

“Qualifications For Elders”

Penetrating a Dark World

Titus 1:5-9

Dr. Bruce Bickel

February 24, 2017

Bruce: Merciful heavenly Father, we thank You for laughter. We thank You for joy. We thank You for relationships in which we can enjoy one another. It’s all because of the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating us and giving us new life in Christ. So Father, we pray today that we would sit back, that You’d be our teacher, that You’d once again be pleased to open our eyes, that we might see You more clearly for Christ’s sake. Amen and Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Let’s turn in our Bibles, please, to the book of Titus. Our theme is “Penetrating a Dark World.” We’re in Titus chapter 1, verses 5-9. I’ll be reading from the English Standard Version. Titus chapter 1, 5-9.

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers, not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. 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. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he might be able to give instruction in sound doctrine, and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen and Amen. The book of Titus is dealing with three major themes, as we said in the introduction. Chapter one is dealing with *orderliness in the church*. Chapter one has to do with leadership, and we’ll be talking about that today. Chapter one deals with orderliness in the church.

Chapter two deals with *godliness in the home*. It has to do with learning. What is the major place and location of learning? It is to be the home.

And then chapter three is *consistency in the world*. That would be lifestyle. The summary of the book of Titus is these three words—leadership, learning and lifestyle.

Today we come to the first part of our major theme of chapter one, which is *leadership*. Leadership in my mind is basically influencing the behavior of people. Now one of the things that Paul told Titus to do was that Paul told Titus, “I want you to go and influence the condition of people on the island of Crete.” And so Paul left Titus there on the island. And the idea was to organize the local assembly and set in order that which needed to be redone, that needed to be straightened out.

Those little words *set in order* is a medical term. It means to set a broken bone, or to strengthen a crooked rib. That’s what he told Titus to do. Go straighten out a broken bone or a crooked rib.

“Qualifications For Elders”

Now the church is a body. And a pastor must occasionally be a spiritual physician. And sometimes a pastor has to straighten out a broken rib, or straighten out a crooked limb. Sometimes a pastor has the duty to do that.

Now Titus was not the supreme dictator of the island of Crete by any means. But he was Paul’s apostolic authority, his apostolic appointee, his representative. He had the authority to do the work under the apostle Paul.

Now if you look in Acts chapter fourteen, it had been Paul’s policy to ordain elders in the churches that he established. You can read about that in Acts chapter fourteen. But he hadn’t been there long enough to stay in Crete so he could do that activity himself. So he turns that over to his representative, Titus.

Now I think there’s an interesting insight right here. The fact that the standards apply to Christians on the island of Crete are the same standards that apply to the Christians in the city of Ephesus, which I think tells us this: that God’s measure for leadership doesn’t change. It isn’t fluctuating just because it’s a big-city or a small-city church. Biblically, leadership is leadership. And it’s appropriate for the small church that it has the same qualifications for leaders as the megachurch which has the same qualifications for leaders. The church is not the black church, the white church, the Indian church, the Vietnamese church. It’s Christ’s church. It’s His body. And therefore the standards of leadership are going to be the same whatever the church is, under the Lordship of Christ. And I think we need to understand that the leadership qualifications don’t fluctuate because of the size of the church.

And so notice that the very first thing that Paul directs Titus to do is to go visit the churches on the island of Crete and create leadership, spiritual leadership. Now in my mind one of the most important aspects of a pastor’s role is this: to preach the gospel, administer the ordinances of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism, and train leaders, because a church can go only as far as its leaders go. And so the very first thing that Paul directs Titus to do is to go and straighten things out. The churches were functioning. Paul visited the churches. “But the one thing we now need to do is that you need to make the church leadership intact,” because the church can go only as far as the leadership takes it. So let’s take a look at these qualifications that Paul gives to Titus in verses 5-9.

You’ll see a similar correlation of these verses in 1 Timothy chapter 3, verses 1-7.

Transcriber’s Note: 1 Timothy 3:1-7. *“The saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive. For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”*

Bruce: It’s a parallel passage. Some of the same qualifications are listed, but there are some additional ones given in 1 Timothy chapter three.

“Qualifications For Elders”

Now the obvious reason for the theme of leadership is for the health of the church. That’s why leadership must be a priority in a local church. It’s for the health of the church locally. It’s a major theme in church planting. It’s a major theme in church growth. It’s also a major theme in church maturity—church leadership.

Now Paul instructs Titus that setting things straight does not stop at evangelism. In other words, yes, there’s evangelism on the island of Crete. But it didn’t stop there. But it included planting churches. So the sequence is this: *evangelism*. You get a body of people to come together who have responded to the word of God. You create a church. You visit the church. And the next thing you do is what? Create a mission board? No. Train leaders! You don’t start programs. It follows like this: *evangelism, plant the church, create leaders*.

Now I was involved in a situation just like that years ago at my church in Chicago. And I took this seriously after studying the book of Titus. So there was an evangelistic effort. When the people came together, they called me to be the church planting pastor. The first thing that I did after that, when I visited with all the people, the first thing we did was to set up a three-year elder training program, because I knew this. The most important thing that I could do for this new group was to train leaders for the future generation, because a church can go only as far as its leaders take it.

Now that’s the theme of what Paul is teaching Titus. Yes, there’s evangelism. But it doesn’t stop there. It doesn’t stop with church planting. It goes on and trains leaders so that the ministry can flourish, because the whole purpose is this. The health of the church is dependent upon the leadership. So let’s go through some of these qualifications.

Now first of all, let me highlight how the word *elder* is used in other passages of Scripture, in the New Testament. In the book of James, elders are singled out as people to be called in times of trouble. Where does the church go to in times of trouble? James says that they go to the elders. And that’s because they are the men of prayer. James says that if somebody is sick, what are you supposed to do? You call the elders because the elders are men of prayer. So there’s a role that the elders have to help the maturity of the church and the stability of the church because they are the men of prayer. And that’s going to be one of their qualifications.

In 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 1-5, Peter singles out the elders for special exhortation and refers to them as *shepherds*. They shepherd the flock.

Transcriber’s Note: 1 Peter 5:1-5. *“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God that is among you exercising oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”*

Bruce: Now Titus is to appoint elders. That means this—the right men with the right qualifications for the right reason, for the health of the church. That’s the first thing that he needs to do after they have the evangelism, after the churches were planted, after the churches were visited. “Titus, go and make things correct, the things that were not

“Qualifications For Elders”

finished. What you have to do, Titus, is go and finish the things that we started. And what you finish is this. Appoint church leaders, qualified elders.”

Now in Acts chapter twenty, we’re told that the Holy Spirit appoints the elders. He makes them overseers. It’s the work of the Holy Spirit. And only the Holy Spirit makes no mistakes in appointing elders.

So how do you identify such men who might be qualified for the role of the ministry of an elder? Well I think there are several processes that one could outline. One might be this. I think that the current elders of a church should go off and have some retreat, pray together, talk together about the men in the church, and see if there men who are qualified to meet these qualifications and have that discussion and pray about them, and ask the Holy Spirit to raise up those men in the church. I think the elders could do that.

And then I would suggest that they teach the role of elders and the qualifications for elders to the church so that the church can identify the people and come to the elders and say, “I think this man might be qualified. Would you examine him?”

Now that’s what I did. I spent six weeks teaching the flock the qualifications of an elder, because I said, “Your role as a church member is really quite simple. It’s this. Respond to your elders, be subject to your elders, and show up.” That’s the role of a church member. That’s what the Scripture says, to show up. You come to worship. You participate in the activities. And the second thing is that you submit to the elders.

What church should you join? You should join a church where you can submit to the elders because that’s one of your responsibilities. If you can’t submit to the elders, don’t join the church, because you’re violating your church responsibilities as a church member.

You’ve got to know the elders. Do you know who they are? Do you ever interview the elders when you go to a church? You need to find out who they are! Find out what the church stands for.

And so I taught for six weeks on the qualifications of an elder. And then I went to the church and said, “Are there people that you recognize who meet these qualifications? Let us know.”

They came up with three men. They said, “Would you examine them?”

And so I’m going to go through these qualifications here. But that’s how we identified the ones whom the Holy Spirit was raising. You see, the people don’t *elect* elders. They *identify* an elder who has already been chosen by the Holy Spirit. That’s because the Holy Spirit makes no mistakes. We just need to be able to identify them. “Oh, there’s one! Over here is another one!”

Now the danger of this process is this. The most popular guy is going to be the one who is going to be the most recommended. That may not be true. Just because a man is a good leader in the world does not mean that he’s qualified to do it in the church.

And so you have to teach people what they’re looking for to identify these men who will be church leaders. The danger is that the most popular will be the most recommended but not the most well suited.

Now there are three words that Paul uses to describe the role of an elder. The first word is the word *presbuteros*, from which we get the word *Presbyterian*. It means a man

“Qualifications For Elders”

of maturity in conduct, a man of wisdom, a man who has capabilities of leadership. That’s the word *elder, presbuteros*.

The second word is the word *episcopoi*, from which we get the word *Episcopalian*. That’s the word *overseer*. 1 Peter chapter five says “a shepherd of the flock, an overseer.” What does a shepherd do? He wards off the evil ones. He battles the wolves when they come after the flock. He teaches where the sheep are to go to graze. The elder is the shepherd of the flock. That’s the word that Peter uses in 1 Peter chapter five.

But I think that one of the most misunderstood words is the word Paul uses here in Titus, the word *steward*. There is the word *presbuteros*, the word *episcopoi*, and the word *steward*.

Now understand this. What is a steward? A steward is somebody who manages somebody else’s property. Now this is not the elder’s church. Who’s church is it?

Men: God’s.

Bruce: God’s church, Christ’s church. The elder is a steward, managing somebody else’s property. That’s why you have to have the right man in the right situation for the right reason, for the health of the church. They are managing somebody else’s property. The church is Christ’s property. The steward is one who manages that. As we’re told in the Scripture, when the Chief Shepherd returns, He’s going to hold us accountable. “How did you manage My property?”

You see, the stewards, the elders, don’t own the church. It’s not a black church. It’s not a white church. It’s not an Asian church. It’s not a Vietnamese church. It’s Christ’s church. And the men in leadership have got to be the right men with the right qualifications for the right reason, and that is the health of the church, because they are going to be stewards of managing Christ’s property, which will be those people who make up the body of Christ. You’re stewards of people’s lives! This, the church eldership and leadership, is a very serious issue. You’re stewards of somebody else’s life!

Remember this in John seventeen, the eternal covenant. God gave some people to Christ as love gifts. Christ is now giving them to the elders, saying, “Manage them for me. These are gifts that God has given to Me. I’m not going to lose any of them. I’m not going to lose one of them. That’s My property, the ones that God gave Me, the elect. I’m never going to lose any of them. No one can snatch them out of My hand.”

“Now manage them. You’re a steward. You’re a steward of the people that I own. They’re My property, the body of Christ.”

You see, the elder is a steward. Yes, Brian?

Brian: There’s a movement where the elders aren’t as involved. And so some are moving away from elder boards because they’re saying that the elders, or those elected to elder, won’t be willing to devote their time.

Bruce: So what does that have to do with anything? So what? We’re not talking about what they’re doing. We’re talking about the standard of Scripture. What does that have to do with anything? If you don’t have the right men in the right situation, you’re not going to be doing the right thing for the health of the church.

“Qualifications For Elders”

Now I’m not putting you down, Brian. All I’m saying is this. So what if the world isn’t doing it? That’s not what we’re talking about. We’re talking about the standard that’s going to be good for the small church or the big church.

Now I realize what you’re saying. That’s why you have to have the right men. You have to have the right qualifications. The way to eliminate that issue, Brian, is to have the right men qualified. Are they qualified to be in the role, because if they are qualified, they’re not going to do what you just said. They won’t do that. Yes, Ted?

Ted: As long as we can (*unclear*), I’m just thinking about your statement that the Holy Spirit doesn’t make a mistake. Does that mean that the Holy Spirit doesn’t make a mistake in the selection of elders?

Bruce: That’s what I’m saying.

Ted: Where do you bring in depravity and the flesh, and the inability of us to see as though through a glass darkly?

Bruce: That’s in the qualifications. They’re all listed in the qualifications. That’s why I’m suggesting that the elders go off and be men of prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to raise up these men. You look at the qualifications, realizing this: that there is no sinless Christian. The elders are not sinless. They’re blameless. They’re not sinless. There’s a difference in that. They’re not sinless. Yes, please?

Participant: I hear you saying that it’s not that the church doesn’t make mistakes. It’s that the Holy Spirit doesn’t make mistakes.

Bruce: That’s right, yes. We in the church make mistakes; the Holy Spirit doesn’t. That’s why we have to walk by faith and not by sight. We don’t measure by externals. All I’m saying is that this is a serious issue! We don’t take it seriously enough, because we have to take this more seriously so that we don’t let the things such as our depravity creep in, and our pride and our ego, trusting the Holy Spirit. What I’m saying is that the church may make mistakes, but the Holy Spirit does not. When He qualifies people, we just have to be willing to say if they are really qualified, and take them through the process.

Now let’s take a look at this in a general sense. Well, let me say one other thing. How many times have you heard someone say, “How’s your work going?” Has anybody ever asked you that question, how’s your work going? Now in that statement there is one thing. There’s a betrayal of the question. What’s the betrayal in that question?

Participant: Your work.

Bruce: Your work. It is not your work! It is Christ’s work. We’re stewards. So if somebody comes along and says, “How’s your work going?”, we need to realize this. I’m a steward of His work! This is not my work. I’m a steward of His work.

That’s why it’s so important, men, that with church leadership you have the right men with the right qualifications for the right reason, for the health of the church.

Let’s take a look at general qualifications, please. Generally speaking, they are *maturity in all respects of life*. That means they are not novices. They’re mature in all respects of life. That can be divided into three areas. Yes, please?

Participant: I was going to say, in light of what Ted was saying about that we are sinful, but the Holy Spirit knows who is qualified.

Bruce: Correct.

“Qualifications For Elders”

Participant: And that person will be useful to Him for the glory of God, whereas maybe another man that’s picked by just a human standard would not be useful.

Bruce: Right. That’s correct. My point is this, and Ted has a good question. The Holy Spirit is the One who doesn’t make a mistake. We might because of our depravity and our pride, and other issues like that. But the Holy Spirit doesn’t make a mistake. We need to be depending as much as we can upon the Holy Spirit resurrecting and birthing these people for us. Yes?

Participant: In light of this context, I always like to think of who God has called in the past—Moses, even Paul—people like that, people who were lost before. He used them despite their being lost.

Bruce: You know what it is? Any Bush will do. *(Laughter)* Any bush will do. The burning bush. It’s just a bush. What made it different?

Participant: God.

Bruce: It was alive through the Holy Spirit. Any bush will do. We’re just one of the bushes that God might use. The difference is this. Has God qualified that bush to be used? Is there life in that bush? That’s the whole issue here in selecting elders and identifying them. But any bush is gonna do.

Participant: W. or otherwise.

Bruce: Excuse me?

Participant: Nothing. *(Laughter)*

Bruce: He talks about three regions of life with these leaders. First of all, in verse six, there’s a *domestic series of qualifications*. In verses seven and eight there are some *personal qualifications*. And then in verse nine there are some *doctrinal qualifications*. Domestic, personal and doctrinal.

Let’s take a look at these general qualifications. First of all, verse six. *“If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers, and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.”* That’s his domestic life and qualifications. Let’s take a look at these.

It does not mean that they’re sinless. They are not sinless, because there is no sinless Christian. That means that the reputation of the elder matters. The reputation of the elder does matter.

It means *not called*, which means that there are no accusations that can be thrown against him. His reputation is not in doubt. There’s nothing to call him to account. That’s where we get the idea of not called. There’s nothing with which to call him to account, because his reputation does matter. That’s what it means to be blameless. In every sphere of his life, he’s above reproach.

It also means this. Public behavior matters. He’s a steward of God’s work. He’s a representative of God’s work. And his activities in public do matter. That’s part of the blamelessness and the maturity of this man.

Now it does not eliminate a single man, but he must not be a novice. He may be single, but he must not be a new believer. Now oftentimes, when somebody becomes a new believer and he has a nice position in life, what do we do? We make him an elder.

“Qualifications For Elders”

He can be single. Christ was single. He had perfect humanity. Now we're not suggesting that single men have perfect humanity. But I'm saying this. Christ was single. A single man can be an elder, but he can't be a novice. He's got to have the same qualifications of maturity.

I think that what it means in the life of his marriage is this. He must demonstrate in his life the inviolability of the marriage bond. I believe that a divorced man can be an elder based upon his divorce, if it was a Biblical divorce. There is that possibility.

What this word talks about is *a one woman kind of man*. He's not a womanizer. He's not chasing skirts. The inviolability of the marriage bond is what he stands for.

Look at 1 Timothy 3:5.

Transcriber's Note: 1 Timothy 3:5. *“He must manage his own household well with all dignity, keeping his children submissive. For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?”*

Bruce: The church is referred to as a family. And here's how it works. If a man can't manage the micro-family of the house, how can he manage the macro-family of the church?

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: If a man can't manage the micro-family of his house, how can he manage the macro-family of the body of Christ, the church? His children must not be rebellious against the truth. His children are believers.

Essentially, what do we need to check in an elder's life, in his domestic qualifications? Is he doing at home what he would do in the church? What is he doing at home? Is he teaching? Is he leading in worship? Is he praying with the family? What is an elder going to do in the church? Teach, pray, lead in worship. Is the man doing the same thing in his home that we're asking him to do in the church? That's part of the domestic qualifications. Yes, Don?

Don: Bruce, what if a man has grown children who to the best of his knowledge are not believers, but are no longer living at home?

Bruce: Well here is how I would suggest this. Children are no longer under the parents' responsibility when they move out and start their own household. They're no longer under the parents' responsibility in the household when they go out and form their own household and their own family.

Now that's not giving them a license to say that they can be nonbelievers. I'm not saying that. I think that you have to take that under very, very great scrutiny with a great deal of prayer, and talk about it individually. It might be all right; it might not be. I can't answer that. It's not a black and white issue. I think you have to take a look at the situation of the family, their history and everything else. Yes, Jim?

Jim: Bruce, it has always struck me with this verse that some many times you hear of p.k. kids, who are among the most wild and rebellious.

Bruce: That's right. That's true. Yes?

Participant: I think you've even taught us that basically, our job is to lead people the best we can, and that it's up to God after that.

“Qualifications For Elders”

Bruce: Absolutely. God is the reason for ministry, the source of ministry and the result of ministry.

Participant: Amen.

Participant: Hey, Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: On the qualification of the husband of one wife, if you were interviewing somebody practically, what kind of questions would you ask them?

Bruce: Are you the husband of one wife? *(Laughter)*

Participant: I mean, what are you looking for practically here? I mean, because we all struggle. If we haven't, we will, or maybe we've overcome that. But we've all looked at women, entertaining thoughts that aren't pure.

Bruce: Well, if you don't have a thought life, you're either a eunuch or you're a liar. *(Laughter)* That's reality. I don't have a list of questions.

Participant: Okay.

Bruce: You have to know the relationship you have with that man. You don't just go in and say, "Here are the ten questions we're going to ask."

Participant: Right.

Bruce: You explore the man's background the best you can. Look at the relationship you have with him. And that's where you have to let the Holy Spirit guide you. This is not a black and white thing where you ask the ten questions and you check that if you've got eighty per cent, you don't qualify. That's not what we're talking about. The Holy Spirit is going to lead you in the sensitivity of how you discuss these things. Yes, Bishop Rodgers. You can help me here.

Bishop Rodgers: I was just thinking that, if I understand you rightly, it would be better not to have an elder until the Holy Spirit raises one up that you can identify than to have the wrong person in leadership.

Bruce: Absolutely right.

Participant: Amen.

Participant: We're dependent on the Holy Spirit to do a prior work.

Bruce: That's right. That's why I'm saying that the Holy Spirit doesn't make mistakes. We identify what the Holy Spirit has done.

So that's a good summary. We have to remember this. It's the right man with the right qualifications, and the next one is what? The right time, the right timing. He may be, but not yet. Now that's for the health of the church. That's why I had a three-year elder training program, because some of these men were the right men and had the right qualifications, but it wasn't the right time yet. And they needed to be qualified and to be trained so they could function as elders.

And so that's a critical ingredient. Timing is very, very important in all of this. And men, that's where you have to trust the Holy spirit in this. You walk by faith. I mean, this is something that is so serious. You can't make this up on your own, and come up with some legislative thing that's going to make it happen. You've got to be in deep prayer ,

“Qualifications For Elders”

trusting the Holy Spirit to guide you in this. Let Him raise up the men, to qualify them. That’s what He’s going to do.

Well, to summarize these domestic qualifications, the family is the nursery of the church. And thus a weak father can’t be an effective leader. He might be the right man with the right qualifications, but maybe not the right timing. Let the Holy Spirit work and raise up the men at the right time.

Next comes the personal side of examination. If a man is to control the church by serving, he must be in control of himself. Robert E. Lee said this. *“You cannot put a man in charge of others who is not in charge of himself.”* A man must be in control of the government of his own life before he can govern other people’s lives. He must control the government of his own life before he can be in charge of the government of other people.

Now notice verses seven and eight. The first five negatives deal with *self-control*, control of his pride. Look at verse seven. *“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.”*

Now notice. Those all deal with the control of his pride. Notice what it says: overseeing, not overbearing. He’s a servant. Not arrogant, not quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent. In other words, the man has got to be in control of his indulgences. He’s got to control his indulgences, whatever they may be.

Golf is an indulgence. Racquetball is an indulgence. Music is an indulgence. A man has got to be able to control his indulgences, those things that are going to draw him away from being a steward of God’s people. He’s got to control his indulgences. That’s what those five negatives talk about.

And the next thing would be this. He’s also got to be in control of his *reactions*—not only his indulgences, but his reactions. He’s not violent. One of the things I would try to ask would be this. How do you act when you’re constantly being irritated by somebody? Can you control not only your indulgences, but your reactions?

Is anger your choice response? It better not be. You see, somebody doesn’t make you angry. You choose to be angry at what they did to you. But they don’t make you angry. Anger is a choice! And one of the things that you have to look at in this man to be the right man with the right qualifications at the right time and for the right reason is this. How is he going to respond when people constantly irritate him? Can he control his reactions just as much as his indulgences?

Then notice next in verses seven and eight that there are five positives. He must be a lover of hospitality, *“a lover of what is good.”*

A lover of hospitality. How is he in relationships with people? Is he a relationship man? Or is he a recluse? You see, you’ve got to look at his relationship capabilities. *Hospitality* means that he is free to develop relationships within the flock of the church. You have to look at his relationship qualifications.

Secondly, *he is a lover of good*. Does he know the difference between good and evil as defined by the church, not by the world? This is goodness in three areas—toward God, toward others and to oneself. He has to know the difference between good and evil toward God, towards others and to oneself.

“Qualifications For Elders”

To others he must be fair and just. To God he must be holy in his own personal holiness. And to himself, he is self-disciplined. That’s what it means to be a lover of good, good in three areas—good to God, good to others and good to himself.

And then lastly, *doctrinal*, verse nine. *“He 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.”*

Does he hold firmly to apostolic truth? And is he absolutely committed to it?

Now I understand that in some circles Presbyterians have the elders submit to the Westminster Confession. Is that correct?

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: The idea there is to get them to where they recognize apostolic truth. Now as Reformed Baptists, we have them submit to the First London Confession. It’s similar to the Westminster Confession.

Now does he know what the apostolic gospel teaches? Does he know what that is? And secondly, can he identify and refute error when it needs to be rejected? Can he refute it? Does he understand it? And can he identify it and refute it when it’s needed?

Now men, those are the three general areas—domestic, personal and doctrinal. We’re looking for the Holy Spirit to raise up men who meet those qualifications. It’s the right man with the right qualifications at the right time for the right reason, the health of the church.

Now turn to the next page, the other handout that I gave you. It was “The Identification of Qualified Church Leaders” that I taught in my church. I printed this out for you.

What I wanted to do first of all was to help you to see the difference between the godly qualified leader and the strong worldly leader. In the strong natural leader you’ll see about nine different things. You can see that on your handout. I wanted to contrast the difference between what I just taught you here in summary, contrasting that with the strong natural leader. Look at the difference. And then there is a little document there on the spiritual leader. The world’s standards are not our standards, according to Isaiah chapter fifty-five.

And then, on the next page, you’ll see the twenty-eight qualifications for an elder. And let me give you just a quick definition of what they are. There are some additional ones listed in 1 Timothy chapter 3:1-7, and additional ones in 1 Peter chapter five. And when you put them all together, those are the qualifications that you’re looking for. And you’re asking the Holy Spirit, “Would You raise up men who meet these qualifications, so they can take us to the next role of leadership in the church?”

And when I realize that there is a new church plant, the first thing that I need to do is to create an environment where men can be raised up under the direction of the Holy Spirit, through the Scripture. And so we created a three-year training program for men to do that.

And after I taught the church for six weeks on what the role of an elder is and how you identify an elder, and the responsibility of the church to submit to the elders and to show up, I said, “If anyone would like to come up, here are the qualifications.”

“Qualifications For Elders”

Notice the qualification. Does he desire the office? “Some men desire the office.”

I said, “Great! Join us.”

So we began to go through our elder training program for three years. There were five men. The church identified three of them, and two came to us and said, “We desire the office. We’d like to go through the program to be active in ministry together.” So we invested in those five men.

They attended for three years. Of two of those men, one said, “This is not my calling. This is the best thing that has ever happened to me, but that is not my calling. This is not what I can do in the church.”

The second man said, “You know, I’m more qualified as a deacon than I am as an elder, because I would rather repair somebody’s roof than sit down and talk about doctrine.”

And so we had one man who became the head of our deacon board, because this process revealed to him that the Lord had raised him up to be a deacon—to be a servant, not to be an elder, not to be a leader. And the other three were qualified to be elders.

It took us three years to do that. But we took it so seriously because you have to have the right men with the right qualifications at the right time for the right reason, and that’s the health of the church.

Those were just the guidelines that I used. I’m not saying that this is perfect. But all I’m saying is that this is what I taught the church.

And you’ll notice the next page. One of the things that I was strongly convicted about is that anybody serving on a church board ought to have some minimal qualifications. And we applied those minimal qualifications to be the qualifications of a deacon or a deaconess. In other words, a woman can serve on a board, but she needs to have certain qualifications. Just because she has the gift to do that does not mean that she is qualified to do it.

Men, the issue is this. Who has God given the ministry to? It’s never who is the most qualified. Who has God given the ministry to? We just kind of used this as a guideline to help to see whom God was giving the ministry to. Yes, Don?

Don: Bruce, do you believe in an ordained office of deaconess?

Bruce: No.

Don: Okay. What do you understand the word *deaconess* to mean?

Bruce: Female.

Participant: The wife of the deacon?

Bruce: No, just a female. I’m using the word *deaconess* in a very general sense. I’m saying that, at a minimum, they need to have certain qualifications. And here is what they should be, on the second page.

For a woman to be involved in anything in the church, at any level, on any board or anything like that, they need to be steady, solid individuals who control their tongues, with a calm and collected spirit, faithful, loyal, protective of what is good and right. In other words, they are “*worthy of respect, not malicious gossips, temperate and trustworthy.*” I’m saying that is a general qualification for a woman to be involved in any activity in the church. That’s what I mean by that.

“Qualifications For Elders”

Men, I’m not saying that this is perfect. All I’m saying is that this is what we attempted to do, because I took the role of training church leaders so seriously. That’s exactly what Paul told Titus to do. “Titus, there are some things that are left undone. Go straighten them out.” And the first thing he says is this. Straighten out church leaders.

May God give us the grace to be involved in the process where we identify the right men with the right qualifications at the right time for the right reason, and that is for the health of the church. They are stewards of the ownership of God’s people. They’re stewards. God raises them up.

Let’s pray. Father, I would just pray that You would take this, that You would begin to raise up men in the church who will be overseers, who will be elders, who will be bishops, who will be shepherds, most of all, Father, who would be stewards of Your people. The church is Your body. It is Your work. And we are just the stewards, managing what You gave us to do. May we do it for Your glory and for the health of the church. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen.” (*Applause*)