it's for the sake of the faith of the elect. We don't want to do a bad job with it.

But you need to know this. So even if you're thinking I'm sitting here as, and I'm a lady, I'm never going to be an elder, you need to know the biblical criteria. You need to know what God has set before us to use as our guide.

[30 : 34] So the first one is that. What is the man's reputation inside and outside of the church? Look at what Titus chapter 1 verse 6 says. If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife and his children are believers, or other translations faithful, and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

This is a pretty observable reputation inside of a church, but also in the community where we live. Let's break it down. Number one, above reproach. Above reproach.

If a man is aspiring to be an elder, but there's questionable areas of their life, how are they going to really be able to fulfill all of the functions required of an elder, while many areas of their life are still at least questionable, if not guilty.

So I think that one's fairly self-explanatory. A man aspiring to be an elder should think about that. If I have a choice and I'm aware of how this might affect other people, I want to be sensitive to their needs.

I don't want to do anything to discourage or hamper the faith of someone else. I just want to be above reproach before Christ. And the caution is, of course, we can become perhaps legalistic and trying to add on to the moral law.

[31 : 51] And there's a freedom in this, but I think that general care for the souls of others and the more sensitive brother's conscience ought to win over your heart. You love the others and you love what Christ is calling you to do, that you're willing to do it, whatever that is.

The next phrase is, the husband of one wife. I think, in general, this, I think the best interpretation is to say a one woman man.

I'm not going to have us turn to other parts of the Bible necessarily to open up a full doctrine of divorce and remarriage and stuff like that. But Jesus says in Matthew 9, verse 19, because the Pharisees were abusing this.

They were divorcing one wife, remarrying for any reason. It was a selfish, proud, male-dominated culture. And Jesus was very pointed to accuse them and tell them this is wrong.

This does not please God. But Jesus says, if a man divorces his wife, except in the case of adultery, then it's wrong. But in other words, if there's a man whose wife was unfaithful to him, it's biblical grounds for divorce, as I would see it, and remarriage as well.

[32 : 58] I know some conservative denominations have been divided on this. Our Constitution, barring from these other Reformed Baptist exemplars, makes it clear that if that man was not guilty of adultery and biblically passed that test and he remarries, he's been faithful to his wife, he still fits this criteria, the husband of one wife.

The next phrase is that his children are believers. So does this mean that a current elder, his wife gets pregnant and they have a baby, this infant is not yet a believer, he better step down from office, he's automatically disqualified.

I think a better understanding is, as some have said, that translation of faithful, it's a child who outwardly, this is an external test, there's no evidence necessarily that there's secret sin on the part of the elders, what this is guarding against.

If an elder stands behind the pulpit or in the Sunday school class or in the home and ministers God's word in one way, but the family knows the secret sin, the sin that's only with the wife or the children, it will show up generally through children's behavior.

And that's really important for the church to be aware of that. So as a congregation, if we see a potential elder or current elders, three-year-old acting like a three-year-old, maybe regressing and acting like a two-year-old, we would still consider that a faithful household.

[34 : 24] If a 13-year-old is acting like a teenager, that doesn't mean the pastor is disqualified. That's probably our best understanding of that phrase. The next one is not open to the charge of debauchery.

Debauchery is open, blatant sin that brings disrepute to Christ. And the last one is insubordination. Insubordination, to not follow the lead of the authorities above you already.

Remember all the authorities above an elder? And so if an elder has a different job or different vocation or even maybe within the life of a church, if that elder has a really hard time following the authorities above him, that's a red flag because there are many authorities over an elder. If you're not able to follow, then you're not ready to lead. So to sum it up, the elder is to shine as a saved wretch. It's all of God's work in them.

Yet not I, but through Christ in me, he has redeemed me and he is helping me to more and more and more grow in these areas so I can be above reproach and not disqualify myself by my sin.

[35 : 30] I want to highlight here too that because of all these constraints and limitations that really narrowed down, the scope of what an elder is called to do in the life of a church, our constitution wisely I think says this, elders will not invade the biblically defined spheres of other divinely ordained human authorities and will not command God's people regarding matters not specified in scripture except to order the house of God by the application of his word.

Later on in Titus chapter 3 verse 1, he's giving instructions for the whole congregation that you must be submissive to all rulers and all authorities over you. So do you see though the elder's role is really defined, really specific.

He's not to invade the role, biblically defined role of a husband. Elders are not to invade the biblically given authority of fathers or civil rulers or even like secular employers.

An elder has no right really. That's not their scope of the authority. You're trying to go on beyond what God has said is really clear for your authority. So church, for the sake of God's elect, make sure you never appoint an elder before he is above reproach in these clear biblical categories.

The second external test is this, how does the man rule over himself? So the first one is what's his reputation in the church and in the world. The next one is how does the man rule over himself?

[37 : 01] Look at verse 7. For an overseer as God's steward must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

If you're like me, you're thinking who is worthy of such a task? That's what Paul said as well. But I think these categories are beautifully arranged. The first one is a temptation toward arrogance. Arrogance was the downfall of Lucifer himself. Must not be proud or arrogant. Notice how that phrase of arrogance in verse 7, it's answered by the biblical virtue, the sanctified fruit of the spirit in verse 8.

Not arrogant, but holy. Holy means you recognize God is creator. He is holy, holy, holy. And if we approach him through Christ, we are on sacred ground.

We are set apart by the blood of Christ. That's the contrast to arrogance. And not arrogant, but a lover of good, a lover of hospitality, loving others instead of seeking your own gain.

[38 : 19] The arrogant, it's first person singular all the time. I, me, you know. And the call here is hospitality, the good of others.

Not your own interest, but the interest of Christ's bride, his precious church. The next temptation is the internal temptation toward greed. Greedy for gain.

But if Christ is working out the generous love of the cross in the heart of the elder, this will display itself in being upright and being generous toward other.

The next temptation is being quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent. Are those related? Well, it's not ruling yourself well.

Quick-tempered, a drunkard, and violent. It's not a sin to have anger. It's not a sin to feel stress. It's not a sin to feel empty and despairing. Because you, you are living in this broken world.

[39 : 21] What do you do with that? But the biblical virtue is self-control and discipline. And so when we do have those feelings, those challenges, what do we do with them?

We run to the cross. It's a reliance upon Jesus Christ. And it's not turning to violence or alcohol or some type of chemical self-medication and quick-tempered.

Because how are you going to rule over the house of God if you can't rule over your own heart? So our Constitution, the proposed Constitution, has this good language, I believe. It says that the authority of elders, it is conditioned by the fact that elders are themselves members of this local church.

While elders are shepherds over the flock, they are also members of the flock. Therefore, each individual elder is entitled to the same privileges, is obligated by the same responsibilities, and is subject to the same discipline as the other members of the church.

Thus, each individual elder is both under the oversight of his fellow elders and is accountable to the church as a whole. There's a lot of accountability.

[40 : 35] And the call is that Christ will rule over your own heart more and more and more first. But you still have that oversight if you become an officer. You still have the accountability, the oversight, the shepherding care of your own soul by the elders and the same love and process for being forgiven and restored by the congregation.

I'm comforted by how this seems to be a lifelong battle, a lifelong reality. John Newton at age 72. And age 72 in the 1700s is different than 72 now.

92 is the new 72, right? So he wrote that such a wretch should not only be spared and pardoned, but reserved to the honor of preaching by the preaching the gospel, which he has blasphemed and renounced.

This is wonderful indeed. And he prayed, God, the more you have exalted me, the more I ought to abase myself. So I think that over time, the biblical elder will grow more and more and more humble like John Newton and see that.

And it's the cry of John the baptizer. The more you behold Christ for who he is, the more you want to say he must increase and I must decrease. So for the sake of God's elect, ask God's help.

[41 : 52] Every one of you forgot to rule over your own hearts more and more, that your love for Christ will grow and that he will restrain you. All right, here's the third test for the eldership that the congregation needs to look for.

How does the man minister God's word? You need to be able to discern this. Look at verse 9. Paul tells Titus and the whole church that these elders, they must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Charles Bridges commented, it is not enough that there is no poison in the tongue. A qualified elder's teaching must be healing. He must be ministering God's grace to his hearers.

So verse 9, the elder must personally grasp, cling to with conviction, hold firm, the trustworthy word, the faithful word as taught.

Before an elder can teach, he must first be taught. He must receive that faithful teaching that's been entrusted to the church. It's estimated that Paul was disciplined by Barnabas for 13 years.

[43 : 09] Paul, who was a scribe and a master of the law. 13 years for the gospel doctrine to be worked into him before he could be turned loose to go teach.

I don't think that 13 years is a good period for all elders in a local congregation, but it's been an encouragement to me that if God feels to be working very slowly in my own life, look at Paul, how much more God was patient.

So that, why is this in verse 9, so that he may be able to give instruction. All men must desire to hold firm and give instruction privately. Remember those other biblically appointed spheres of authority.

Husbands must lead your wife spiritually. In your workplace, we must know what God's word says for how we are to serve like Daniel. There wasn't a line on Daniel's job description in fallen Babylon that he didn't fulfill with excellence.

We need to know God's word and we need to work that out in every sphere of responsibility. In fact, that is your first trying ground. Are you shepherding? Are you caring for? Are you ministering God's word to your wife, to your children if you have them?

[44 : 14] That is one of the requirements we need to look for as a church as well. Then you will be able to give instruction to God's congregation. See, Titus was not to be a circuit preacher going around doing all the preaching.

Titus was not to put up big screens and simulcast his voice preaching to all these congregations. Every congregation was to appoint elders. And Titus was making sure they are doing it biblically with the authority of Christ himself given through Paul.

Not only do you need to build up God's congregation, you need to be shepherding the congregation toward life of godliness. See, it accords with godliness. You need to have a zeal for the gospel that works its way out in the lives of the congregation.

That's the oversight. That's really what everything is for. It's not only to preach the truth, it's to apply the truth. It's to let God's spirit work it out in the hearts of God's people in tough situations.

That's what you're called to do. If God is stirring you to be an elder. And you need to be ready to pick up the sword of the spirit, the word of God, and fight a defensive battle to rebuke those who contradict it.

[45 : 21] To ground your hope of eternal life by the preaching of the word of God. To refute error. The King James says to convince gainsayers. There will be those mocking the gospel message every day.

In fact, Satan will be lurking within the congregation every time the gospel is preached. Trying to whisper doubts and lies. So as we minister God's word, it needs to be persuasive. It needs to convince the believers of the truth.

So the second test that John Newton gave is that there must in due season appear competent, sufficient gifts as to gifts, knowledge, and utterance.

John Newton had said there needs to be that warm eagerness, that desire. But then there also, with opportunity, if you show up for a Bible study, if we have Sunday school, through discussions, through one-on-one conversations, you are learning to put into words and to be persuasive, to convince others of the truth of the gospel.

That's how God sharpens that. He sets up a series of opportunities for teaching and for growing and using that gift that then becomes a requirement that the congregation expects. Our Constitution summarizes the five functions of an elder this way.

[46 : 31] Number one, it's the spiritual care of the members. Number two, it's the preaching and teaching of God's word, both publicly and privately, along with prayer. Number three, it's the governing and management of the church.

Number four, it's the formative and corrective discipline of the church. Number five, it's the provision of being a role model, though fallen, and it's only through Christ. You are to be an example to the flock, is the command.

The elders, according to our Constitution, are to be reviewed against all this criteria every four years, and the congregation must continually affirm that we believe that each officeholder is fulfilling these biblical requirements.

It's a very high bar. And so, for the sake of God's elect, I encourage each one of you, within the spheres that God has given you, within your role as a son, a brother, a daughter, a wife, a friend, grow in those graces of Christ, grow in your knowledge of Jesus Christ in the gospel, minister sound doctrine, know his word well, because each one of us will be strengthening the congregation, will be blessing one another the more we do.

All right, well, the last external test is simply how it actually happens. What needs and opportunities is God revealing to this congregation? I just want to point out that Paul told Titus to be aware of every town in the island of Crete.

[47 : 57] You've got to have a strategic picture of where is God working, where are their needs, where are their opportunities. Most likely, there were two or more elders appointed in one town a little bit quicker than another for various reasons.

Jesus said, the fields are ripe unto harvest, but the laborers are few. If we look around or look at your own experience, it's true. There is a real scarcity of caring shepherds who will look over the flock of Christ.

So John Newton said, the final evidence, this is the third and last evidence of a proper call, is a corresponding opening in providence by a gradual train of circumstances pointing out the means, the time, the place of entering upon the work of ministry.

It says, you will look back and you will see God's hand like a train with one card after the other of how God gradually nudged you and boom, it happened. Here's a congregation and here is an elder for that congregation.

So church, we may be called upon to evaluate a person and if they've met this biblical criteria, we can affirm that. We believe this person is qualified. We believe that they have been tested and there's no reason they should be kept from a biblical office but there's still this strategic discernment is the need in this congregation.

[49 : 14] Maybe a congregation already has, you know, seven elders and there's an opportunity for church planting. So it's still the job of a biblical church to affirm and test and then to send out and be discerning about that.

Every town needs to have a plurality of elders. Where is God calling us to mobilize? But we would still own that. So maybe it's to send a missionary to another part of the world. We would own that as a congregation.

We would use this same criteria. Then we'd be able to affirm and to send with God's blessing. As we think about, let's call to appoint elders in every town for the sake of God's elect, it can feel overwhelming.

It can feel a lot of pressure. My last John Newton quote for you today, he said, None but he who made the world can make a minister of the gospel.

It's Jesus Christ himself who must do it. We believe that once an elder has been called and stalled and if they are well reviewed, then they would serve in that office for life unless they honorably resign or are disqualified for another reason.

[50 : 22] Charles Spurgeon said, If God calls you to be an elder of his congregation, don't stoop to becoming a king.

The topic of elders and pastors, it does raise emotions. Maybe you will have a bit of a fear of that office or a fear of being under a congregation, actually becoming a member of a congregation that has elders.

One of my fears is that to be an elder for life with such scrutiny and review and accountability constantly that I don't trust myself.

I'm so comforted by the words in both cases of this hymn that the Lord has promised good to me. His word my hope secures.

He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures. So for the sake of God's elect, pray for God to gift and equip men from this congregation that will watch over our souls.

[51 : 35] Will you pray for that with me? Let's thank the Lord. Amen. Amen. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

Father, we are here because we were once lost, but you found us. Our eyes were blind to your glory and your kingdom, but you made us to see by the power of your spirit.

Amen. We trust you, Lord, that grace has brought us this far, and it's your grace that will lead us home. Help us to trust us forever. Amen.