

The background of the cover is a blurred photograph of church lights, likely from a sanctuary or altar area, creating a warm, golden glow. The lights are out of focus, appearing as soft, glowing shapes in various colors including yellow, orange, and blue.

PASTORS
DEACONS &
CHURCH Members

David W. Cloud

Pastors, Deacons, and Church Members
Copyright 2019 by David W. Cloud
ISBN 978-1-58318-274-1

This book is published for free distribution in eBook format. It is available in PDF, MOBI (for Kindle, etc.), and ePUB formats from the Way of Life web site. We do not allow distribution of this eBook from other websites.



Published by Way of Life Literature
PO Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061
866-295-4143 (toll free) - fbns@wayoflife.org
www.wayoflife.org

Canada: Bethel Baptist Church
4212 Campbell St. N., London Ont. N6P 1A6
519-652-2619

Printed in Canada by
Bethel Baptist Print Ministry

Table of Contents

The Pastor	5
The Pastor's Call	7
The Pastor's Qualification	16
The Pastor's Authority	49
The Pastor's Support	73
The Pastor's Ordination	75
The Pastor's Discipline	77
The Church Member's Relationship to Pastors	82
The Office of a Deacon	114
Way of Life Literature Publications	133

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ,
to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at
Philippi, with the bishops and
deacons” (Philippians 1:1).

The Pastor

It has been said that “everything rises and falls on leadership,” and that is true in the churches. Never has there been a greater need for God-called, qualified, devoted, properly trained, capable, wise pastors.

This is strongly emphasized in Scripture. Three entire books of the New Testament are called “the Pastoral Epistles” because they are focused on the training of pastors. A major portion of Acts 20 is devoted to the same subject (verses 17-38). Two chapters of Scripture are dedicated to the pastor’s qualifications.

Since 2017, I have been praying fervently for God to raise up 1,000 special preachers to lead special churches. I pray for prepared men and a prepared people that we might have New Testament churches in these last days that are stronger than any that have existed in my lifetime.

There is one office of leadership in the New Testament church, and the one office has three names: *Pastor*, *Elder*, *Bishop*.

Bishop is the Greek *episkopos*, which means overseer (*epi* is over and *skopos* is watcher). Elder is *presbuteros*, which means older, senior. It speaks of maturity, experience, wisdom. This is the term most often used for the church leader (Ac. 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Ti. 5:17, 19; Tit. 1:5; Jas. 5:14; 1 Pe. 5:1). Pastor is *poimen* or *poimaino*, which is usually translated shepherd (Lu. 2:8).

In Titus 1:5 and 7 the terms “elder” and “bishop” are used interchangeably. We see all three terms in Ac. 20:17, 28. In verse 17 the church leaders are called *elders*. In verse 28 they are called *episkopos* and *poimaino*. We see all three terms in 1 Pe. 5: *elders* (verse 1), *poimaino* (verse 2), and *episkopeo* (verse 2).

The three terms emphasize different aspects of the one office.

Pastor refers to the chief *duty* of his office. He is a shepherd of the flock. He feeds and protects the flock.

Elder refers to the *dignity* of the office. He is an experienced, proven, mature Christian.

Bishop refers to the *responsibility and authority* of the office. He is an overseer. Compare Heb. 13:7, 17. “Bishop, pastor, elder do not signify so many offices, but departments of work in the one office. Here is a working force: there is an overseer for that working force; here is a flock: there is a shepherd for that flock; here is an assembly: there is a ruler of that assembly, a president” (B.H. Carroll).

Pastors are under-shepherds and under-bishops. The church belongs to Christ, and He is the Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20) and the Bishop of your souls (1 Pe. 2:25). A pastor once told me, “There are no under-shepherds; only shepherds,” but he is wrong. Pastors are not shepherds of their own flocks and they do not rule by their own authority or for their own benefit and glory.

The Pastor's Call

The office of the pastor is a divine call. Paul said that the bishops at Ephesus had been appointed by the Holy Spirit (Ac. 20:28).

Following are some of the chief tests of God's call:

1. The test of desire

1 Timothy 3:1 ("If a man desire the office")

This speaks of a strong, compelling desire; a passion; a zeal. It could be translated "if a man *reach out to grasp*" (John Economidis). The Greek word is *oregomai* which is elsewhere translated *covet*. In 1 Ti. 6:10 it refers to coveting money and possessions. In contrast, the qualified pastor covets the work of God. In Hebrews 11:16 it refers to pilgrim Christians who "desire a better country, that is, an heavenly."

Paul speaks of this strong calling in 1 Co. 9:16 when he says, "for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"

Those in Israel who did the work of building the Tabernacle were men "whose hearts stirred them up, to come unto the work to do it" (Ex. 36:2). Likewise, men who lead the churches must be men whose hearts have been divinely stirred for this great task. This desire must be more than a mere interest; it must be a passion, a powerful, divine summons. It has been said, and rightly so, that if a man can refrain from preaching and from church leadership, he should refrain, because God's call to such ministry is attended by a powerful, unmistakable summons. A man might say no to God's call, as Jonah temporarily did, but he will not mistake the call or ignore it lightly!

Charles H. Spurgeon, in addressing the men in his Pastor's College, warned, "If any student in this room

could be content to be a newspaper editor, or a grocer, or a farmer, or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a senator, or a king, in the name of heaven and earth let him go his way ... If on the other hand, you can say that for all the wealth of both the Indies you could not and dare not espouse any other calling so as to be put aside from preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, then, depend upon it, if other things be equally satisfactory, you have the signs of this apostleship.”

This is the type of calling I experienced after I was saved in 1973. I was consumed with the desire to study and teach the Bible. That’s all I wanted to do. Immediately I started witnessing to my old friends. Within the first year I started printing little booklets containing the spiritual truths I was learning. I was working as a printer at the Florida Citrus Commission in Lakeland, Florida, and I did my work well and had a good testimony on the job, but I wasn’t satisfied. I just wanted to study the Bible and pursue God’s calling, and the Lord soon gave me freedom to do that, and I’ve done it ever since. I couldn’t be happy doing anything else.

Psalm 37:4

God imparts the right desires to those who love Him. He imparts His will into that individual’s life. Then He fulfills those desires.

The verse does not say that whatever an individual desires he will have. Desire itself is not evidence of God’s leading and calling, because there can be many wrong desires in a man’s heart. The promise is for those who delight in the Lord, those who love the Lord and love His Word and abide in Him and pursue His holy will.

To delight in the Lord is a passionate thing. It is not a casual, half-hearted thing. It is not lukewarm. Delight in the Lord is first-love passion (Re. 2:4). It is the passion of Psalm 1.

Delight in the Lord is fed by God's Word. Through Scripture the mind is renewed (Ro. 12:1-2) so that we know the mind of Christ (1 Co. 2:15-16). Through studying God's Word and through the preaching of God's Word, God's people are stirred to do His will. His desires are put into their hearts. The coveting after the world is replaced by the coveting after God and His business.

2. The test of life (1 Ti. 3; Tit. 1)

Desire is important, but this, in itself, is not enough. The individual's life must also meet the requirements for the calling. Some people who desire to be pastors, deacons, or missionaries are deceived about God's call, because they don't meet the standards that God has laid out.

Examples of how the test of life restricts the calling.

If a woman, for example, feels God is calling her to be a pastor or deacon, she is wrong, because the Bible says plainly that this is a man's work.

If a man has a poor reputation in his community, or is given to wine, or has an angry, combative spirit, or loves money, or does not have faithful children and a good home life, or has more than one wife, etc., he can be certain that God does not want him in the pastorate until such issues are solved.

In 1980, I was invited to teach a group of pastors in Nepal in an all-day Bible conference, and I chose the book of Titus as my outline. After we had gone through the standards for pastors in chapter one, I was informed that one of the men had three wives. He maintained three families on three properties that he owned and he visited them on sort of a circuit. I told the national pastors that this man could not be a pastor because of his marital status. He spoke up and said that he knew that God had called him to pastor because he had a

vision. The entire group chose to ignore the Word of God in favor of the man's vision!

We would note here that the call to preach is not necessarily the same as the call to pastor. A man can preach in many ways without being a pastor: in the highways and byways, in the jails and nursing homes, on the street corners, from house to house, in a bus ministry, etc. Men who are not qualified to be a pastor or deacon can still preach the Word of God in many ways if they are faithful to Jesus Christ and have a good Christian testimony.

3. The test of ability (Tit. 1:9-11; 1 Ti. 3:5; 1 Pe. 5:2)

When God calls, He equips. He will never call someone to do something without giving that person the ability to do it.

When the Lord wanted the Tabernacle built in the time of Moses, He prepared men for this work. "See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship" (Ex. 31:2-3). We see here the main aspects of God's call for special service. First, it was *an individual call*. God called Bezaleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur. Second, it was *a call to a particular work*. Third, the call was *accompanied by the ability to perform that work*.

It is true that God loves to use the weak things of this world for His service. In this way Jesus Christ receives the glory. God often calls men to preach who seem unlikely candidates by man's natural standards. He will not, though, call a man to be a pastor who cannot do the work of a pastor.

No man without such ability is qualified to be a pastor, even if he has a strong desire and a good Christian testimony. Such a man should heed Romans 12:3 - "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to

think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”

Consider some of the things the pastor must be able to do:

The pastor must be able to feed and shepherd the Lord's sheep (1 Pe. 5:1-2). He must be apt to teach God's Word (1 Ti. 3:2). He must be able to preach God's Word effectively (2 Ti. 4:2). He must be able to teach all the counsel of God (Acts 20:27). The man called to be a pastor must, therefore, be able to read and study well enough to do this work. The qualified pastor is a studious man, a man who “labours in the word of God and doctrine” (1 Ti. 5:17). He must be a serious student of God's Word (2 Ti. 2:15).

The pastor must be able to make disciples by teaching the believers “to observe all things” (Mt. 28:20). This involves more than teaching facts. It involves teaching how to walk with Christ, how to live the Christian life, how to do the work of the ministry.

The pastor must be able to take oversight of the church. He must have the ability to lead and oversee and supervise all areas of church life and ministry (Ac. 20:28; 1 Pe. 5:2; Heb. 13:17). The qualified pastor is a leader, a manager, an overseer, a supervisor. He must have leading ability and planning ability. He should be a man of ideas. He has to lead the church in accomplishing everything Christ has commanded. He has to take God's commands and apply them to his cultural setting and figure out the best way to do God's work in that particular situation. He isn't a man who blindly follows tradition. That is not a leader. Yet many pastors don't rethink the tradition they have inherited. They don't analyze the services and programs to see if things could be done more effectively.

The pastor must be able to protect Christians from error (Tit. 1:9-13; Ac. 20:28-30). This includes rebuking when

necessary (Tit. 1:13). It requires the exercise of discipline (Tit. 3:9-11). It requires the courage to confront sin and error. It requires spiritual discernment to know true believers from false (Tit. 1:16). The qualified pastor is the opposite of the simple man who “believeth every word” (Pr. 14:15). The pastor must have keen doctrinal and spiritual discernment and a shepherd’s heart for protecting and watching over the sheep. He must be informed about any danger that his church faces, such as New Evangelicalism, charismaticism, ecumenism, contemplative prayer, and contemporary music, and he must be able to protect the church from such things.

The pastor must be able to train Christian workers and leaders (2 Ti. 2:2). A qualified pastor is a serious educator.

The man who lacks the ability to do the work of a pastor is not qualified to be a pastor, even if he has a good Christian life and testimony and even if he has the ability to do *some* of the work of a pastor.

There are many good Christian men who can preach and teach, but they don’t have the gifting to be pastors. They might not be strong enough to exercise discipline as they should and to deal with error. They might not be able to reprove and rebuke. They might not have the spiritual wisdom to deal with people effectually in a pastoral way. They might not be good leaders and overseers.

4. The test of recognition (Ac. 13:1-3; 16:1-3)

When God called Paul and Barnabas to a particular missionary work, their church recognized that call. This is an important test. The normal Bible pattern is for an individual’s call and burden to be recognized by the church which knows him best. The same was true when Timothy was called to accompany Paul on his journeys (Ac. 16:1-3).

Consider this statement by Spurgeon to the preachers in his Bible college: “Considerable weight is to be given to the judgment of men and women who live near to God, and in most instances their verdict will not be a mistaken one. *Yet this appeal is not final nor infallible, and is only to be estimated in proportion to the intelligence and piety of those consulted.* I remember well how earnestly I was dissuaded from preaching by as godly a Christian matron as ever breathed; the value of her opinion I endeavoured to estimate with candour and patience--but it was outweighed by the judgment of persons of wider experience ... I have noted ... that you, gentlemen, students, as a body, in your judgment of one another, are seldom if ever wrong. There has hardly ever been an instance, *take the whole house through*, where the general opinion of the entire college concerning a brother has been erroneous. Meeting as you do in class, in prayer-meeting, in conversation, and in various religious engagements, you gauge each other; and a wise man will be slow to set aside the verdict of the house” (C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*).

As Spurgeon noted, there are exceptions to this rule. When a church is controlled by unsaved or carnal men, the church’s judgment can be wrong. There have been instances when God called a man or woman to a certain work, but the church refused to recognize the call or support the ministry. In fact, there are examples of this in the Bible. Jesus was rejected by His own people (Joh. 1:11). Paul was rejected by the Galatians and by some in the Corinthian church (Ga. 4:15-17; 1 Co. 9:1; 2 Co. 6:11-12; 3:1). John and other men of God were rejected by the proud Diotrephes (2 Jo. 9-10).

5. The test of proving (1 Ti. 3:10; 2 Co. 8:22)

The Scriptures show that churches must be careful in ordination. Men should demonstrate their zeal and faithfulness *before* ordination, not *by* ordination. This is true for every position of service in the church. The believer

should show by his manner of life that he is qualified for a special place of service, regardless of how “lowly.”

The Scriptures warn about hasty ordinations (1 Ti. 5:22). Timothy was instructed to be cautious about ordaining men to positions of leadership. The context of 1 Timothy 5:17-25 concerns leaders in the church. By laying on of hands, those performing the ordination are testifying publicly that they are convinced God has called the person being ordained. It is a recognition of a divine call. Those performing the ordination are identifying themselves with the one being ordained. If the church makes a mistake because of hastiness and failure to prove the person by God’s standards, they become partaker of the sins of the man wrongly ordained.

6. The test of fruit

The Bible emphasizes the importance of fruit. “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper (Ps. 1:3).

Note that the fruit is personal and individual (“his fruit”). Fruit is different for different people. There are different gifts and callings, but there will be fruit.

If you are called to a certain ministry, you should have some fruit, some success, some evidence. The blessing of God should be evident in some tangible way. “... make full proof of thy ministry” (2 Ti. 4:5).

There are pastors who are never successful in the ministry. In fact, there are pastors who only kill churches. They always have an excuse for their failures, and the excuse might sound reasonable, but there should be some evident blessing and fruit if a man is called of God to that ministry.

Many men simply don’t have the ability to do the work of the pastorate. They are good Christian men. They have a good testimony and a good family, and they love Christ and love the Word of God, but they don’t have the gifting and wisdom and ability and discernment to lead a church.

One fruit of a pastor should be more preachers. Many pastors do not reproduce themselves, do not raise up and train more preachers, do not send out preachers to start new churches. After 25 years, there are no more preachers in the church than when his ministry began. We don't see this in Scripture. The missionary church that is put before us preeminently in Scripture is Antioch. Paul and Barnabas worked together to establish the foundation of that church (Ac. 11:22-26), and by the time God called them to go out from that church as foreign missionaries, there were already other preachers in the church (Ac. 13:1).

Fruit is an important test in all areas of ministry. There are missionaries who never start sound, self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating churches. There are Sunday School teachers who do not grow their classes either spiritually or numerically. There are song leaders who do not raise the standard and blessing of the church's song service.

A God-called pastor will show evidences of his calling in all of the aforementioned ways: by the test of desire, the test of life, the test of ability, the test of recognition, the test of proving, and the test of fruit.

A man who does not have the biblical evidence of God's calling should be content with doing something other than pastoring. There are many ways to preach without being a pastor.

Churches must be very careful in ordaining men. They must measure men by God's standards, not by human standards. By ordaining the wrong men, they are doing both those men and the churches a disservice, and this business will doubtless be addressed at the judgment seat of Christ. Once a man is ordained to the ministry, it is very difficult to remove the ordination.

The Pastor's Qualification

The Necessity of High Qualifications for Pastors

1. High standards are necessary because good leadership is necessary.

It is impossible to have the right churches without the right leaders. It has been said that “everything rises and falls on leadership.” If elders are not qualified, the entire church will suffer loss.

“A false step in the selection of permanent officers of a church can seldom be retrieved, and must be productive of the most melancholy consequences” (R.B.C. Howell).

“It is obvious that the character and welfare of the church depend greatly, if not entirely, on the character of the ministry. The office of the ministry is God’s great appointment for the preservation of pure religion, and for spreading it abroad through the world. The church adheres to the truth; is built up in faith; is distinguished for love, and purity, and zeal, in proportion as the ministry is honoured, and shows itself qualified for its work. In every age corruption in the church has commenced in the ministry; and where the gospel has been spread abroad with zeal, and the church has arisen in her strength and beauty, it has been pre-eminently where God has sent down his Spirit in copious measures on those who have filled the sacred office. If the church will prosper from age to age, the pulpit must be filled with a pious, learned, laborious, and devoted ministry, and one of the first cares of the church should be, that such a ministry should be secured” (Barnes).

2. High standards are necessary because of the character of the church (1 Ti. 3:15).

Pastors are the leaders of the most important work on earth, which is the work of the church. It is the house of God. It is the pillar and ground of the truth in a world of lies. It is

the institution where God's people are nurtured, protected, trained and prepared for God's will. It is the headquarters for world evangelism, as we see in Acts 13-14.

3. High standards are necessary because the pastor is the steward of God (Tit. 1:7).

A steward is a manager. He is appointed to watch over his master's business and is accountable to the master for everything that he does in that capacity. Abraham's faithful servant Eliezer is an example (Ge. 15:2; 24:1-61). He ruled over all that Abraham had (Ge. 24:2). Joseph was a steward for Potiphar (Ge. 39:4) and for Pharaoh (Ge. 41:39-40). Ziba was appointed by David to be the steward for Mephibosheth (2 Sa. 9:9-10).

4. High standards are necessary because of the difficulty of the work (1 Ti. 3:5; 1 Pe. 5:3).

The pastorate is one of the most difficult jobs on earth, if not the most difficult. It entails feeding God's people with the Scriptures, protecting them from spiritual danger, discipling them, training workers and leaders, exhorting, reproving, rebuking, comforting, disciplining, interceding. The pastor deals with immortal souls. The business of the pastorate entails walking with God, associating with men, and wrestling with spiritual wickedness in high places. He must know how to be gentle and how to be severe, how to comfort tenderly and how to rebuke sharply, when the situation warrants. The pastor must have a vision of reaching the world for Christ and multiplying churches, and he must have the ability to lead God's people in that great work. The pastor must be a ruler, a governor, a superintendent, a shepherd, a nursemaid, a father, a headmaster, a teacher, a spiritual warrior, a disciplinarian. He must effectively minister to young and old, men and women, married and single, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, educated and uneducated, weak and strong.

Who is sufficient for these things? Surely we see that the difficulty of the work demands the high standards of God's Word.

5. High standards are necessary because the pastor must be an example.

“Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pe. 5:3).

“A man's life is always more forcible than his speech; when men take stock of him, they reckon his deeds as pounds and his words as pence” (C.H. Spurgeon).

6. High standards are necessary because of spiritual warfare.

“Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Ti. 3:7).

We see in this verse that Satan knows about church leaders and seeks way to ruin them. Satan spares no effort in his attempt to destroy church leaders. If the elder is not blameless he will fall into the devil's snare.

7. High standards are necessary because of the activity of false teachers.

“Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake” (Tit. 1:9-11).

The Bible warns that false teachers are controlled by Satan (1 Ti. 4:1-2; 2 Co. 11:13-15). They are subtle and cunning (Eph. 4:14). They are a very real threat to the churches (Ac. 20:27-32; 1 Th. 2:5; 2 Co. 11:1-3). They are an increasing threat as the age draws to a close. “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (2 Ti. 3:13).

In the face of this great danger, the Bible's standards for pastors appear absolutely necessary. Churches must have men of unusual spiritual wisdom and ability if they will be protected from the winds of false doctrine that are blowing in this age (Eph. 4:14).

The Qualifications for Pastors

In the following study, we combine the standards of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

God has always required high standards for those who lead His people. This was true for *the judges* of Israel (Ex. 18:21), *the Levites* (Le. 10:8-10), and *the kings* (De. 17:14-20).

The Lord's standards for church leaders are much higher than anything that was required of Old Testament leaders. For example, that David committed adultery and kept his office is not an example for the church age. David was a king of the nation Israel, not a pastor of a New Testament church.

In a nutshell, the pastor must be **blameless** in the areas listed in 1 Timothy 3:2-5 and Titus 1:6-8

"Blameless" is repeated three times by way of emphasis (1 Ti. 3:2; Tit. 1:6, 7). In 1 Ti. 3:2, "blameless" is *anepileptos*, which means "not to be taken hold of, irreproachable" (*Robertson's Word Pictures*). It means "having no just handle for blame" (John Economidis). It means that there should be nothing in the man's life that the enemies of God can take hold of to bring reproach upon the church. In Titus 1, "blameless" is the Greek "anegkletos," meaning "that which cannot be called to account, i.e., with nothing laid to one's charge as the result of public investigation" (Vine). It is translated "unreproveable" (Col. 1:22). Since the pastor does the Lord's work in a wicked world and has occasion to make many enemies for the truth's sake, accusations *will* be made against him, but Paul is referring to charges that

can be substantiated with witnesses and evidence (1 Ti. 5:19-20).

Blameless does not mean sinless or perfect according to man's standards. It means blameless according to God's standards.

We have seen the reasons for the blamelessness of the pastor in the previous section on the necessity of the high standards for pastors.

THE PASTOR MUST BE A MAN.

“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife” (1 Ti. 3:2).

A woman is not qualified to be a pastor. Compare 1 Ti. 2:12.

THE PASTOR MUST BE BLAMELESS IN HIS FAMILY LIFE.

“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife” (1 Ti. 3:2).

“One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)” (1 Ti. 3:4-5).

“If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly” (Tit. 1:6).

The pastor is to rule his house “well.” He must be an example of God's will for the home. He must understand this business and have some success in it. One of his jobs is to educate the families in his church in the matters of the husband-wife relationship and child training, and if he isn't doing a good job with his own family, it is impossible that he will build up the homes effectually.

“the husband of one wife” (1 Ti. 3:2)

The pastor should be a married man. God’s standard is in contrast to the Roman Catholic requirement of “celibacy.” It is not possible for a single man to understand and to deal effectively with families in the way that a married man can.

The pastor cannot be a polygamist. I know of a pastor in Nepal who has three wives, but the Bible forbids this.

The pastor should not be divorced and remarried. There are some who hold that a divorced man can be a pastor, but for the following three reasons we are convinced that this is not the scriptural position. *First, the pastor should not be a divorced man because he is to be blameless in his marital status.* The man who is divorced, though he can be forgiven and can serve the Lord fruitfully in many ways, does not have that blameless marital status that is required for this special office. *Second, the pastor should not be a divorced man because he is to be an example of God’s will to the church* (1 Pe. 5:3). Though divorce is allowable under certain circumstances (“except it be for fornication,” Mt. 19:9), it is not God’s design for marriage (Mt. 19:3-6). He hates putting away (Mal. 2:16). *Third, the pastor should not be a divorced man because he has to preach the whole counsel of God,* and if he has a broken and crippled marital status, regardless of the reason, he is not in a position to preach some things with complete authority. People tend to discount preaching when it is done by a man who has serious blemishes in relation to the things he preaches. We have great sympathy for saints whose marriages have been destroyed by the infidelity and abuse of their partners, and we know many such cases. But when a divorce happens under such circumstances and a second marriage is taken, there are great negative consequences no matter how innocent one party might

have been, as every divorced and remarried person knows, and that second marriage will not have the same blameless reputation of a first marriage.

The pastor must be a man who is content with his wife and doesn't have a roving eye. The "husband of one wife" means "a one-woman sort of man" (Wuest). "God wants a man to hold a church office only if he is attached solely and wholly to his wife. Nothing will ruin a man's ministry more quickly than infidelity or philandering" (John Phillips).

The pastor must have a good relationship with his wife (1 Ti. 3:4-5). The "husband of one wife" refers also to the quality of his marriage. If a man does not know how to love and guide his wife in a godly manner, he will not know how to love and guide the church, which is a greater and more difficult responsibility. A husband's rule of a wife and a pastor's rule of a church is not like worldly lording. It is not done with a harsh, overbearing attitude. It is a rule by love and humility and compassion and gentleness. If a man does not know how to treat his wife in this manner, he will also not treat the church properly.

“having his children in subjection with all gravity” (1 Ti. 3:4)

The pastor must have his children under discipline. This is described and emphasized in the book of Proverbs (Pr. 13:24; 19:18; 22:6, 15; 23:13-14; 29:15). One of the pastor's jobs is to instruct and build up the families in the church so that the parents can effectively train the children. He cannot do this if he does not discipline his own children. "The word for 'subjection' here is the same word used in 1 Ti. 2:11 to describe the subjection of women in the church to the authority of men. It is primarily a military term. It is a simple scriptural principle that children are to learn obedience in the

home, where parents are to exercise authority and rule over their offspring. When children are defiant, argumentative, and self-willed and are allowed to get away with disobedience and temper tantrums, it is evident that their parents have lost control” (John Phillips).

The word “gravity” refers to the children’s obedient demeanor and their respectful attitude toward authority. Strong defines it as “venerableness.” The children are to be so trained that they respect authority. I know a pastor who has four children. When another church worker visited this home, the pastor and his wife told the children to give the best seat to the visitor. The children refused to move and instead of disciplining them, the pastor ignored the open disobedience as if nothing happened. He allows the children to do as they please. The pastor’s wife says that it is too much trouble to make the children obey. I think of another pastor who told his young son to pick up something and put it in the trash can. When the boy refused after being told twice, the pastor got up and did the job himself and did not discipline the boy. I have seen this type of thing many times. Such men are not qualified to be pastors according to God’s standards.

We would hasten to say that the qualified pastor is not a severe disciplinarian after the fashion of a Marine drill sergeant. He is a father like God is a Father, meaning kind, patient, compassionate, as well as authoritative. He must be firm but fair, strict but loving. There is a saying that “you can have as many rules as you please, as long as your relationship exceeds your rules,” meaning that child training must be bathed in godly love and close, tender relationships in Christ.

“having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly” (Tit. 1:6)

The pastor’s children must not have a poor testimony in the church and community. If children are not disciplined properly, they have a reputation of being unruly. Such a reputation greatly weakens the pastor’s testimony and injures the Lord’s work.

The children must not be accused of living in a *riotous* manner, referring to profligacy, licentiousness, recklessness, wastefulness, dissolution. The prodigal son wasted his substance in “riotous living” (Lu. 15:13). This refers to sensual partying, drinking, drugs, rock & roll, worldliness, and such. It refers to being a bad example to the church and the community.

The children must not be accused of being *unruly*, meaning insubordinate, ungovernable, disobedient to authority. The children must be well disciplined, and this begins at a very young age. They must be taught to obey authority, not only the authority of the father. They must obey the mother. They must obey teachers. They must obey older people. If they don’t, they aren’t disciplined properly. Obedience with a right attitude is the proof of proper discipline. Once when a preacher was preaching a Bible conference, his young son, age about 9, was sitting in the back of the church near me. He was playing with something that was making noise and was disturbing those around him. I told a man sitting beside me, who was closest to the boy, to tell him to stop, but he didn’t stop, even after being told four times. Later I informed the preacher so that he could deal with the boy. A child that doesn’t obey a command by an adult is unruly.

THE PASTOR MUST BE BLAMELESS IN REGARD TO HIS WIFE'S CHARACTER.

“Even so *must their wives be* grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things” (1 Ti. 3:11).

The same qualifications are given for the wives of both pastors and deacons.

The man's wife is a very important part of his life and ministry, and her spiritual condition and thinking will greatly affect his personal life and ministry. If church officers have unspiritual wives, the entire congregation will be injured. I have known of many cases in which a pastor's wife weakened his hands and undermined his ministry. I think of wives who aren't kind, gracious, compassionate. I think of wives who have no great love for God's Word and aren't Bible students. I think of wives who lack spiritual wisdom and discernment. I think of wives who are not modest in attitude and dress. I think of wives who are worldly minded, who want their children to excel in worldly education rather than surrender to the Great Commission, who would rather that their sons be engineers and doctors than preachers, who would rather that their daughters be fashionable and popular with the worldly crowd than modest pilgrims. I think of wives who have critical spirits and are gossips and spend their time tearing down the flock rather than building up. I think of wives who form cliques and show favoritism and cause division rather than spiritual unity. I think of wives who are petty in their judgments, criticizing something like a little makeup or a little jewelry while overlooking a heart that loves Christ. I think of wives who are hasty in judgment and do not allow the saints space to grow.

These qualifications are also important because the older women in the church are to instruct the younger women (Tit. 2:3-5). If the wives of church officers are not godly women who are an example to others and who can instruct the younger women in the practical aspects of Christian

discipleship and godly family life, the work of God will be greatly weakened. This does not mean, of course, that the work of teaching the younger women is limited to the wives of church officers.

The pastor's wife is "grave."

This "speaks of that combination of gravity and dignity which invites the reverence of others" (W.E. Vine). The wife of the pastor and deacon is the type of Christian lady who lives her life with a godly seriousness of purpose. Her life is the kind that causes others to respect her spiritually and morally. She is spiritually minded. She loves God and is serious about serving God.

The spiritual "gravity" of the qualified pastor or deacon's wife causes other women to accept her teaching (Tit. 2:3-4) and to seek her counsel.

This does not mean, of course, that she has no sense of humor. It is referring to a serious-minded, dignified, grave manner of life, not a humorless personality. Spirit-filled women have many types of personalities, but one thing they all have in common is a spiritual dignity that causes others to look upon them with respect.

The pastor's wife is not a "slanderer."

The Greek word used for "slander" (*diabolos*) is used elsewhere of the devil. The word means "accuser." In Revelation 12:10 the devil is said to be the accuser of the brethren. He loves to say evil things about people with a malicious goal of hurting them. He slandered God to Eve (Ge. 3:4-5). The wife of the pastor or deacon must be a woman who is especially careful about her conversation and attitude toward people. Otherwise she can easily hurt her church and ruin her husband's ministry with her tongue.

Slander refers to lying, gossiping, backbiting, and other types of hurtful conversation, especially that which is untruthful and mean-spirited and spoken with the object of hurting people or getting back at them for some perceived injury. Gossip and slander involve deception, untruth, and an injurious attitude and purpose. It is the fruit of a mean-spirited person rather than a Christ-like person. Lying comes from a heart of hate (Pr. 26:28). Jezebel slandered Naboth to steal his property (1 Ki. 21:9-13). God hates lying lips (Pr. 12:22), and the righteous also hate lying (Pr. 13:5).

We must emphasize that it is not wrong for the wives of pastors and deacons to discuss the spiritual condition of people in a godly manner so that help can be given to them and so that others can be protected from possible harm. To “speak the truth in love” is not slander (Eph. 4:15). To admonish or reprove is not slander (Ro. 15:14; Eph. 5:11). To discuss and report spiritual and moral problems in a godly manner is not slander (1 Co. 1:11; 5:1). For Paul to warn Timothy about Alexander and other false teachers and evil workers was not slander (1 Ti. 1:20; 2 Ti. 2:16-18; 4:14).

The pastor’s wife is “sober.”

This is the Greek “nephaios,” which is also translated “vigilant” (1 Ti. 3:2). To be “sober” means to be in control of one’s mind and life with the goal of pleasing God and fulfilling His will. The wife of the qualified pastor or deacon is spiritually and morally circumspect. She meditates on God’s Word and tests everything by God’s Word. She is on guard against spiritual dangers, watching over her own life and her family and those to whom she ministers.

To be “sober” is the opposite of being under the control of wine or anything that would destroy one’s spiritual vigilance. Consider some examples of things that can

take control of one's mind in an unwholesome manner: Alcohol and drugs; sensual music such as rock and roll, country/western, pop, rap, CCM, and contemporary Southern Gospel; unwholesome television programs; filthy literature; worldly social media; the *vast* majority of Hollywood movies; television "soap operas:"; romance novels; sensual beauty magazines; gossip magazines; or any other influence which would draw one's mind away from fellowship with Christ.

The pastor's wife is "faithful in all things."

In a word, this is God's standard for the wife of a church officer. She must be a faithful Christian woman in all aspects of her life: in her home, in the church, and in society. She has a good testimony before her family, the church, and the community.

She is dependable. When it comes to any service of God, she gets the job done and she gets it done right.

THE PASTOR MUST BE BLAMELESS IN HIS PERSONAL LIFE.

"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous" (1 Ti. 3:2-3).

"But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate" (Tit. 1:8).

Following are the specific areas in which the pastor is to be blameless.

No man will have perfection in all of these things, but a pastor should be a man who exhibits these characteristics in a general sense and is growing spiritually.

"vigilant" (1 Ti. 3:2)

This means circumspect; spiritually watchful.

The pastor is a man who knows that he is in a spiritual war and he lives his life cautiously and purposefully so as not to be overcome by his enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil. Compare 1 Th. 5:6-8; 2 Ti. 4:5; 1 Pe. 5:8.

Vigilant is the opposite of spiritual and moral carelessness.

“sober” (1 Ti. 3:2)

This means “self-controlled (moderate as to opinion or passion)” (Strong). The Greek *sophron* is also translated “temperate” (Tit. 2:2) and “discreet” (Tit. 2:5). It is the opposite of intoxicated or spiritually and morally careless.

This refers to a sound mind; it refers to one’s thinking. It describes a man who is “level-headed” and wise. He is able to apply God’s Word to practical living and to practical situations in the church. He isn’t hasty and doesn’t jump to conclusions. He is careful to search out all the facts and to get to the truth of the matter.

Soberminded also touches on the issue of levity. While a good sense of humor can be a benefit to the ministry, the pastor must have the reputation overall of being sober and serious about the things of God and life in general. I think of a pastor I once knew who was hardly ever serious. He didn’t joke sometimes; he joked *all* of the time. It was frustrating to try to talk with him about serious things. That is not a pastor type of man. B.H. Carroll wrote, “Do not put a man in the office of bishop who is a clown. I knew a man who occupied the pastoral position in a prominent place in this state; a very brilliant man. But it was impossible to have a reverent feeling toward him, for he was the funniest man I ever saw ... but after you laughed at him and listened to him, somehow or other you did not have reverence for him, for he was not soberminded.”

“of good behaviour” (1 Ti. 3:2)

This means “orderly” (Strong). The Greek “kosmios” is also translated “modest” (1 Ti. 2:9).

This is a general description of a man who orders his life in an upright, godly, honest manner. It disqualifies large numbers of pastors. In the 1990s, Way of Life had to stop sending out books to churches on account, because so many of them didn't pay their bills or didn't pay in a timely manner. It was a shocking thing to learn that many pastors of Bible-believing churches are dishonest.

Of good behavior also describes a disciplined man. He is able to order his personal life and the church in a godly fashion (1 Co. 14:40). He keeps his word. He is punctual in his appointments, which is a matter of honesty.

“given to hospitality” (1 Ti. 3:2)

The Greek “philoxenos” means “fond of guests.”

The pastor must be a man who enjoys showing hospitality, both to the unsaved and to the brethren. Compare Heb. 13:2; 1 Pe. 4:9.

“not given to wine” (1 Ti. 3:3)

The Greek word “paroinos” is a combination of two words *para* (near) and *oinos* (wine).

According to some commentators, this means that the pastor must not linger at the wine and be a drunkard. For the following reasons, we believe Paul is saying the pastor should not go near wine. *First, the only way to avoid impropriety with alcoholic beverages of a certainty is to avoid them altogether.* “Wine is mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (Pr. 20:1). The following is from *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides*, 1891: “From observation, at an early age I became convinced that mere Temperance Societies were a failure, and that Total

Abstinence, by the grace of God, was the only sure preventive as well as remedy. What was temperance in one man was drunkenness in another; and all the drunkards came, not from those who practised total abstinence, but from those who practised or tried to practise temperance. I had seen temperance men drinking wine in the presence of others who drank to excess, and never could see how they felt themselves clear of blame; and I had known Ministers and others, once strong temperance advocates, fall through this so-called ‘moderation,’ and become drunkards. Therefore it has all my life appeared to me beyond dispute, in reference to intoxicants of every kind, that the only rational temperance is Total Abstinence from them as beverages, and the use of them exclusively as drugs, and then only with extreme caution, as they are deceptive and deleterious poisons of the most debasing and demoralizing kind.” *Second, wine and beer and other alcoholic beverages are much more potent today.* “Today’s wine is by biblical definition strong drink, and hence is forbidden in the Bible. ... Therefore, Christians ought not to drink wine, beer or other alcoholic beverages for they are actually strong drink and are forbidden in Scripture. Even ancient pagans did not drink what some Christians drink today. ... to consume the amount of alcohol that is in two martinis today, by drinking wine containing three parts water to one part wine (the biblical ratio) a person would have to drink over twenty-two glasses” (Norman Geisler and Robert Stein, *Focus in Mission*, Sept. 1986).” For more about the importance of abstinence, see “Christian Drinking Is a Bellwether Issue,” www.wayoflife.org.

Drinking has become increasingly accepted among professing Christians. In 1978, Richard Quebedeux documented the dramatic changes that were occurring within evangelicalism. He observed that “the wider

culture has had a profound impact on the evangelical movement as a whole” (*The Worldly Evangelicals*, 1978, p. 115). This was the product of the renunciation of “separatism.” He mentioned rock music, dancing, smoking, immodest dress, and drinking. By the turn of the 21st century, many evangelicals were embracing drinking with enthusiasm. The book *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives* contains probably a dozen positive references to drinking. In 2003, Wheaton College announced that it had changed its rules to allow drinking, smoking, and dancing for graduate students and faculty members (*Chicago Sun-Times*, Feb. 20, 2003). In 2007, a Lifeway Research survey found that 29% of Southern Baptist “laity” drank alcohol (“Baptists & Alcohol,” Baptist Press, Nov. 2, 2018). In 2013, Moody Bible Institute dropped its 127-year ban against alcohol and tobacco use by faculty and staff. In 2014, Dallas Theological Seminary dropped its ban against alcohol.

“Not given to wine” would also include not being under the influence of mood-altering drugs such as marijuana. Marijuana is being legalized in many places across the world, and we predict that it will be increasingly accepted by “evangelical” Christians. In 2018, Canada became the second country to legalize recreational marijuana, after Uruguay. Since 2012, ten states in America have legalized recreational marijuana and others have decriminalized the possession of small amounts of the drug. Proponents of recreational marijuana typically ignore proven dangers such as addiction, psychosis, marijuana as a gate-way drug, long-term effects on learning, cognition, and personality, “amotivational syndrome” (lethargy and loss of interest in achievement), bronchitis and respiratory infections, and increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

“no striker” (1 Ti. 3:3)

The pastor must not be a quarrelsome, pugnacious type of man who loves to fight.

There are two ways to strike others: with fists and with words. The pastor should not be the type who strikes out at others in either way. Some men do not use their fists, but they lash out with an angry tongue and pen, using vicious words and not representing the graciousness of Christ.

An example of a striker pastor in the first churches is Diotrophes, who spoke against the apostle John, “prating against us with malicious words” (3 Jo. 1:10).

Another example was Jerome, one of the fathers of the Catholic Church. He hated those who desired to remain true to apostolic doctrine and “engaged in many violent and bitter controversies.” When Vigilantius, Jovinian, and Helvidius rejected Jerome’s false teachings such as infant baptism, worshiping relics, enforced celibacy, and the perpetual virginity of Mary, Jerome called them dogs, maniacs, monsters, stupid fools, two-legged asses, gluttons, and madmen. “The pen of Jerome was rendered very offensive by his grinding tyranny and crabbed temper. No matter how wrong he was, he could not brook contradiction” (Armitage, *A History of the Baptists*, I, p. 207).

A modern example of a *striker* is the late Peter Ruckman, a Baptist pastor in Pensacola, Florida. He had the same type of crabby spirit as Jerome of old and used the same type of language against those with whom he disagreed. He claimed that God instructed him to “pour out vitriol” upon other preachers. “God called me to sit at this typewriter and pour forth VINEGAR, ACID, VITRIOL, AND CLEANING FLUID on the leading conservative and fundamental scholars of 1900 through 1990. ... God is in charge. He ... destines me to sit at this

typewriter and LAMBAST, SCALD AND RIDICULE these Bible rejecting fundamentalists ... I hereby dedicate myself anew to the task of DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM AND NEGATIVE BLASTING against every adversary of that Holy Book..." (*The Bible Believers Bulletin*, Dec. 1985). Some of the names Ruckman called men who disagreed with him were "jackass," "poor, dumb, stupid red legs," "silly asses," "apostolic succession of bloated egotists," "two-bit junkies," "two-faced, tin-horned punks," "incredible idiots," "egotistical jack legs," "conservative asses whose brains have gone to seed," "cheap, two-bit punks," and "stupid, little, Bible-rejecting apostates."

Of course, striker also refers to a pugilist. I have been threatened with physical harm *by pastors* on more than one occasion. On at least two occasions pastors have written to me and threatened me with bodily harm because of my teaching. On a trip to the Philippines in January 2004, a Filipino pastor associated with the Baptist Bible Fellowship International threatened to strike me because he did not like my warnings about Jerry Falwell, a preacher that he admired. B.H. Carroll wrote, "I once heard a pastor boast on a train that he had just knocked a man down. I said, 'I am going to pray for you either to repent of that sin, or resign as a pastor.' I will admit there was some provocation, but a pastor must not be a brawler, he is not a swash buckler, he is no striker. I think of the two wicked men who headed off a Methodist circuit rider and told him he must turn back and not preach and he fought them and beat them and went on to his preaching engagement. I believe I would myself have fought under the circumstances. But the idea in 1 Timothy 3 is that the preacher must not have the reputation of 'throwing his hat into the ring': 'Now, there's my hat, and I'll follow it' — 'don't you kick my dawg around.' Not contentious. ...

We should not be like Shakespeare's Hotspur, ready 'to cavil on the ninth part of a hair.'"

“not greedy of filthy lucre” (1 Ti. 3:3)

“Greedy of filthy lucre” is the Greek “aischrokerdes,” which is a compound of three Greek terms--*a* (not) *aischros* (filthy) *kerdos* (lucre or gain). It means one who is greedy of improper gain, one who is desirous of base gain.

There are at least three ways that a man can be greedy of filthy lucre: First, a man is greedy of filthy lucre when he loves money and personal gain. This is the man who is not content with godliness (1 Ti. 6:6-10). The greedy man should not be in the ministry. Second, a man is greedy of filthy lucre when he is willing to use unlawful or unjust means to obtain money and possessions. In this sense it refers to “gain obtained by base arts and employments” (*Family Bible Notes*). Third, a man is greedy of filthy lucre when his motive for Christian service is personal gain. Compare Tit. 1:11; 2 Pe. 2:3. Many men are in the ministry for what they can get out of it by the way of money and prestige. I recall a pastor that I knew many years ago who used the church's property and funds to operate his personal business. The term “rice Christian” refers to those who are Christians because of how it can benefit them financially. Churches and mission organizations must be very cautious, so that they do not support men who are merely seeking a livelihood and trying to use the church as a ladder to personal advancement.

The motive for filthy lucre is associated with all sorts of evil, such as taking bribes (Pr. 15:27; 1 Sa. 8:3). This was the sin of Balaam (Jude 11). This was the sin of the prophets of Israel in the time of apostasy (Is. 56:11; Jer. 6:13; Mi. 3:11; Mal. 1:10). This was the sin of Judas, who was a thief (Joh. 12:6).

If a man's motive is money, he will not have a ready mind to preach God's Word and to do God's will (1 Pe. 5:2). He will always be weighing decisions by how he will be affected financially. He will not preach hard things from the Bible that people do not like to hear, because he will fear that tithers will leave or will stop giving.

This is why men must first be proven before they are put into the ministry (1 Ti. 3:10). If a man will not serve the Lord without pay, he should not be put into a position whereby he is paid to serve the Lord.

“patient” (1 Ti. 3:3)

This describes the pastor's demeanor and attitude in life. The Greek word (*epieikes*) is also translated “moderation” (Php. 4:5) and “gentle” (Tit. 3:2; 1 Pe. 2:18).

The opposite of being patient is being impatient, irritable, hasty, harsh, overbearing.

“not a brawler” (1 Ti. 3:3)

This is from two Greek words, the negative *a* (not) and *mache* (peaceable).

It is the opposite of gentleness and meekness (Tit. 3:2).

Note how many times the Holy Spirit emphasizes that the pastor is to be a gentle, meek type of man. Compare “no striker” and “patient” in verse 3.

Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit (Ga. 5:22). It is a product of being surrendered to God and under God's control.

“Gentleness or meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will” (Vine).

This does not mean the pastor is pacifistic and wimpy, as he is usually portrayed by Hollywood. Meekness is being weak to defend one's own opinions, but strong to defend God and His Word; it is weak to promote self, but strong to promote God and His Word; it is weak toward fulfilling one's own will, but strong toward doing the will of God; it is weak for personal views, but strong for God's truth. The Lord Jesus Christ is meek and gentle, but He is also bold, forceful, manly. Twice He made a whip and chased the money changers out of the temple (Joh. 2:15; Mt. 21:12). He will return to earth as the King of kings and Lord of lords and rule with a rod of iron. Moses was "very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth" (Nu. 12:3), but he was exceedingly zealous for God and truth. He ground the golden calf to powder and threw it on the water and made Israel drink it (Ex. 32:20). He did not hesitate to punish evil doers (Nu. 25:5). Paul was gentle as a nurse with the believers (1 Th. 2:7), but he was also very bold against evildoers in the church (1 Co. 5) and against heretics (Ac. 13:9-10; 1 Ti. 1:19-20; 2 Ti. 2:16-18; Tit. 3:10-11).

"not covetous" (1 Ti. 3:3)

This is from three Greek words: *a* (not), *philos* (love), and *arguros* (silver). The pastor must not be a man who is in love with money.

This refers to a manner of life. The pastor is not one who lives to pursue wealth. Paul is an example of what the man of God should be (Ac. 20:33-34; 2 Co. 12:14-15).

This is the second time that the Holy Spirit has emphasized that the pastor must not be a man who is seeking after money and personal gain. Compare "not greedy of filthy lucre" (1 Ti. 3:3).

The Pharisees were covetous (Lu. 16:14). Not only did they love money but they also loved the prestige of office (Mt. 23:6; Lu. 20:46) and the praise of men (Joh. 12:43).

Diotrephes loved to have “the preeminence” (3 Jo. 9).

“not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil” (1 Ti. 3:6)

The Greek word *neophutos* means “newly sprung up,” in the sense of a new plant.

There is no specific amount of time that is required to pass after conversion before a man is no longer a novice, and there is no specific age. Men mature at different rates. One believer might mature so rapidly that he is ready to take an office of leadership within a relatively short time, whereas another might require a very long time. Charles Spurgeon was called to the pastorate of New Park Street Baptist Church when he two months short of age 20. Two years later he started his Pastors College. It is exceedingly rare, though, that a man will be ready to be ordained a pastor at age 20 and start a Bible college at age 22.

The main thing that we learn from this requirement is that churches must be very careful in dealing with novices. They must be handled wisely before the Lord. They must not be rushed into leadership positions. Their character must be monitored. Some men cannot handle any type of position without becoming proud.

The particular danger for the novice is pride, which was the thing that condemned the devil. Compare Isa. 14:12-14. Pride is one of the great dangers of the ministry. See also Pr. 16:18; 29:23; 1 Pe. 5:5.

This does not mean, of course, that the novice should not preach. He must have opportunities to preach and minister in order to grow, but he is not qualified to be appointed a bishop as long as he is a “neophutos.”

“a good report of them which are without” (1 Ti. 3:7)

The Greek word translated “report” (*marturia*) is also translated “testimony” (Ac. 22:18) and “witness” (Tit. 1:13).

Those that “are without” are the unsaved. Compare 1 Co. 5:12; Col. 4:5; 1 Th. 4:12.

This does not mean that the unsaved will necessarily speak well of the pastor’s doctrine. They will probably not like his “narrow minded” preaching on sin and hell and judgment and on Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation. The gospel is foolishness to the unsaved (1 Co. 1:18) and is openly hated by many of them (Ac. 19:27-28; 22:22).

What this means is that the unsaved in general will speak well of the pastor’s manner of living, his honesty, generosity, kindness, morality. Compare Ac. 6:3; 10:22; 22:12; 3 Jo. 12. “Nothing could be worse for the testimony of a local church than to choose an elder with a bad reputation. The world quickly spots a phony. A man who has a foul mouth on the job, or does not pay his bills, or has an extramarital affair, or is embroiled with the law [due to something he has done wrong], or abuses his family simply has no right to be an elder. Public opinion must be taken into account” (John Phillips).

“let these also first be proved” (1 Ti. 3:10)

This means that the pastor’s life and abilities are tested to ascertain if he is called of God and qualified for the position.

The requirement that he be proven applies both to pastors and to deacons. In fact, by application and principle, it applies to all ministries in the church. Every individual who is put into a position of ministry, such as music or Sunday School teaching or ushering, should

first prove that he or she has a right testimony and has the zeal and ability and faithfulness to do that particular work.

Church officers are to be proven *before* they take an office. They are men who have *demonstrated* their calling. Timothy was warned about ordaining men too quickly (1 Ti. 5:22).

Proving is protection for the church. If a church will be patient and prove men properly, it will be far less likely to appoint the wrong men to leadership positions.

“not selfwilled” (Titus 1:7)

The pastor is not to rule the flock by his own will but by God’s will. “Not one who is determined to have his own way in everything; setting up his own judgment to that of all others; expecting all to pay homage to his understanding” (Adam Clarke).

The pastor’s authority is not his own word and own will, but the Word of God (Heb. 13:7). If a pastor attempts to rule by his own will, he has no authority and the brethren should not follow him. The church does not belong to the pastors but to God. See Titus 1:7, where the pastor is described as “the steward of God.” Pastors are under-shepherds who watch over the Lord’s flock (1 Pe. 5:2-3).

Diotrephes was self-willed. He ruled the church by his own will and thinking, refusing to receive even the Lord’s apostles, and treating the believers harshly when they did not do what he demanded (3 Jo. 9-10).

“not soon angry” (Tit. 1:7)

He must be a man whose temper is under control. “Not a choleric man; one who is irritable; who is apt to be inflamed on every opposition; one who has not proper command over his own temper” (Adam Clarke).

There are constant challenges to the church leader's teaching and leadership and he must be patient and meek instead of quick to become angry at opposition.

This is a serious matter before God. Moses' anger brought God's judgment upon him so that he could not enter into the Promised Land (Nu. 20:7-13; Ps. 106:32).

“a lover of good men” (Tit. 1:8)

The qualified pastor loves those who love the Lord (Ps. 16:3; 1 Jo. 3:14).

His close fellowship is with good men and not with evil men (Ps. 1:1; 1 Co. 15:33).

He loves good men regardless of their rank in life or the color of their skin or their level of education or whether they are in his own church. It is the unsaved man who merely loves his own (Mt. 5:46-47).

“just” (Tit. 1:8)

What is “just”? It means “equitable (in character or act)” (Strong). It refers to honesty (Le. 19:36). It refers to right dealings with men, not giving preference, not taking bribes, treating all men fairly (De. 16:18; Col. 4:1; Heb. 10:38).

Consider some ways the pastor must be just: in his dealings with the brethren (1 Ti. 5:21); in his dealings with the other elders (1 Ti. 5:19-20); in his dealings with the unsaved (1 Ti. 3:7).

“temperate” (Tit. 1:8)

This means “self-controlled” (Strong). It means “having power or control over all his passions and appetites” [it] “denotes abstinence from all that would excite, stimulate, and ultimately enfeeble; from wine, from exciting and luxurious living, and from licentious indulgences. ... It relates not only to indulgences unlawful in themselves, but to abstinence from many

things that were regarded as lawful, but which were believed to render the body weak” (Barnes).

Paul referred to this in 1 Co. 9:27.

THE PASTOR MUST BE BLAMELESS IN HIS TEACHING MINISTRY (1 Ti. 3:2; Tit. 1:9-11).

Not only must the pastor be blameless in his personal and family life, he must have the ability to teach the Word of God and to protect the church from error.

“apt to teach” (1 Ti. 3:2)

He is capable of teaching. He is qualified to be a teacher, skilled in teaching. This means that he has good Bible knowledge for teaching and that he has the ability to teach. There are men who know sound doctrine and hold fast to it, but they do not have the ability to teach it to others. “No one should be allowed to enter the ministry who is not qualified to impart instruction to others on the doctrines and duties of religion; and no one should feel that he ought to continue in the ministry, who has not industry, and self-denial, and the love of study enough to lead him constantly to endeavor to ‘increase’ in knowledge, that he may be qualified to teach others. A man who would teach a people, must himself keep in advance of them on the subjects on which he would instruct them” (Barnes).

“Ignorance can be cured, but the natural incapacity to teach is irremediable so far as this office is concerned. The power to arrest and hold attention, the power to awaken the dormant and alarm the careless, the great faculty of being able to impart what we do know or may acquire, the being able, not only to say things but, to so say them that they will stick, yea, the power not of pouring into empty vessels from our fulness nor of cramming a receptacle with many things, but of suggesting so that the other mind will do the thinking

and working out—that is the teacher. Once only, though inclined thereto more than once, I put my arms in tenderness around a ministerial student and said, ‘My boy, may you and God forgive me if I make a mistake, but after patient trial and much observation, I am impressed that you never can be a preacher. You are a Christian all right, your moral character is blameless, but so far as I am capable of judging with the lights before me, you are wholly devoid of any aptness to teach’” (B.H. Carroll).

“as he hath been taught” (Tit. 1:9)

The teaching process is described in 2 Ti. 2:2.

This does not mean that he has a formal seminary education. It refers to training and knowledge, not to theological degrees. The men that Titus ordained were not trained in a formal theological school; they were trained by the apostles and missionaries. The Pastoral Epistles instruct us that the qualified pastor is a man who not only is diligent to study on his own; he also has been trained by other men.

The training of a qualified pastor is extensive. It is no small thing. He must learn the Bible properly so he is able to teach it effectively. The Bible is a big book and the newest part is 2,000 years old. The preacher must be educated in Bible history, geography, culture, customs, principles of interpretation, and doctrine. He must learn at least the fundamentals of the 66 books and how that the individual books fit into the whole. He must know the law, the Psalms, and the prophets. He must know the gospels and the epistles. He must understand the gospel thoroughly and understand how it associates with the law (e.g., how the law of Moses prepared for the gospel, but the law of Moses is not the believer’s law, Gal. 3:24-26). He must be educated about Israel and the Church. He must learn the meaning of Bible words and

figures of speech. He must understand faith, sin, atonement, propitiation, redemption, justification, sanctification. He must know Bible prophecy. He must understand the Bible text/version issue. And he must be educated about all aspects of church practice. He must have some expertise in the work of evangelism and must understand Christ's program of world missions. If pastors, in particular, and preachers/teachers, in general, are more thoroughly trained, the churches will be much stronger.

“holding fast the faithful word” (Tit. 1:9)

The pastor must not only be a man who has been taught the truth, he must understand it properly and not veer from it. Compare 2 Ti. 2:2 -- “faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” Some men sit under good teaching but they do not learn effectually; they don't understand correctly; they get things mixed up. They never become skillful in the word of truth. They are weak in doctrine. They tend to go off on theological tangents. Such men are not qualified to be pastors.

“that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort” (Tit. 1:9)

The pastor is a man who not only *knows and understands* sound doctrine and teaches sound doctrine, but he is able also to use it to build up the saints. He is not just a teacher; he is an exhorter. He is a preacher. He can teach in such a way that the Word of God affects the people's lives and changes how they live. “Exhort” is the Greek *parakaleo*, which encompasses the full range of what it means to build up the saints with God's Word. It is translated “beseech” (43 times - Mr. 1:40), “comfort” (20 times - Mt. 5:4; 1 Co. 14:31; 2 Co. 1:4), “entreat.” (the father entreated the elder son, Lu. 15:28; entreat an elder as a father, 1 Ti. 5:1), “desire” (the eunuch desired Philip to sit with him and teach him, Ac.

8:31; Cornelius desired Peter to come and preach to him, Ac. 9:38).

“and to convince the gainsayers” (Tit. 1:9-12)

The pastor must have the ability not only to exhort the saints but also to protect them from false teachers and compromisers. He must be able and ready to deal with error.

The false teachers are described (Tit. 1:10-11). *They are unruly.* They will not submit to God-ordained authority. They believe they are a law unto themselves. *They are vain talkers.* They are full of talk but their talk is vain, meaning empty, not valuable for salvation or spiritual edification. Their talk does not build up; it tears down. It produces doubt and confusion. *They are deceivers.* They are not afraid to use deceptive tactics. They “creep into houses” (2 Ti. 3:6). They use “sleight” and “cunning craftiness” (Eph. 4:14). For example, they use Bible words but change the meaning. An example is Karl Barth who spoke highly of the Bible’s inspiration and of Christ’s deity but did not mean that the Bible is infallible or that Jesus is God. Another example is the Roman Catholic Church, which uses the term “grace” but really means works and sacraments. False teachers will also hide their identity, such as when the Seventh-day Adventists have prophecy conferences and do not identify themselves as Adventists. False teachers will also change their identity, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses who have changed their name many times. *They subvert.* This means “to overturn.” The Greek word (*anatrepo*) is also translated “overthrow” (2 Ti. 2:18). They overthrow the sound Bible faith of people and turn them from right doctrine. *They are after filthy lucre.* Their motive is money and prestige; they want to make an impression upon people and gain a following.

How does the pastor stop their mouths (Tit. 1:11)? This does not mean that the preacher must be able to turn every false teacher from his error. That is not possible. The heretic has a deep spiritual problem (Tit. 3:11). He has a seared conscience (1 Ti. 4:2). Ordinarily he will not respond to the truth but will continue to argue against it and to champion his false doctrine. This also does not mean that the preacher can stop heretics with physical force or by using the civil authorities. New Testament churches do not have authority to arrest, torture, kill, or otherwise physically persecute their enemies (Lu. 9:54-56).

First, to convince the gainsayers means that the preacher teaches sound doctrine in such a way that the believers are not deceived by error (Tit. 1:9 “by sound doctrine”). The God-called pastor shuts the mouths of false teachers by building up the saints so that they can defend the faith and are not therefore led astray. He does this by effectual education. For example, he shuts the mouth of the Jehovah’s Witness by instructing the saints carefully in the doctrine of Christ’s deity; and he shuts the mouth of the Seventh-day Adventist by instructing the saints in the doctrines of the sabbath and eternal punishment, among other things; and he shuts the mouth of the New Evangelical by instructing the saints in biblical separation.

Second, to convince the gainsayers means that the preacher answers the false teaching. Every false teacher has pet verses to support his error. These are taken out of context and misused, and the God-called preacher must know how to deal with these challenges so that the false teachers are no longer able to use their specious arguments to confuse the minds of the saints. There are a great many errors today, more than ever before, and the Internet has made it easy for heretics to promote their doctrines into Bible-believing homes and

churches. The Lord's people must be well educated so they will not be led astray by any "ism," whether it is Romanism, Seven-day Adventism, New Evangelicalism, Judge Not-ism, Charismaticism, Modern Textual Criticism, Sovereign Electionism, Replacement Theology, etc.

Third, to convince the gainsayers means that the preacher rebukes the saints when they are giving heed to false doctrine and are in danger of going astray (Tit. 1:12-14). The pastor is more than a teacher. He must also reprove and rebuke when necessary. We see this in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians in regard to the doctrine of the resurrection (i.e., 1 Co. 15:33-36) and his epistle to the churches of Galatia in regard to the doctrine of the gospel (i.e., Ga. 1:6-9; 3:1-3; 4:9-20). In Titus 1:12-13, we see that the believers must be dealt with according to their character and according to how they respond to God's Word. The Cretians had very poor character. They were liars, evil beasts (dangerous and unpredictable like wild beasts, backbiters, hurtful, gossips), slow bellies (lazy, idle, living for one's belly or appetites and lacking ambition beyond that; "slow bellies ... with the idea of indolent, slothful in Christian duty, idle, insincere," *Complete Word Study Bible*). Because of their poor character and slowness to obey God, they were to be dealt with sharply. This is contrary to the human psychology, but it is how God's Word instructs us to deal with insubordination.

Fourth, to convince the gainsayers means that the preacher rejects heretics when they refuse to repent (Tit. 3:10-11). The pastor must have the courage to deal plainly with those who are teaching error. The word "heretic" means one who creates divisions by false doctrine and if they are not dealt with in a strict manner, they will divide the church and possibly even destroy it. The qualified pastor is not a man who is

committed to being everyone's buddy. He must disassociate from men who would cause harm to the flock that God has entrusted him with. He also must withdraw himself from preachers who are committed to a path of error and compromise even if they are otherwise sound in doctrine and are brothers in Christ. See 2 Th. 3:6.

The Pastor's Authority

General Lessons about Pastoral Authority

Following are some important truths that are emphasized in Scripture in regard to pastoral authority:

1. **There are certain men in churches who are called rulers and overseers.**

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you” (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1).

“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work” (1 Timothy 3:1).

“For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre” (Titus 1:7).

These verses teach that God-called pastors (the same office is called *elder* and *bishop*) have authority over the assemblies. Other Christians are to submit to this authority. As a church member, pastor-elders are over me in the Lord.

When I honor and submit to them, I am not submitting merely to a man; I am submitting to the Lord and Chief Shepherd of the church and to His plan and program. I am obeying His Word.

Many women could share horror stories of how their husbands abused authority, but this does not destroy the fact

that God has given husbands authority. (We don't mean to say that wives must submit to husbands even when they are abused. We deal with the abuse of authority later in this book.) When the saved wife submits to a husband, she is not submitting merely to a man, with his faults and frailties; she is submitting to her Lord God Himself. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Eph. 5:22).

Likewise, abuse of pastoral authority does not negate the fact that God has given authority to pastors and that the Bible demands that God's people submit to pastors who are leading according to God's Word.

Even in cases in which a Christian has been under the influence of an abusive or unscriptural pastoral situation, he or she must maintain a proper attitude toward pastoral authority. He should leave such a church, if necessary, and find a spiritually-healthy church that is led by God-called men and join it and submit to their authority. A Christian must carefully guard his spirit so that he does not become bitter. He must examine himself before the Lord to be sure that he is not rebellious toward genuine, God-given authority.

Sometimes we think the problem is with those who have the rule over us when in reality the problem is with our own stubborn hearts.

2. Church leaders are called by three different terms (pastor, elder, bishop), which refer to different aspects of the same office.

In Titus 1:5-7 the terms "elder" and "bishop" are applied to the same office.

In 1 Peter 5, the same church leaders are called "elders" (verse 1), pastors ("poimaino" or shepherds, verse 2), and bishops ("episkopeo" or overseers, verse 2). Thus the hierarchical form of church government which places bishops over elders is not biblical. A pastor-elder is a bishop, and a bishop is an elder.

3. Each church is to have its own leaders and government.

“For this cause left I 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” (Titus 1:5).

“And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 14:23).

Since this is clearly the New Testament pattern, any outside form of control over the New Testament church is unbiblical.

4. Every pastor is to be God-called, scripturally qualified, and ordained.

“And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 14:23).

“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

“For this cause left I 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 selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of

hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:5-9).

New Testament churches are not to be led by unordained men or by men who cannot do the whole work of a pastor-elder-bishop. Every pastor is to be both a teacher, a spiritual protector, and a ruler or overseer (Ac. 20:28; 1 Ti. 3:2; Tit. 1:9-11; 1 Pe. 5:1-2).

5. Deacons are never referred to in the capacity of ruling or overseeing the churches (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:9-13).

The deacon is a servant of the pastors and the church, not a ruler of the church. Church rule by a deacon board is unscriptural and has caused great harm in many assemblies. We deal more extensively with this in the chapter on the office of a deacon.

6. There is no scriptural support for any other sort of board that has authority over the pastors.

The Extent of the Pastor’s Authority

Since responsibility implies a corresponding authority, we get a clear idea of the extent of a pastor's authority by considering his God-given responsibilities.

There are three major areas of pastoral responsibility, with corresponding authority:

1. A pastor has the responsibility to teach and shepherd the church.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the

perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you” (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Pastors, therefore, have the authority to oversee all aspects of such ministry. They must have the final decision concerning what is taught and by whom, and they must judge all things that are taught to make certain it is correct (1 Co. 14:29).

2. A pastor has the responsibility to protect the church from false teaching.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:28-31).

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which

God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained” (1 Timothy 4:1-6).

“Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:9-13).

Pastors have the God-given responsibility and authority to determine what is taught and preached and by whom, as well as to forbid the brethren from getting involved with false things, such as Bible studies conducted by the wrong kind of teachers, meetings in which unbiblical doctrines or practices are promoted, etc. This includes oversight of the music ministry of the church, because music is part of the church's teaching ministry (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Pastors don't need permission from deacons or the leading families of the church in regard to whom they invite to preach or what Sunday School lessons to use, etc. Pastors will stand before God and give account for the church doctrinally, and they therefore have the authority to exercise control in this area.

3. A pastor has the responsibility to oversee the entire ministry of the church.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to

feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you” (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” (1 Peter 5:1-2).

The pastor's position of overseeing the church is like that of a supervisor or manager. The pastors are not to do all of the work of the ministry--every Christian must be busy in the work of Christ, Ephesians 4:16--but the pastors are to train the people for their individual ministries and are to supervise all of the work. And they have authority from God to exercise this ministry.

Spiritual Characteristics of the Pastor's Authority

The authority of a pastor is distinctly different from that exercised by leaders in the secular world.

1. It is a ministering authority -- the authority of a shepherd.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

“Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction” (2 Corinthians 13:10).

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” (1 Peter 5:2).

The authority of a pastor is for the purpose of building up and protecting God’s people and work. The church does not exist to please and glorify pastors; it exists to please and glorify the Lord.

2. It is a humble authority -- the authority of a steward.

“But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1).

“For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God...” (Titus 1:7).

“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

“Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:3-5).

The pastor is to rule under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is to rule by Christ's mind and by Christ's will rather than by his own. To be "self-willed" means to rule pompously according to human thinking and human will rather than ruling humbly according to God's Word. The church is God's property; the people are God's people; the work is God's work (1 Co. 3:5-9). Pastors are merely stewards or caretakers.

Contrast this type of leadership with the ministry of proud, willful Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9-10). He ruled by his own self-will and according to His own pleasure. He forbade even the apostle John to minister in the church. What a pompous man!

A pastor has the authority to oversee and protect the congregation and to warn them not to listen to false teachers and compromisers who might lead them astray, but he has *no* authority to forbid the people to hear (listen to sermons by, read books and articles by) sound Bible preachers. That is the way of a Diotrephes rather than a shepherd of God.

3. It is a loving authority -- the authority of a father.

"But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children" (1 Thessalonians 2:7-11).

The pastor is to have a godly, loving, tender, sacrificial consideration for the welfare of the people. His rule is not to be an overbearing, self-serving type of rule.

4. It is a building up and liberating authority.

“For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed” (2 Co. 10:8).

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:11-16).

The church is not only a head; it is a body. A godly pastor is not in the church to hinder the Spirit’s work through the body of believers by exercising an oppressive type of leadership that cripples individual vision and initiative. His role in the church is rather to build up the body so that it prospers spiritually and all of the various gifts are functioning and Christ can be Lord throughout the entire body to freely accomplish His work.

Godly pastors have the goal of maturing the flock so that they can participate in the work of the Lord to the fullest extent possible. They do not want to tie the saints down but to liberate them to their greatest potential in Christ.

A pastor ministering according to the teaching of Ephesians 4 will rejoice when his children mature and stand on their own feet before Christ. The goal of a scriptural

pastor is not to make the people dependent on him; his goal is to mature the members so that they can interpret the Bible properly for themselves and find direction for their lives directly from Christ through the indwelling Spirit.

Many pastors are so jealous of their authority that they hinder and cripple the work of God by turning the ministry of the Lord into a “one man show,” and the people rise only to the level of his servants and never mature to the true liberty in Christ that we see in Scripture. Brethren, these things ought not to be.

The Difference between Pastoring and Lording

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1-3).

Pastors have real authority in the church, but it is a different kind of authority than that exercised by worldly lords.

Note some of the differences:

Scriptural pastors love the flock and lead by compassion (1 Th. 2:7-8), but lords typically despise compassion. While a pastor has the authority to demand (Tit. 2:15), and he must demand that the people obey God, it is a different kind of demanding than that of a worldly lord. There is a time to reprove and rebuke, and even to rebuke sharply, but the rebuking must be in the context of teaching, exhorting, challenging, entreating, and beseeching. There is warning, but it must be with tears in the sense of coming from a caring heart (Ac. 20:31).

Scriptural pastors lead by example, but lords merely make demands with little or no concern that they must exemplify what they demand (1 Pe. 5:3).

Scriptural pastors know that the flock is not their own, but lords feel that they own the people and thus can control them according to their own desires (1 Pe. 5:2, 3 “flock of God” “God’s heritage”).

Scriptural pastors care more about the welfare of the saints than their own profit, but lords rule for personal gain and typically are not afraid to abuse the people (1 Pe. 5:2).

Scriptural pastors are humble and do not consider themselves greater than the flock, but lords exalt themselves high above the people. Pastors are over the flock (Heb. 13:17), but they are also among the flock (1 Pe. 5:2). They are to be clothed with humility (1 Pe. 5:5).

Scriptural pastors aim to build up the people and free them to do God’s will, but lords want to control the people and hold them down (Eph. 4:11-12; 2 Co. 10:8). The Greek word translated “destruction” in 2 Corinthians 10:8 is elsewhere translated “pulling down” (2 Co. 10:4).

“But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

Miscellaneous Suggestions to Pastors

1. Never forget that the people are not yours and that you will give account for the way you treat them.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2-3).

“My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (James 3:1).

A Baptist pastor can have his way in the church in this present world even if he is wrong and sinning, because there is no higher earthly ecclesiastical authority than the assembly, but he will stand before the Chief Shepherd and give account for how he acted. The following warning applies both to pastors and to the people:

“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Corinthians 3:17).

2. Treat the people as you would want to be treated.

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

Think back to the time before you were a pastor. Are you treating the people now as you wanted your pastor to treat you then? Were there things the pastor did that discouraged you rather than built you up then, and are you repeating those same mistakes in your own ministry? Were there questions that you wanted to ask and should have been at liberty to ask but were afraid to ask because the pastor didn't seem approachable, and could this be how you come across to the people today?

3. Treat the people with equality.

“I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21).

Be very careful about exercising favoritism. Treat the people with equality in regard to enforcing standards for workers. It is easy to let the standards slide with some because they are your relatives or pets. Treat the people with equality in regard to exercising church discipline. Don't let it be said that you were harsh toward some and lenient with others over similar matters.

I know of pastors who have disciplined their own sinning children, and that type of equality is an example to emulate. King Asa is commended in God's Word for disciplining his own mother and making the burning of her idols a public matter (1 Ki. 15:13). I know of other pastors who have allowed their children and grandchildren to get away with things that would not have been allowed in his own ministry 20 years earlier.

4. Aim to build up the people and give them liberty to do God's will.

“For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed” (2 Corinthians 10:8).

A pastor should have the goal of maturing the people in Christ so that they can stand on their own feet and make good decisions and follow God's will, not wanting them to be perpetually dependent on his microscopic control. A wise parent even allows his children to make mistakes along the way, knowing that they must learn how to do things on their own and that they will not always get it right the first time.

5. Encourage the people to have a personal vision of God's will and to bring new ideas for the Lord's work.

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

The only thing the pastor should discourage is sin and false teaching. Don't let it be said that the pastor discouraged people to have a vision and to exercise their gifts freely within the boundaries of Scripture.

6. Aim to produce many leaders who will work alongside of you to multiply the ministry.

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul” (Acts 13:1).

“And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus” (Acts 20:4).

Everywhere in the New Testament we see teams of leaders, both in individual churches and in missionary church planting. Wise pastors will not fear sharing their authority and ministry with other men of God so that the Lord's work can make good progress.

The advantage of ministry teams

The early churches were established and led by *teams* of ministry-gifted men, and we have practiced this from the beginning of our church planting work.

This is something I pray much for and it is something I would urge young preachers to pray for. Pray for help. Pray that God would raise up a ministry team. Since we see this in Scripture, beginning with Christ's choice of 12 apostles, we can pray in confidence that it is God's will.

When we started our first church in the early 1980s, I said, “Lord, I am not able to do this by myself. My wife is a great help, but we can't do this alone. We need a ministry team like we see in the Bible.” The Lord answered that fervent, persistent prayer and brought other men alongside, one from

India, one from Switzerland, and one from Nepal, and we worked in harmony for several years in founding that church. The four of us together were much stronger and more effectual than any one of us would have been alone.

We see this in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:6).

We see this in the church at Antioch, which is set before us as the preeminent missionary church. Paul and Barnabas worked together to establish this congregation (Acts 11:22-26). Soon there were many other preachers at Antioch (Acts 13:1). Then Paul and Barnabas were sent out as a missionary team to plant churches across the Roman Empire (Acts 13-14). When they had laid the foundation for new churches, they ordained teams of pastor/elders to rule them (Acts 14:23).

Consider some of the advantages to ministry teams:

More gifts (Eph. 4:11; Ro. 12:6-8)

When men minister as teams, many different gifts are available. We see this in our church planting ministry. Presently, four of us are functioning as a leadership team. There is an American, a Korean, and two Nepalis. We are different ages. We have different spiritual gifts, personalities, training, and backgrounds, and these differences are an advantage in the ministry.

For example, we have monthly youth meetings, and each month a different leader plans and leads the meeting. As a result, each meeting is different and the youth benefit from the difference.

More eyes

When you have a multiplicity of ministers, you have more eyes to see spiritual danger and error (Ac. 20:28-31). You have more eyes to discern hypocrites, deceivers, and false teachers.

More mouths (1 Pe. 4:10-11)

When there is a multiplicity of ministers, there is greater variety in preaching and teaching. This is a great benefit to the people.

In our church planting ministry, not only do the ordained leaders share preaching and teaching duties, but we also give many opportunities for younger preachers in training to minister God's Word. The churches benefit greatly from the multiplicity of voices. Currently we have 13 preachers in addition to the four leaders.

More hearts

When there is a multiplicity of ministers, there are more hearts. Different men have different grace. Christ has all grace, but we only have grace in part (Joh. 1:16). When men can minister together in harmony as a team, their differences in personalities and approaches and gifts and backgrounds make the work stronger. Some are encouragers like Barnabas, while others are reprovers like James. I think of a preacher friend who says he can't preach as hard as me in the matter of reproof and rebuke, but he supports my reproof and believes it is a blessing. Ministry teams make it possible for all types of men to minister together in harmony.

More hands

When there is a multiplicity of ministers, there are more hands to work.

Because we have many ministers in our team, we can have more ministries, more Bible studies, more house fellowships, more children's ministries, more personal visits, etc.

More feet

When there is a multiplicity of ministers, there are more feet to carry the gospel to more people.

Our ministry teams make dozens of outreaches each month to carry the gospel to various parts of our city and to many other towns and villages.

More equality

When there is a multiplicity of ministers, there is more potential for equality in the church. God does not show preference, and we are taught to follow God (1 Ti. 5:21), but the temptation to show preference is very strong in fallen sinners. We have relatives and friends. We have favorites. Multiple leaders can help one another not to show preference.

When it comes to team leadership, in a practical sense there will always be a senior leader or a head pastor. We see James in this role in Acts 15:13-22. After the others had their say about the issue at hand, James summarized the matter and made a practical suggestion about how they should proceed. The other leaders and the church members agreed, and the matter was settled.

Whether complete unanimity is required in every decision is something that each church must decide before the Lord.

For more about teams of leaders see *The Discipling Church: The Church That Will Stand until Christ Comes*, available from Way of Life Literature.

7. Value criticism.

No one really enjoys criticism and correction, but godly criticism is necessary in this life. (I want to emphasize that I am talking about godly criticism from a right spirit, not false accusations and critical-spirited attacks from a desire to harm a preacher and his ministry.)

The flesh despises “criticism.” The flesh thinks it is always right. But James says that godly wisdom is “easy to be intreated” (Jas. 3:17). When people approached Christ and asked Him things, He didn’t lash out at them or become angry and resentful.

No preacher does everything right or makes every decision wisely. It matters not what I have experienced or how much I have studied, I haven’t learned everything, not by far. Every honest preacher will admit that he makes mistakes, probably quite a few. I don’t think I’ve ever preached a message when I

didn't afterward say to myself, "Why did I say that? I wish I could do that over."

A man who does not want help and counsel and even correction from the church family is not functioning as a New Testament pastor but rather as a lord, and it is impossible that such a church will be what God wants it to be.

The preacher must remind himself that suggestions, counsel, even correction, are not rebellion to authority. When the people approach the pastors in such ways, they are not rebelling against God, because God has commanded that they "prove all things" (1 Th. 5:21). No pastor has the authority to demand "unquestioning loyalty." No preacher's decisions are infallible. There are no divinely-inspired prophets today. The preacher's sole authority is the Bible rightly interpreted and applied, and a wise preacher will be open to possible correction.

It has been said, "He who corrects me gives me a gold coin."

Proverbs teaches that the wise individual will receive reproof. One's attitude toward reproof is evidence of his spiritual condition.

"He *is in* the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth" (Pr. 10:17).

"Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof *is* brutish" (Pr. 12:1).

"Poverty and shame *shall be to* him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured" (Pr. 13:18).

"A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent" (Pr. 15:5).

"Correction *is* grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: *and* he that hateth reproof shall die" (Pr. 15:10).

“The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise” (Pr. 15:31).

“He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding” (Pr. 15:32).

“A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool” (Pr. 17:10).

“As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, *so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear*” (Pr. 25:12).

“Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful” (Pr. 27:6).

Remember that it is difficult to challenge a leader and few will do it. Be thankful for those Nathanael’s who speak their mind (Joh. 1:45-47).

In *Lectures to My Students*, Charles Spurgeon gave the following counsel:

“A sensible friend who will unsparingly criticize you from week to week will be a far greater blessing to you than a thousand indiscriminating admirers if you have sense enough to bear his treatment, and grace enough to be thankful for it. When I was preaching at the Surrey Gardens, an unknown censor of great ability used to send me a weekly list of my mispronunciations and other Slips of speech. He never signed his name, and that was my only cause of complaint against him, for he left me in a debt which I could not acknowledge. I take this opportunity of confessing my obligations to him, for with genial temper, and an evident desire to benefit me, he marked down most relentlessly everything which he supposed me to have said incorrectly. Concerning some of these corrections he was in error himself, but for the most part he was right, and his remarks enabled me to perceive and avoid many mistakes. I looked for his weekly memoranda with much interest, and trust I am all the better for them. ... He demanded my authority for calling a man covetous; and so on. Possibly some young men might have been discouraged, if not irritated, by such severe criticisms, but they would have

been very foolish, for in resenting such correction they would have been throwing away a valuable aid to progress. No money can purchase outspoken honest judgment, and when we can get it for nothing let us utilize it to the fullest extent” (Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, vol. 4).

The preacher who doesn't like challenges not only misunderstands his position and authority, he is also ignorant of the reality of his own condition. No man knows everything or sees everything. *Every man* has weaknesses and blind spots. It matters not how long one has lived, how much experience one has, and how much one has studied. We must be careful to maintain the humility demonstrated by Agur, who said,

“Surely I *am* more brutish than *any* man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy. Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what *is* his name, and what *is* his son's name, if thou canst tell?” (Proverbs 30:2-4).

Agur was not saying that he was ignorant. He was comparing himself to God rather than to man. He was saying that before God's omniscience, he is like a dumb animal. This is the humility that will keep the preacher right in his self-perception so that he remains open to further learning and correction.

8. Listen to Criticism.

In receiving criticism be “swift to hear, slow to speak” (Jas. 1:19).

Hear your critic out and think on it before giving an answer.

Don't be quick to justify yourself.

Don't be eager to discount the criticism if you find that some of it is wrong; there might still be a lesson for you. One

preacher suggested, “Take your critics seriously. Almost every criticism contains a germ of truth. Your job is to find it.”

Also don't be hasty to make a decision. Don't be hasty to discount the suggestion or criticism, but also don't be hasty to admit error and apologize. You should admit error when you have erred, but don't be hasty because it is easy to make a mistake in the heat of the moment. First, make sure you have actually erred and exactly how and to what extent and then decide how you need to deal with the matter. Haste can compound a problem.

9. Weigh the Criticism by God's Word.

Both the preacher and his “critic” must remember that the sole authority for faith and practice is the Bible.

The preacher must be careful that he does not weigh the criticism by his own experience and tradition. It is my observation that the average Independent Baptist pastor is as tradition bound as an orthodox rabbi. He doesn't judge by God's Word as much as he judges by his schooling and the thinking of his preacher friends and by what he has seen in other churches and by the example of prominent leaders.

To weigh “criticism” in the right way requires that the preacher be a serious student of the Scriptures and a man who has a Berean mindset (Ac. 17:11).

At the same time, the preacher is not to be judged by another person's thinking, experience, conscience, or tradition. This is the theme of Romans 14. We are not to judge one another on the basis of the Bible's silence. The example Paul gives is the matter of diet (Ro. 14:2-3). There is no authoritative Christian diet. The New Testament says “every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving” (1 Ti. 4:4-5). Therefore, there is liberty in the matter of diet. This is true of every issue that is not contrary to the teaching of Scripture. The Bible's silence is a matter of liberty, not law. For example, the New

Testament says nothing about the use of musical instruments in the churches. Some see this as a matter of law, but in reality it is a matter of liberty. Each church has the liberty to use or not use instruments as it sees fit before the Lord, assuming they are used in a sacred rather than a worldly manner.

10. Be a leader.

In the end, it is the pastor who must make the final decisions.

He must be a leader. He must be wise enough to desire and seek counsel and even to embrace “criticism” and correction, but he must be strong enough to be a leader. He must be ready to stand alone if necessary, even if his own wife and best friends don’t agree with him.

He must know the Lord and His Word well enough to make good decisions and then he must stand by them in the strength and courage of Christ.

The bottom line is that the pastor must make sure that his decisions are based on the clear teaching of God’s Word.

If you don’t have a “thus saith the Lord” for the things you are doing, you are on dangerous ground. Your authority is not your mind or what you learned at Bible college or what you learned from your first pastor; your sole authority is God’s Word. The pastor is not to be “self-willed” (Tit. 1:7).

11. Don’t give your authority to those who are not pastors, such as deacons, and don’t allow strong men or women or even your own wife to control things from “behind the scenes.”

A wise pastor will work closely with his wife and will seek her counsel in many things, because she will see things that he doesn’t, but he must beware of giving her the leadership. He must have the final say, and his wife’s perspective will not always be right. She sees things through a feminine perspective, but it is the masculine perspective that must lead the church. A feminine perspective is important. God “made them male and female” (Ge. 1:27). It was God’s good plan

that Adam have an Eve. But the feminine perspective was not created for leadership.

12. Don't be afraid to allow the congregation to share in decisions.

In the book of Acts, the congregations participated with the pastors in two major decisions.

The first was in the selection of deacons (Ac. 6:5-6). The pastors set the standards, and the congregation chose the deacons based on those standards.

The second was in the sending of missionaries (Ac. 13:1-3). The Holy Spirit called the missionaries and the church leaders and the congregation recognized the call, laid hands on them, and sent them forth.

We see a combination of congregational and pastoral rule in Scripture. Pastoral authority is described plainly in Hebrews 13:7, 17, and Paul says the pastors are “over you in the Lord” (1 Th. 5:12). That speaks of authority.

Exactly how the pastors work with the congregation to make decisions (e.g., which decisions are made entirely by the leaders and which decisions are made by the leaders working with the congregation) is not laid out specifically in Scripture beyond the two examples previously mentioned. Since these things are not laid out in an absolute manner, there is liberty for each church to make its own decisions before the Lord.

The Pastor's Support

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer *is* worthy of his reward” (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

Elders who are diligent in the ministry should be supported (1 Ti. 5:17).

This verse doesn't mean that some pastors should labour in God's Word and some shouldn't. The Pastoral Epistles teach us that every church leader should be a zealous student and teacher of God's Word (1 Ti. 3:2; 4:6, 13; 2 Ti. 2:2, 15, 24). What this verse means is that those who are the kind of preachers they should be by labouring in God's Word are worthy of more support. It also means that the more a man labours in God's Word, the more worthy he is of support.

Hard-working elders should be supported well (1 Ti. 5:17). This is the church's responsibility before God. Churches are not to be stingy in this matter. Elsewhere we are told that laboring elders are to be esteemed very highly in love (1 Th. 5:12-13), but the “honor” of 1 Timothy 5:17 refers to financial support. 1 Ti. 5:18 makes this clear. Paul quotes De. 25:4 and Lu. 10:7. (By the quotation from the Gospel of Luke, we see that the Gospels were already in circulation and were received as Scripture. Compare 1 Co. 9:13-14; Ga. 6:6.)

Faithful elders should be supported as long as they need it. It is the church's responsibility to make sure that they have a decent retirement when it is time for them to step back from full-time ministry. I have seen a number of pastors who had to retire because of health or age and were forced to live on a very small income. B.H. Carroll testified of this same thing in his day. “The cases are shamefully numerous of men who, without thought of themselves, devote their lives unselfishly to the work of God, and then in old age are laid on the shelf

... Many churches are guilty, just here, to their shame. A preacher of that kind has earned a living and it must be accorded to him, not as charity, but as wages for his labor. ... There are some 'freeze-out churches' among the Baptists, which take a man in and use up his life, and when their debt to him for salary is large they begin to find fault with him and finally rudely send him off to get another to be treated the same way. It is a dishonorable method" (*An Interpretation of the English Bible*).

Paul did not accept support from the church at Corinth, but that was a special situation brought about by that church's carnality and the slander of false teachers against Paul in that region (1 Co. 9:1-15). Paul did not want to give them anything that they could use against him. In the same passage (1 Co. 9:14), though, Paul taught that it is normal and proper before God for preachers of the gospel to be supported by the gospel. See also Ga. 6:6.

The Pastor's Ordination

“And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 14:23).

“Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure” (1 Timothy 5:22).

Ordination is the church's recognition of God's call.

Ordination is done by the laying on of hands and prayer and fasting (Ac. 13:3; 14:23). The exact method of how this is done is not described in Scripture. Who lays hands on the man? How many lay hands on him? Where do they lay their hands on him? How long do they fast? Who prays? Each church is at liberty to decide these things under the Lord's direction.

What about an ordination council that examines the man's doctrinal beliefs? This is a Baptist tradition, but it is not something that is spelled out in Scripture. Therefore, there is liberty to have a council or not to have a council, and there is liberty as to who composes the council and what is asked. In our church planting ministry we have not had ordination councils, because we ordain men that we have personally trained and have known for a long a time.

The most important thing in ordination is emphasized in 1 Timothy 5:22, which is to avoid haste. The man must be proven (1 Ti. 3:10). He must be qualified according to God's standards in 1 Ti. 3 and Tit. 1.

Caution about ordination is one of the best ways to protect the churches and to avoid scandal. After men are ordained to any position, it is extremely difficult to remove them from that position. It is not possible to be 100% sure of the condition of a man's heart and true character (e.g., the hypocrite Judas), and it is not possible to know what decisions a man will make in the future (e.g., Demas, who

turned aside to the love of the world, 2 Ti. 4:10); but the church must do the best it can to exercise godly wisdom and must be very cautious about this matter. An example of a hasty decision was Joshua's decision to accept the men of Gibeon without having sought the mind of God (Jos. 9:3-15).

To ordain the wrong men is to become partaker of their sins (1 Ti. 5:22). God holds the church responsible for those it ordains. If it ordains unqualified men hastily without proper proving and without proper qualification, or if it refuses to discipline them when they sin, it becomes partaker of their sin.

Paul tells Timothy, "keep thyself pure" (1 Ti. 5:22). This is the way to have wisdom and power in such difficult matters as discipline and appointing leaders. The preacher that does not walk in purity and holiness and separation will make many serious mistakes, and the work of God will be harmed.

The Pastor's Discipline

“Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality” (1 Timothy 5:19-21).

Elders are not above discipline. If they sin, they should be disciplined. Paul confronted Peter for his hypocrisy (Ga. 2:11-14).

The instruction of 1 Timothy 5:19-21 is very wise. On one hand, it protects the church from sinning elders, and on the other hand it protects elders from frivolous and false accusations. An elder, as a leader in God's house, is the devil's prime target. The devil will do anything to bring that man down or to harm him. The elder is also in a position to cause offense and create enemies for the truth's sake by his rebuke and discipline. So while he must not be allowed to sin with impunity, he must be protected from false accusations. “Moses was subjected to criticism throughout his career as leader, shepherd, and teacher of God's people. The Israelites constantly murmured against him and Aaron. At times, God had to intervene to vindicate and protect His faithful servants (Ex. 14:11-12; 15:24; 16:2, 7, 9, 12; 17:3; 32:1; Nu. 11:1, 9-15; 12:1; 14:1-5; 16:11-32, 41-46; 21:4-5)” (John Phillips). “Stories abound of leaders in the church whose ministries have been undercut or destroyed by malicious rumors originated by one person. The principle of multiple witnesses, along with the right of the accused to be faced by his or her accuser, is absolutely essential for the well-being of all concerned” (*The Preacher's Commentary*).

Care must be exercised in “receiving” accusations against elders (1 Ti. 5:19). *First, the accusation must pertain to disciplinary types of sin as we see in verse 20.* It is an

accusation pertaining to a matter for which he would need to be publicly rebuked. It is a matter pertaining to the types of sin enumerated in 1 Co. 5:11. It is not just any accusation that someone might want to make against an elder. To allow frivolous accusations would be destructive to a man's ministry and mental wellbeing. *Second, the accusation must be a specific charge.* It must be an accusation, not a rumor or a vague suspicion. *Third, there must be two or three witnesses before the accusation can be received.* This was required under the law of Moses (De. 19:15). See also Mt. 18:16; 2 Co. 13:1. A proper witness is an individual who has personal knowledge of a matter, not just hearsay. This is why hearsay is not allowed in a court of law. *Fourth, upon receipt of an accusation accompanied by proper witnesses, the church should make its own investigation as to the truth of the matter.* This is necessary, because witnesses can be sincerely wrong, and witnesses can also be evil. Under the law of Moses, the testimony of the witnesses was to be tested (De. 19:17-20). "The witnesses must be good and sufficient ones, who are capable of well attesting the fact. A charge against a pastor of a church is not to be easily received; it should not be listened to privately, unless it clearly appears by such a number of witnesses; nor should it be brought publicly before the church, until it is privately and previously proved, by a sufficient number of credible witnesses, that it is really fact" (John Gill).

Church members must not listen to gossip and backbiting. It is sin to tell gossip, and it is sin to listen to gossip. "The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue" (Pr. 25:23). "A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue" (Pr. 17:4). Saul was rebuked for listening to slanders (1 Sa. 24:9). "If that rule were followed strictly, many needless scandals and troubles in churches would be avoided. It is such an easy thing to call a man and whisper, 'Don't say anything about this, but I want to tell you something about our pastor.' We

should stop the whisperer at once: 'Are you about to tell me something against the pastor? If so, do you know it to be true, or are you proposing to circulate a hearsay? If you know it to be true, can you furnish the corroborative testimony of other witnesses? And will you and the other witnesses go with me now and tell what you know to the pastor himself, face to face, giving him an opportunity to meet the accusation?' The whisperer will be apt to reply: 'Oh, no! I don't know anything myself. I have heard so and so.' Thus we not only silence the whisperer, but we save ourselves from becoming a partaker of his sin. The necessity for this rule, in all cases, is more emphasized in the case of a preacher, whose reputation is a large part of his capital. ... It is shameful the way good, God-fearing men are slandered by irresponsible reports against them. Bring the accuser to task and make him come out in the open and give his corroborative evidence, and allow the accused a chance to answer." (B.H. Carroll).

The discipline of an elder should be done by other pastors. This instruction was written to the preacher Timothy rather than to churches or church members in general. This reminds us of the importance of teams of pastors. If there is only one pastor, it is exceedingly difficult for the church to discipline him, as he is the only one with pastoral authority. It can be done, but it is much more difficult than if there is a plurality. Deacons or other mature men can try to do this if absolutely necessary, but it is better that it be done under the direction of pastors, even if likeminded pastors outside the congregation must be brought in for this purpose.

Elders that sin are to be disciplined. "That sin" is a present participle, indicating an ongoing action. It is a habitual sin; it is a sin that the elder has allowed himself to be captured by. It is not the sin of being "overtaken in a fault" (Ga. 6:1), which is dealt with by restoration.

Elders that sin are to be corrected publicly so that the church will fear sin. Compare De. 13:11; Ac. 5:11. Paul reproved Peter "before them all" (Ga. 2:14). Private matters

are to be dealt with privately, but public matters are to be dealt with publicly. If the pastor has sinned in such a way that would bring reproach to the church, he must be disciplined publicly. “Fear of the discipline of God, in this case administered through the congregation, is a healthy thing in a Christian, especially for those in places of leadership. Modern congregations that ignore church discipline do so at the peril of both the offender and themselves” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*). “When a church leader is arraigned, accused, convicted, and sentenced publicly, the effect on the other elders is bound to be salutary. Fear is almost as strong as love as a motivating force” (John Phillips).

Elders should be treated impartially (1 Ti. 5:21). It is a great temptation to treat church members with partiality, being more lenient with some, giving preferential treatment to some. This is a sin before God, who loves justice and equity.

Paul solemnly exhorts Timothy in this matter, reminding him that he is conducting his ministry before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels (1 Ti. 5:21). We are reminded here that Christ is risen and exalted to the right hand of God. He is Lord. We are reminded that the elect angels are witnesses to the affairs of the churches. Angels are interested in church revelation (1 Pe. 1:12). Female church members are to have long hair as a symbol of their submission to authority “because of the angels” (1 Co. 11:10). The angels will accompany Christ in His glorious return (Lu. 9:26). The reverence of and fear of God is the only motive that will keep a preacher straight in difficult matters like discipline, the only motive that will cause him to overcome his innate fear of man and the peer pressure that has resulted in so much compromise through the centuries. Recently I asked a Baptist pastor in Georgia how many churches he knew of in his state that practice church discipline, and he replied that, other than his church, he did not know of *any* others. The pastors of those churches need to be rebuked

sharply about their solemn obligation before God, and the risen Christ, and the elect angels, to obey God's Word in these matters. "Why Paul punctuated his instructions with this strong charge can only be guessed. Had Timothy passively avoided unpleasant confrontations, or had he taken a strong stand in some cases but not others? For whatever reasons, Paul strongly adjured the young minister to follow through" (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

The Church Member's Relationship to Pastors

When churches are led by God-called, qualified men, and when pastors and members exercise a right relationship one to another, there is peace and blessing.

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

From my perspective of having preached in hundreds of churches over the past 45 years and hearing from hundreds of pastors and church members each year, I believe there is *widespread* weakness in the pastoral ministry, considerable abuse of pastoral authority, and a lack of biblical qualification in a great many cases. It is very difficult for God's people to relate properly to pastors who aren't qualified and aren't doing the work God instructed them to do. Such pastors should be disciplined rather than honored.

At the same time, there is widespread rebellion toward and resistance even to the godliest pastoral authority. This is the product of the fallen nature and the result of the spirit of end-time apostasy. I am convinced, too, that it is the result of the Quick Prayerism program whereby a great many church members have “prayed a sinner's prayer” but have not been born again. The “old man” will not have anyone rule over him.

We need a revival on both sides: a revival on the side of pastors and a revival on the side of church members.

We need to reject human tradition, whether Protestant or Baptist, and get back to the Word of God in all things.

General Responsibilities

1. Respect and love them.

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Th. 5:12-13).

This is the church member’s responsibility to pastors in a nutshell.

In this context, Paul mentions a pastor’s work, because it is for “their works’ sake” that the church members are to esteem them.

They labor. They are hard-working men, not lazy men. Hard work is required to build and maintain biblical churches. There is the work of Bible study, praying, teaching, preaching, overseeing, evangelism, discipling, and disciplining.

They are overseers. They have the calling and gifting to oversee the flock. This refers to pastoral authority. It refers to edifying or building up the members, guiding and providing vision and direction, and protecting from every danger. Note that the pastors are over the church “in the Lord.” They have authority only if they are leading in submission to God’s authority and in accordance with God’s will.

They are admonishers. This encompasses teaching, exhorting, and warning, but the emphasis of the word “admonish” is on warning. The underlying Greek word, “noutheteo,” is translated “warn” in Acts 20:31; 1 Co. 4:14; Col. 1:28; 1 Th. 5:14. A man who cannot or does not exercise a ministry of admonition, reproof, rebuke, and warning is not qualified to be a pastor, and the fruit of such a man is a soft, lukewarm, backsliding congregation.

Many pastors who want the high respect described in this passage do not fit the calling that is described in the same

passage. The people are to esteem them very highly in love “for their work’s sake,” meaning because of their work, because they do the work described here. The Bible nowhere teaches blind obedience and “unquestioning loyalty” toward spiritual leaders. That is cultic. It is popery.

For its part, the congregation is *to know their leaders*. This means more than simply to know who the leaders are. That should be obvious. It means to know them in the sense of knowing that their calling and authority is from God and knowing the value of such leaders. The people need to be taught about the qualification and work of pastors so they can exercise the right kind of respect toward them.

The congregation is *to esteem the leaders very highly in love*. Note the words “very highly.” The word “perissos,” which is translated “highly,” is a powerful term in itself. It is elsewhere translated “beyond measure” (Mr. 6:51), “abundantly” (Joh. 10:10; Eph. 3:20), “superfluous” (2 Co. 9:1), and “exceedingly” (1 Th. 3:10). But in 1 Thessalonians 5:13, “perissos” is combined with “hooper,” a common preposition meaning “very.” This is strong language. Biblical pastors should be shown great esteem. Elsewhere Paul uses the term “double honour” (1 Ti. 5:17). That is God’s express will in the matter, and it is on this basis that churches will be judged at Christ’s judgment seat. I wouldn’t want to stand there and give account for not having had a proper biblical relationship with my pastors.

Note that Christian love is the key to showing proper honor to one’s spiritual leaders. It is the key to a wife’s honor toward a husband and a child’s honor to a parent and a church member’s honor to a pastor. This means that for a church to treat its pastors as it should, the members must be saved and walking in fellowship with Christ, because this is the only way to have true love. This reminds us of the importance of limiting church membership to those who are qualified according to Acts 2:41-42. The pastor who is not careful in this matter and hasty in receiving members should

not be surprised if the people do not obey God's Word and if they cause him great heartache.

As with Christian love in general, the loving esteem of church members toward pastors is something to be shown in concrete actions. Godly love is not something merely to be *felt*; it is something to be *done*. As with a husband toward a wife, the church member should think of how he can show loving esteem to his pastor. Some of the ways are as follows: being faithful and dependable, being punctual, showing godly attentiveness to the preaching and teaching, obeying the teaching, communicating true words of encouragement (not flattery and guile), always giving a pastor the benefit of the doubt, and supporting him financially.

Pastors have so often been treated shabbily. I think of a pastor who faithfully shepherded a church for about a decade and had a tender love for an older deacon. But when the deacon died, his widow chose to exclude their own pastor from having a major role in the funeral. She called another pastor to preach the main message, and she chose a woman to sing a special who has a poor testimony in the church and was out of fellowship with the pastor.

As a husband's heart should safely trust in his wife (Pr. 31:11), so a pastor's heart should safely trust in his congregation. All too often, a pastor has to live in fear that he is being attacked behind his back and that efforts are underway to divide the church and to steal the people's affection. While a sinning pastor should be disciplined by the church (1 Ti. 5:19-21), pastors who are faithful to God's Word should be given unceasing esteem in love.

Note that a biblical relationship between the pastor and the people results in peace. It is a major part of maintaining peace in the church.

2. Obey their teaching as they follow the Bible and as they seek to build up the church for the service of the Lord.

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12).

If the teaching is not contrary to Scripture, obey it. Take it to heart and put it into action.

During every sermon, attend with the attitude and mindset that you are going to get everything you can from God's Word so that you can apply it to your daily life. Listen carefully; write notes; capture something.

This is how I treated the preaching from the very beginning of my Christian life at age 23. I searched for a sound Bible church, and as soon as I found it, I treated every sermon seriously. I wanted to understand the Bible. I wanted to learn and grow. I wanted to please the Lord.

If the preacher preaches on the home, write down what you need to change and what you need to improve, and then do it.

If the preacher preaches about separation from the world, thank the Lord for his willingness to preach on difficult things and decide what you need to do to apply the preaching to your personal life and family.

If the preacher preaches on modest dress, learn from it and obey it.

Don't spend your time criticizing the preacher and trying to find fault and trying to figure out if he has the right motive in his reproofing, etc. Instead, put your effort into receiving His teaching and benefiting from it. If he reproves and rebukes, thank the Lord for such a man. That is a very difficult ministry, and it is one that few preachers exercise, so be thankful if you have a preacher who will do that. Don't worry about his motives. *You can't know his motives.* That is between him and God. He will give account to God for his

motives and for the heart-attitude in his preaching, but for your part, you need to receive the teaching and reproof and take heed to it as from God and obey it (as long as it is Scriptural).

The preacher is commanded by God to “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pe. 2:11). That is a powerful concept. The oracles of God are the words of God. This does not mean that a preacher today can speak divine prophecy; it means that as he is preaching God’s Word he can speak with perfect authority, as if God Himself were speaking. That is how we need to receive the preaching and teaching--as the oracles of God.

In preparing to write the book *Keeping the Kids: How to Keep the Children from Falling Prey to the World*, I interviewed many men and women who had successfully raised children to know and serve Christ. One man said,

“As my family was growing up, we tried to take the things that the preacher taught and warned about and apply them to our home. When I got saved at age 24, I realized that there was a lot missing from my childhood, since I grew up in a weak church. The strong preaching was like honey to me. Being in a church that preached the truth was just like the Bible says; it was like honey. I just ate it up and tried to apply it. As I matured in the Lord, the preaching just made more and more sense and you could see that the truth worked. So when I would hear the preaching about things such as Santa Claus and clothing, I would apply them and take them home and we would talk about them and my wife and I would purpose in our hearts to apply them to our family. When we learned that Santa Claus is not a good thing, we cut that out. When we learned that Christian education was a good thing and that secular education system had many evil things, we took our kids out of the public school and put them into a Christian school. **We basically purposed to follow the preaching that we heard from the pulpit as well as what we learned and studied on our own from Scripture.** We started applying those

things. I believe that making the church a center and focal point for our family was a major thing. We were at church whenever the doors were open. That in itself will not win the battle, but that was certainly a help. If children hear something from the pulpit and the parents don't implement it, the children think that it is not important. Whether it is clothes or discipline or whatever, if they hear it and everyone is saying 'amen' but they don't see it at home then they don't have that feeling that the church is real."

3. Follow their examples.

"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation" (Heb. 13:7).

"Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pe. 5:3).

This shows the importance of God's standards for pastors. If the church leaders do not lead the right kind of lives and have the right kind of homes, they cannot be an example to the flock and God's work becomes weak and even corrupted.

4. Submit to their oversight.

The Bible uses strong, clear language about pastoral authority.

"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation" (Heb. 13:7).

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves..." (Heb. 13:17).

The words here are plain. There are men appointed by God to be overseers of the congregations, and they are to be obeyed as they faithfully teach God's Word. As we have seen, this is the meaning of the term "bishop."

In both verses (Hebrews 13:7, 17), the Greek word translated "rule" (*hegeomai*) means to lead, to command. It is

translated “governor” (Mt. 2:6) and “chief” (Lu. 22:26). It refers to the office of a bishop or overseer. It is not “absolute” rule, of course, in the sense of a king. It is a shepherd’s rule. It the rule of a man who speaks the Word of God to God’s people, who has the type of Christian lifestyle and testimony that can be imitated, who watches over souls. It is the rule of a man who knows that he must give account to God for his ministry in the church.

In Hebrews 13:17, the word translated “obey” (*peitho*) is not the normal Greek word for obey. It is translated “persuade” 22 times. The meaning therefore is “to be persuadable.” It reminds us of the Bereans who “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Ac. 17:11). They were ready to obey Paul if they could see that he was teaching according to Scripture. To obey the church leaders properly is the “readiness” kind of obedience. Compare Titus 3:1, “to be ready to every good work.” It is being ready to obey, eager to obey, cheerful to obey. The Corinthians had this mindset in regard to giving (2 Co. 8:19; 9:2). It is the mindset of submission to God and His Word which makes one eager to obey those He puts over me, so long as they are faithful to God’s Word. It is the opposite of being stubborn and resistant to the man’s teaching and leading. It is the opposite of a hearer and not a doer. This is the mindset that brings spiritual growth and blessing.

The word for “obey” (*peitho*) is also translated “trust” nine times, so it has the idea of submitting in a trusting way. But the trust is not in man; it is God. When I obey them that have the rule over me, I am trusting God to lead them and give them wisdom.

Therefore, unless the pastors are leading contrary to the Bible in a very clear and obvious manner, it is God’s will that the church member submit to them.

It is like a wife’s submission to a husband.

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:22).

Every wife knows that if she submits to her husband she is submitting to an imperfect man. Sometimes she will disagree with his decisions, but the godly wife is not merely submitting to her husband, she is submitting to the Lord who gave her that husband, the Lord who created the husband-wife relationship and gave headship to the man. Her eyes are on Christ, like Sarah of old who called her husband lord because she trusted in God (1 Pe. 3:5).

Likewise, the church member does not submit merely to a man; the church member submits to the Lord who has established the office of the pastorate and who has put men into that office and who has commanded obedience.

Too many church members think it is their duty to advise and correct the pastor in all matters if they think he is not doing his job properly, even in matters that do not pertain to scriptural error. But it is wise and scriptural to let pastors be pastors. If I am not a pastor, why would God lead me in regard to how the church is operated instead of leading the pastors?

As we have already noted, we are not saying that it is wrong to give suggestions to pastors or to challenge their decisions. God’s people are to prove all things (1 Th. 5:21), and pastors are certainly not above correction, as we have seen. Blind obedience is not scriptural or godly, but cultic.

What we are saying here is that after I have shared my thoughts or concerns with those in authority over me and if they decide against my counsel, I must leave the matter in the Lord’s hands and submit with a right attitude.

The exception to obedience is if the pastor teaches contrary to Scripture. If the pastor says, for example, “Let’s be filled with the Spirit by falling on the floor and laughing,” he is not to be obeyed. If he teaches, for example, that the world’s sensual music can be used for the glory of a holy God, he is

not to be obeyed. Rather he is to be disciplined for preaching heresy or trying to lead the church away from God's Word.

This also does not mean that a pastor has rule over the people in everything. It means he rules in the matter of spiritual and doctrine issues. He is not a lord; he is a pastor. He is to watch for people's souls.

A pastor should give good counsel to the people, but he cannot make decisions for them. He can advise about what job to take or what school to attend or whom to marry, but he doesn't have the authority to take control of the people's life decisions.

He has the authority to forbid the people to follow heresy and to warn them about sinful decisions, such as marrying an unbeliever or going into business partnership with an unbeliever (2 Co. 6:14).

He also has the authority to discipline members who make sinful decisions.

5. Pray for them.

One of the most important things the church members can do for their pastors and their churches is to pray for them. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. 5:16).

Prayer can change any situation, even the most hopeless, because effectual prayer is entering into intimate communion with God and taking hold of His infinite power and omniscient wisdom. "To pray is to enter the treasure house of God and to enrich oneself out of an inexhaustible storehouse of riches."

When praying for a church, we must focus our attention on the power of God, not the weakness of the situation. To Abraham and Jeremiah, God said, "Is any thing too hard for the LORD?" (Ge. 18:14; Jer. 32:27). God was challenging their faith. Many times Jesus reproved the disciples for their lack of faith (Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; Lu. 12:28).

I have witnessed situations in which pastors became concerned for issues about which they had previously been unconcerned, and I have no doubt that this was an answer to the prayers of, and a product of the effort of, concerned church members.

Instead of merely criticizing pastors, pray for them! Pray believing (Mr. 11:24); pray earnestly (Ro. 15:30; Jas. 5:16); pray persistently (Mt. 7:7; Lu. 18:1); pray with fasting (Mt. 17:21). Pray with prayer partners. Paul taught the importance of this by his frequent, earnest requests for prayer (Ro. 15:30; Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3; 1 Th. 5:25; 2 Th. 3:1). Agree with likeminded brethren to pray for specific things in the church.

6. Challenge them.

Another important way to relate to pastors biblically is to challenge them in a gracious and wise way.

This is never wrong. It's not wrong to talk to a pastor or teacher about any issue. It is not wrong to encourage a pastor or teacher to read something that could help them. I have often been helped in this way by well-meaning people.

I must understand that the pastor is not obligated to do what I ask, to change something that I would like him to change, to read something I would like him to read, but it is not wrong to approach a pastor in such a way.

I know of *many* churches that have been strengthened by members who have challenged the preachers on a variety of issues.

Of course, this requires that a preacher receive challenges, even instruction, from the "people."

No man naturally likes to be challenged or corrected, but a pastor or teacher who does not receive exhortation properly misunderstands his position and authority. The church is a body in which the leaders have a *unique* teaching role but not the *only* teaching role (Eph. 4:11-16). Every member of the body is to contribute to the edification of the whole.

“From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16).

The brethren are instructed to “exhort one another” (Heb. 10:25).

This is not to say that a church member is to be a “loose cannon” and operate independently of or in defiance to the leaders.

The pastor does have very real authority. We believe in that and we teach God’s people how to submit to that authority, but a pastor’s authority is not the authority to demand blind, unquestioning loyalty. The people are commanded by God to “prove all things” (1 Th. 5:21), so it cannot be wrong when they do so. Paul did not reprove the Bereans for testing him by Scripture (Ac. 17:11). The wisdom from above is “easy to be intreated” (Jas. 3:17).

7. Provide for their physical needs.

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward” (1 Ti. 5:17-18).

A church needs to do its best to take good care of its leaders. If the church is to minister to traveling preachers “diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them” (Tit. 3:13), how much more should it minister to the men of God who live among them year in and year out and devote themselves to shepherding and watching for their souls?

“A church that is penurious with a pastor violates the Scripture. Rarely does such a church manifest spiritual power or progress. The principles revealed in 2 Corinthians 9:6-10 are worthy of consideration” (Paul Jackson, *The Doctrine and Administration of the Church*).

8. Be charitable and merciful to them.

“For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment” (Jas. 2:13).

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, **full of mercy** and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (Jas. 3:17).

“And above all things have **fervent charity** among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Pe. 4:8).

We need to be very charitable and merciful toward church leaders. I am convinced that church leadership is the most difficult job on earth. No man is up to it. On his best day, he has no perfection in any matter whatsoever.

Don't be a hypocrite, demanding of the preacher that which you don't live up to yourself. You know your own terrible lack of perfection. You know how often you do things that are wrong. You know how often you fail to do things that are right. You know that you have lots of “blind sides.” You know that you have personality issues.

Too many people are busy criticizing the pastor when they should be loving and merciful. They say, “He isn't very friendly to me; he is friendlier to other people; he wasn't very talkative when I tried to converse with him; he wasn't very helpful when I asked him a question; he shouldn't have joked about that matter; he shouldn't have been so severe in his rebuke; he didn't shake my hand; he looked at me and didn't greet me; I believe he gave me an angry look when he was preaching; he doesn't spend enough time visiting; he studies too much; he never laughs; he jokes too much.....”

I know a man who split a church because he became offended that the preacher's wife gave someone a cough drop but didn't give him one! He never discussed the matter with the pastor and his wife. Instead, he held that and other

offenses in his heart, one added to another over the years, and he discussed such things with others and poisoned their minds, until the root of bitterness sprang up and defiled many.

Charitableness and mercy is so absolutely essential in all Christian relationships and even more so in one's relationship with pastors.

Miscellaneous Suggestions to Church Members

1. Guard your heart and attitude.

We are to esteem the church leaders highly in love for their work's sake.

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves” (1 Th. 5:12-13).

When we attempt to correct others, we must guard our own hearts and do so in the spirit of meekness (Gal. 6:1). We need to have a cool head and a warm heart, not a cool heart and a warm head!

2 Timothy 2:24-25 describes the spirit in which we are to seek to correct others:

“And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.”

The late evangelist Mel Rutter would say, “Be as firm as the rock in your position but as sweet as the honey from the rock in your disposition.”

The difference between leaving a church over legitimate doctrinal concerns and leaving in rebellion toward pastoral authority will be evidenced in two ways, according to James 3:14-18.

“But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.”

First, the difference will be evident in one’s attitude. Contrast the “bitter envying and strife” of verse 14 with the godly attitude described in verse 17: “peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

Second, the difference will be evident in the fruit that issues from the situation. Contrast the fruit of verse 16 (“envying and strife ... confusion and every evil work”) with the fruit of verse 18 (“the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace”).

The long-term consequences will demonstrate the motives of the heart. On the one hand, those who are seeking to strengthen the church and are opposed to things that are truly unscriptural and who leave a church on that basis alone and not because of their own self-will, will go on to serve Christ fruitfully in stronger churches.

On the other hand, those who are merely striving for their own self-will and who are causing trouble in a carnal manner usually hop from church to church, causing trouble everywhere they go, losing their testimony and usually their children, leaving a church over alleged biblical issues but moving to a weaker one. The fact that they move to a church that is weaker doctrinally and spiritually demonstrates that the issue was not actually about truth and righteousness, but was a personality conflict or a personal issue of some sort.

2. Give pastors the benefit of the doubt and do everything you can to be an obedient church member.

As we have seen, the Bible uses strong, clear language about pastoral authority.

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (Heb. 13:7).

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves...” (Heb. 13:17).

We have seen that this is not a kingly authority; it is a shepherd’s authority; but it is real authority. Pastors are overseers and rulers.

Giving pastors the benefit of the doubt is an important principle. It means that when the pastor’s interpretation or application of Scripture is contrary to mine, I should submit to his unless it is clear that his cannot be supported by Scripture rightly divided.

Giving the pastor the benefit of the doubt means that *as far as possible scripturally* I should support him.

Giving pastors the benefit of the doubt means to not judge him about his motives for reproof. In fact, you cannot possibly know a preacher’s motives for anything. That is between him and God. Reproving and rebuking and warning is the most difficult ministry that a pastor must exercise, and he will not do it perfectly. *We don’t do anything perfectly.* But if your pastor is a reproof, thank the Lord for it and be very merciful to him. Fewer and fewer pastors are willing to exercise the God-commanded ministry of reproof and rebuking (2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 2:15).

I recall a situation in which I reproofed some people in the congregation about not being good workers and that they were thereby stealing from their employer by wasting time and other such things. I was preaching from Titus 2:10, which indicates that if I do not serve my master in “all good fidelity,” I am “purloining.” I mentioned a particular ministry

and its employees by name, and those employees took offense that I would say such a thing publicly. But what I said was true and needed to be heard by the entire congregation, and I believe I was following the Lord's leadership in it. It was a hard call, but I was speaking as the oracles of God, as God has commanded me to do (1 Pe. 4:11). This is not without biblical precedent. Paul corrected two women by name in the church at Philippi in a public epistle (Php. 4:2). In fact, all of Paul's epistles in which he reproved men by name were public epistles. Even the epistles of Timothy were meant to be read by all the churches, and in those epistles Paul mentioned the sins and errors of Alexander, Demas, and many others.

In such cases, it is the preacher who must make the decision about what to preach and how to preach it and how to apply it. He will give account to God. For the listeners' part, they should take the reproof to heart and guard themselves from being offended at the preacher and attacking him and holding grudges against him instead of heeding the warning of God's Word. You cannot take the Word of God and say that it is wrong for a preacher to mention specific people and situations in his message. And you cannot say that he needs to be more "kind" in such things. You cannot know the preacher's heart and motives, and that therefore is not your business. It is God's business to judge the preacher's motives and to correct him if he needs correction in such matters, and He is very adept at that, let me tell you!

But the people's part is to receive the preaching as the oracles of God (1 Pe. 2:11) and to let God's Word do its work in their lives.

I can understand how that someone would be offended in such a situation, but that is a natural response rather than a right one before God. If I were in that situation, I should say to God, "Lord, the preacher has said hard things and made an example of me publicly, but he is right in what he said. I have not been as faithful in my work as I should be and I have wasted time and have misspent time for my own affairs like

talking on the phone or looking at Facebook, and I can see from your Word that this is stealing and I repent of it. Help me to keep a right heart before you and not be offended at godly reproof. Help me to grow, Lord!”

Let me give another example of giving benefit of the doubt to a church leader. Oftentimes it is possible to apply different Scriptures to a situation, and in such a situation the leader’s application should stand. For example, A few years ago I told one of our Bible college students that since it was common knowledge that he had cheated on a test to gain a tenth grade certificate in the national educational system, he should not try to build on that foundation to get his 11th-12th grade certificate. My thinking was based on the fact that he had gotten the certificate unlawfully, and the law of restitution says that we should try to make things right when we have sinned against men (Lev. 6). Plus I cited Philippians 2:15 and Psalm 15:4 and noted that believers need to demonstrate honesty in a corrupt generation, even to their own hurt.

The other teachers disagreed with that decision, quoting Scriptures that say the past is under Christ’s blood and claiming that “everyone cheats before he is saved.”

All of these Scriptures *could* be applied, but which one should stand in that particular situation? I believe the Lord will give the senior leader the best wisdom in such matters. It would be confusion to think that God would give a man authority and not give him the necessary wisdom to exercise that authority if he is truly walking with God, living in the Scripture, and seeking God’s mind. In such a situation, the other men should feel at liberty to express their disagreement with the senior leader, but if he remains steadfast in his position, they should accept the matter as from the Lord.

Also, in that situation I was looking at things that others could not see or were not considering, such as this young man’s particular situation, his need to focus on his Bible studies rather than looking back, and the overall work of the Lord in the churches we are building and the future of that

work. This is a reminder that a church leader often knows things and sees things that the average church member doesn't. This is why the Lord's people should let the Lord lead their pastors and not try to force the pastors to be under the authority of the people.

3. Be sure that you are contending for scriptural truths and not for your own preferences and opinions.

If I think that something is wrong in the church, I must ask myself, "Does the Bible plainly say that this is wrong or is this merely something that I personally do not like or agree with?" Many church problems arise because of personality conflicts and self-will and the attempt to exalt personal preference and tradition to the place of Scripture.

Romans 14 speaks to this issue. Here Paul is addressing those things about which the Bible does not speak in this dispensation. The two examples that he gives are dietary rules and holy days. These are matters about which the New Testament faith is silent.

Unlike during the Mosaic dispensation, there are no laws in the New Testament about what we are to eat. See 1 Ti. 4:4-5. Likewise, there are no laws in the New Testament about keeping the sabbath and maintaining holy festivals.

Since the New Testament does not contain laws on these things, they are areas of Christian liberty. In such things, each believer is free to do as he pleases before the Lord, but he cannot push his preferences on others and judge others according to these things.

The church member who has a problem with something in the church and disagrees with something the leaders are doing needs to ask himself if his position on the issue is based on clear Scripture or if it is based merely on his personal preference and human thinking.

4. Look at the overall situation rather than focus on one thing.

It is important to keep the big picture in focus. Every pastor and every church has strengths and weaknesses. To focus exclusively on the weaknesses can cause us to forget the strengths. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 says to prove all things, but it also says to hold fast that which is good. We must not “throw the baby out with the bath water”!

There simply is no perfect situation in this present life.

If you leave a church, you should move to a stronger one, not a weaker one.

It is a good practice to count your blessings. What are the things that attracted you to the church in the first place?

Only one time in 45 years have I wrongly caused a problem in a church, to my knowledge, and it was a situation when I was young and inexperienced. My pastor at the time was not a great student, and I became focused on that particular issue and began to think that he might not be qualified to be a pastor because of this lack. I talked to him about it, which was the right thing to do. But I also talked about it to a couple of people in the congregation and caused them to be discouraged with the church. The pastor got quite upset as could be expected.

What happened was that I became hyper focused on one issue and lost sight of the overall picture. The pastor had many gifts and strengths and God had blessed his ministry in raising up a church from scratch, a church that won people to Christ, stood for the truth and sound doctrine, a missionary giving church, a church that built its own building. That is no small fruit. He had a good Christian testimony. He was a soul winner. He loved people. He was a man of faith. It's true that he wasn't a great student, and there is no doubt in my mind that he should have been a more serious Bible student so that he could more effectively feed his people, but he did study the Bible and he did teach and preach God's Word. I was judging

him on the basis of my strength, which is studiousness, instead of weighing all factors.

5. Guard against allowing a church problem to poison your attitude toward the church as a divine institution.

It is not uncommon for someone who discovers a serious and legitimate church problem, especially a sin or error on the part of the pastors, to become embittered against the church as a divine institution. Eventually he or she sees nothing but problems and errors in churches. *Everything* is wrong. When a person falls into this condition, it is easy for him to quit church altogether or to be content with being on the periphery of a church rather than a faithful, fruitful, contributing member. We must be careful not to allow the devil to do this in our lives, and we resist this by counting the good things and by not forgetting that Christ is the one who established the church and made it the pillar and ground of the truth for this age (Matthew 16:18; 1 Timothy 3:15). Consider Paul's attitude toward the church at Corinth. In spite of its carnality and errors, he thanked the Lord for them on many points (1 Co. 1:4-9; 2 Co. 1:11, 14).

6. Women, especially, must be cautious in dealing with pastors.

Nowhere do we see that it is a woman's job to correct pastors. In fact, they are forbidden to teach men.

“But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Ti. 2:12).

The only exception to this is when we see a woman working together with her husband in the informal context of the home.

“And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism

of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:24-26).

Aquila and his wife Priscilla brought Apollos into their home and helped him come to a sound doctrinal stance. The Bible says “they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God.” The pronoun “they” refers both to Aquila and Priscilla. This is an example of a wife involved in informal teaching of the things of God in the home under her husband’s headship. As a newly saved 23-year-old Christian, I was helped like this by a godly woman in the first church I joined. She had no authority in the church and had no official teaching ministry as such, but she and her husband opened their home to young people and created a godly atmosphere for spiritual healing and discipleship. In that context, in casual conversation, she was able to help me and other young men by sharing favorite verses, describing her own experiences with the Lord, and recommending good reading material.

We hasten to add that the case of Priscilla is not an example of a woman trying to correct a church leader. Apollos was a new Christian. He was not a church leader.

It is a man’s job to approach church leaders about matters that seem to be wrong.

On numerous occasions, women have written to me about spiritual matters and have tried to correct me about something they perceive to be wrong, and they will include their husband’s name on the email, but it is the husband who should deal with a preacher about such matters rather than the wife. If the husband is not willing to do this, the wife should keep silent.

“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it

is a shame for women to speak in the church” (1 Co. 14:34-35).

I don't think it is wrong for a woman to recommend to a pastor or a preacher that he read some report or book or check out some web site, but that is as far as it should go since God's Word does not give her permission to teach and correct leaders.

7. Keep your eyes focused on Christ rather than on men.

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:1-4).

Some believers are said to carry permanent “spiritual scars” because of being in churches that are led by pastors that abuse their authority. Others leave church altogether and use this as their excuse. The problem in such cases is that these folk have their eyes focused on men rather than on Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus will never disappoint us, but men will always disappoint us in some way. Pastors are only imperfect men at their best. They make mistakes. They sin. They can be selfish and partial and shortsighted. Knowing the flesh as I do, I am not surprised when pastors fail; I am more surprised when they don't!

8. Don't forget that there is no perfect church.

Even the first churches established by the apostles were very imperfect. The church at Corinth was carnal and was characterized by division, fornication, lawsuits, drunkenness during the Lord's supper, misuse of spiritual gifts, and

countenancing of false teachers. Most of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2-3 had serious problems. In the church at Philippi, two women were at odds with each other and had to be corrected (Phil. 4:2). Peter's hypocrisy had to be rebuked publicly by Paul (Gal. 2:11-14).

This is not an excuse to ignore problems and errors. Each of these matters was rebuked and corrected. I mention these things only to remind us that churches are not perfect, because they are composed (at best) of sinners saved by grace; and we must keep this in mind as we deal with church problems.

If you leave a church over doctrinal or moral issues, you should have a better church to move to, or you will only be moving "from the frying pan into the fire."

9. Learn to exercise keen spiritual discernment, distinguishing between the important and the less important.

One Sunday morning I was talking with a man who attended one of my Bible conferences. He had driven 100 miles, he said, because he reads my material and wanted to hear me speak. I asked him about his home church, and he said that he attended a church that was "formerly Assemblies of God." I inquired further about that, and he admitted that it is still Pentecostal "to some degree," that it uses Christian rock music, and that it is engaged in other seriously unscriptural things. When I challenged him as to why he would be in such a church, he argued that "every church has its issues."

I answered him that while every church does have some "issues," those issues aren't of the same weight. I told him, for example, that Christian rock is of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and it is a major element of the building of the "one world apostate church," and I would have nothing to do with a church that uses it. And I would never attend a church that teaches false Pentecostal doctrine. Those are serious issues.

In Matthew 23:23, the Lord Jesus Christ taught that not all things in the Bible are of equal importance.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

Some biblical teachings are “weightier” than others. Everything in the Bible has some importance, but everything is not of equal importance. Not every issue is an issue of separation and not every issue is important enough to leave a church over. Knowing the difference between the two requires a good knowledge of God’s Word and keen spiritual discernment. This is the lesson of the following verses:

“And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another” (Romans 15:14).

“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:12-14).

Such discernment requires spiritual maturity, which comes only through diligent study of Scripture and through exercise of the senses to discern good and evil. Paul told the church at Rome that the reason they were able to admonish one another was because they were filled with goodness and knowledge (Ro. 15:14). As we mature in Christ and in our knowledge of the Bible and in godly living, we are able to help others and to be a blessing to the church. Some who attempt to “straighten out” perceived problems are weak in

Bible knowledge and carnal in their Christian living, and as a result they cause more harm than good.

10. If you have a problem or question or disagreement, go directly to the leaders.

Christ taught us to go directly to a brother when we think he has trespassed against us (Mt. 18:15). This is an essential element of keeping peace in the church. This way, the issue can be dealt with openly between the parties concerned.

Oftentimes I have discovered that my perception of a matter was wrong or that the information I had received was wrong or that I did not have all of the necessary information. By discussing a matter directly with those concerned right from the beginning, we can avoid many problems.

11. Don't forget that pastors have greater authority and greater responsibility in the church.

This bears repeating. It is something that has often helped me personally in my relationship with pastors.

The fact that the pastor has greater authority and responsibility means that pastors must make decisions that the average church member does not make and that they will answer to God for those decisions.

There is a time to leave a church over things that are seriously wrong, but we must also learn to put many things into the hands of the Lord and do what He has told us to do, which is to submit to the church leadership and be a blessing and be fruitful and seek to glorify Christ.

Don't confuse your job with that of the pastor. As a non-pastor, you don't have the work of the pastor (visiting the sick, burying the dead, being on call for any need, watching for souls, the care of the church, bearing the brunt of the devil's attack against the church).

As a non-pastor, you also do not have the responsibility of the pastor. He will give account for more. "My brethren, be

not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (Jas. 3:1).

This has helped me many times when I have not agreed with some decision that the pastors have made. I have laid the matter before the Lord and told Him that though I do not agree with this decision, it is not my decision to make and I will leave the matter in His hands and do my part to be a blessing to His church.

When I am tempted to criticize a pastor, I need to ask myself if I could do a better job than he is doing. Pastoring is probably the most difficult job on earth, and no man is going to do it with any perfection. We aren’t capable of that. At best we basically stumble along in God’s will! You know that to be true, if you are honest before God about your own life and ministry. So we must exercise a lot of mercy and patience with our leaders and be a blessing and encouragement and help to them as best we can.

12. Understand that you will not have the pastor you want; you will have the pastor that God calls.

You will not have exactly the pastor that you want. Think about it. If you had 100 church members, each one would have a different idea of what he or she wanted in a pastor.

God is the one who calls men to the ministry and to a certain church, and you have to accept the pastor that God gives you and be patient with him and try your very best not to compare him to other pastors. (Of course, I am not talking about unqualified pastors or pastors who are leading contrary to God’s Word.)

You can say, “I wish my pastor would spend more time personally discipling his people like that other pastor does,” or, “I wish my pastor would spend more time with the youth like that other pastor,” or, “I wish my pastor would pay more attention to the children like that other pastor,” *but he is not that other pastor.*

Every pastor has strengths and weaknesses. The old deacon prayed for his pastor, “Lord, prop him up on the leaning side.” Every pastor has a leaning side. In fact, he will have multiple leaning sides, meaning weaknesses. And instead of criticizing his “leaning side,” we should follow the old deacon’s example and rather pray for him to be propped up on that side and do everything we can to help him.

Every pastor has certain things that he will emphasize and pay more attention to and be more gifted at. Every pastor must try to do everything that needs to be done, but no pastor has the time to do everything that could be done, and no pastor has every gift in perfection. Some will study more than others; some will be friendlier and more outgoing than others; some will evangelize more than others; some will personally disciple more than others; some will pray more than others; some will be more oriented than others toward building the families or working with children; some will be more oriented toward training preachers.

This is another reason why team ministries are so important and beneficial when God calls men to work together, as He did Paul and Barnabas (Acts 11:25-26), and when men can work together in harmony and humbly share the authority of leadership in a church. This is what we see in that great church at Antioch, the first missionary church (Acts 13:1).

But the bottom line is this, church member: You cannot, and you will not, have exactly the pastor that you want. You will have the pastor that God gives you, and it is your business to benefit from that pastor’s ministry as much as you possibly can and to grow under that pastor’s ministry so that you walk in the perfect and acceptable will of God (Ro. 12). That is your business, and it is a full-time business.

The same is true for marriage. You will not have exactly the wife or husband that you want. You will have the one that you have! Any individual that gets married with the idea of making one’s partner into what he or she wants that person to

be will be sorely disappointed. The wife's business is not to conform her husband into the image of what she wants in a husband. Her business before God is to love and honor and obey him and serve him as his help meet. The husband's business is not to conform his wife into the image of what he wants in a wife. His business before God is to love her as Christ loved the church. This is emphasized in Ephesians 5:33. "Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband."

Likewise, the church member's job is not to try to conform his pastor into the image of what he wants in a pastor. His or her job before God is to love and honor that pastor (1 Th. 5:11-13) and obey him (Heb. 13:17) and prosper spiritually as much as possible under his ministry.

13. Be busy building the church.

Every member of the church should serve Christ with all of his heart and strength, doing everything he can to make the church prosper. As we have seen in Ephesians 4, the church is a body and the ministry of the church is the work of the entire body, with each member diligently contributing his or her part.

We see the same thing in 1 Corinthians 3. The warning about the judgment seat of Christ is given in the context of the work of the church.

"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, *ye are* God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide

which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are" (1 Co. 3:9-17).

The church is the temple of God; the foundation is Christ; and each member is to build on this foundation by the unction of the Holy Spirit. Paul, as an apostle, was a master builder. He didn't choose that function; it was assigned by God. Paul was used by God to write a large portion of the blueprint for the church in the canon of the New Testament. Every member has his or her assigned part in this great business, and each member will be judged as to how he builds.

If you want to make the church stronger, be faithful to all of the services, to every prayer meeting, to visitation programs. Get involved in every ministry opportunity that is open to you. Ask the pastors what you might be able to do in particular.

Those who are faithful and are busy serving are much more likely to get a hearing from the leaders as opposed to those who are on the sidelines. A team member can "criticize" more effectively than a bystander.

And a team member tends to care for the team a lot more than those who merely watch from the sidelines.

14. Don't let anything drive you away from church.

There are occasions when a child of God is forced to leave a certain church over serious doctrinal or moral issues, but he must not allow anything to keep him out of church altogether. I have known of a great many examples of people who claim to be saved and to love the Lord, yet they got offended at something that happened in a church and they

dropped out of church for years on end. This is *never* God's will.

Jesus Christ established the church (Mt. 16:18), and there are more than 100 references to the church in the New Testament. It is the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Ti. 3:15). Most of the New Testament was written directly to churches, such as the church at Ephesus and the church at Philippi. The book of Revelation is written to seven churches in Asia Minor (Re. 2-3). The book of Acts is the account of the planting and multiplication of the first churches. The Pastoral Epistles are about church work. Even those epistles which are not written directly to churches, the General Epistles, always have the assembly in mind. The book of Hebrews, for example, contains strong statements about the church (Heb. 10:25; 13:7, 17). The book of James mentions the church elders (Jas. 5:14). Peter's first epistle addresses the elders (1 Pe. 5:1-4).

This demonstrates the importance of the church in the eyes of God, and each believer must be diligent to have the same zeal for the New Testament assembly.

It is easy to criticize any church, but I need to ask, "What am I doing to make the church successful and fruitful for my Saviour's glory?" I should also ask, "If the whole church were like me, what would the church be?"

Some people are quick to criticize but they do not add anything of significance on the positive side. That is wrong and destructive to the work of the Lord, and such people will doubtless have loss at the judgment seat of Christ. As we have seen, the very context of Paul's teaching on the judgment seat of Christ in 1 Corinthians 3 is the believer's service in the church. Paul uses the metaphor of laboring on a farm and constructing a building (1 Co. 3:6-12). He then says that "every man's work shall be manifest," referring to Christ's judgment seat (1 Co. 3:13-15). He concludes the passage with a reference to the temple of God, ("ye" is plural) which is the church, and warns that "if any man defile the temple of God,

him shall God defile” (1 Co. 3:16-17). The believer’s relationship with the church is a very serious matter of eternal consequence.

The Office of a Deacon

The office of a deacon in the New Testament church is an honorable and important position, but like everything else, it has been abused in many ways throughout history.

In this study we examine what the Bible says about the deacon's office, work, authority, qualification, and appointment.

Meaning of the Word "Deacon"

The New Testament Greek for deacon—*diakonos*—simply means "servant." Consider the following definition by W.E. Vine: "Diakonos ... primarily denotes a servant, whether as doing servile work, or as an attendant rendering free service, without particular reference to its character. The word is probably connected with the verb 'dioko,' to hasten after, pursue (perhaps originally said of a runner)."

The term "deacon" is used in the New Testament primarily in two ways:

First, deacon refers to Christian workers in general.

In the following verses *diakonos* is translated "minister" and "servant":

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but MINISTERS by whom ye believed..." (1 Co. 3:5).

"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a SERVANT of the church which is at Cenchrea" (Ro. 16:1).

"Who also hath made us able MINISTERS of the new testament..." (2 Co. 3:6).

"But in all things approving ourselves as the MINISTERS of God..." (2 Co. 6:4).

"Are they MINISTERS of Christ? ... I am more..." (2 Co. 11:23).

“Whereof I was made a MINISTER...” (Eph. 3:7).

“ ... the gospel ... whereof I Paul am made a MINISTER” (Col. 1:23).

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a SERVANT of Christ, saluteth you...” (Col. 4:12).

“... Timotheus, our brother, and MINISTER of God...” (1 Th. 3:2).

“If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good MINISTER of Jesus Christ...” (1 Ti. 4:6).

In the above passages, the Greek word “diakonos” is used, and in each case the reference is to gospel preachers and Christian workers in general. In this sense, the apostle Paul, Timothy, Epaphras, and other preachers were called “deacons.” Yea, every Christian is to be a deacon in this general sense—a servant of Christ, a minister of the gospel to a lost world, a humble worker in the church.

Second, deacon refers to a certain office in the church.

The work of a deacon, in the general sense of being a servant to Christ and the church, is the work of every Christian; but there is also the office of a deacon—an office with definite and high standards, an office which only properly qualified and chosen Christians are to hold (Php. 1:1; 1 Ti. 3:13).

It is in this sense that the word “deacon” is most commonly used today.

Women Deacons?

Women can be deacons in a general sense. An example is Phebe in Romans 16:1, who was “a servant of the church at Cenchrea.”

Only men, though, can hold the *office* of deacon. The qualifications require that the deacon “be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well” (1 Ti. 3:12).

While women cannot hold the office of a deacon, they are very important to the ministry of the Word of God and the work of the church. Paul refers to the women who labored with him in the gospel (Php. 4:3). The elder women are to teach the younger women (Tit. 2:3-4). The aforementioned Phebe assisted Paul and represented the Cenchranean assembly in a ministry to the church at Rome (Ro. 16:1-2). The church was instructed to “assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you.” This exemplifies Paul’s high regard for women in the work of God.

The Deacon’s Work

The deacon is a servant of the church and of the pastor in a special sense beyond that which is expected of every member.

Though the actual term “deacon” is not used in Acts 6:1-4, we can see here a biblical pattern for the work of deacons. Notice that certain qualified men were chosen when a definite need arose, and their primary function was to allow the pastors to be free to carry on the spiritual ministry of the Word of God and prayer.

Of course, the deacons can do any work assigned by the pastor and the church, but they especially look after things like finances, property, and social projects (such as care for widows), thus freeing the pastors to dedicate their full attention, strength, and time to the pastoral ministry—oversight of the church, study, teaching, preaching, visitation, counseling, prayer.

By this example in Acts chapter six, we see the following definition of the term *deacon*: Deacons are men who are appointed to be in a special position of servitude to the pastor

and to the church, helpful in any way necessary to free the pastors for their God-given duties.

The Deacon's Authority

Nowhere in Scripture are deacons referred to as rulers, and nowhere are they seen ruling over pastors. They are table waiters, not rulers. “Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples *unto them*, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables” (Ac. 6:2).

In the absence of a pastor, the deacons or other mature men must assume control. But as soon as the church has a qualified pastor, leadership must be relinquished.

The terms “pastor,” “elder,” and “bishop” are used interchangeably in the New Testament and refer to the office of the same man. The different words are used to describe the three aspects of his office—shepherding, instructing, and leading. A pastor is the only officer in the church who has Bible authority to exercise oversight. The title *bishop* means overseer. The elders in the church at Ephesus were called the overseers (compare Ac. 20:17 with 20:28). Elders are called rulers (1 Ti. 5:17). Deacons are never referred to as overseers, rulers, or leaders. A church must not set up overseers over the overseers!

Consider the following comment by Baptist historian Thomas Armitage:

“This election created a new office in the Church, but not a new order in the ministry, as that term is now technically used. ... The reason given for the creation of their office was, that the Apostles might be relieved from those duties which interfered with their full ‘ministry of the Word.’ One set of ministers was not created to help another to do the same work, but duties that were not ministerial or pastoral were separated from those that were, and given into other hands. So that the deaconship was not probationary to the

eldership, nor have we any evidence that in the first century any deacon became an elder. ... The instructions given to the deacon in the Epistles, show the functions of his office to have been the same in the latter period of the Apostolic Age that they were when the office was created; and it nowhere appears that they exercised the pastoral or ministerial office. Even in matters relating to the relief of the poor they were not supreme. When Paul and Barnabas brought relief to the poor saints at Jerusalem, they delivered the gift to the 'elders' and not to the deacons: and no deacons assisted in the call, deliberations, or decisions of the advisory Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15). Paul's associations there were all with the elders and not the deacons of the Church, showing that the deacons held no rank in the pastoral office" (Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists*, 1890).

Anytime a board of deacons or committee of other men set themselves up over pastors, or try to operate apart from the pastor's oversight, they are sinning against God's Word.

I think of a church in which the pastor announced that he was called to another congregation after about ten years of ministry. He informed the church that he would assist them over the next few months in finding a new pastor or an interim pastor who would help them find a new pastor. The three deacons immediately had a series of conferences without counseling with the pastor or even informing him of the meetings. They discussed the possibility of calling a former associate pastor. This is disorderly and unwise conduct. When the pastor confronted them about the matter, they argued that they needed to form a pastor search committee, but that was not their job. Their job was to work with the existing pastor and under his direction to call another pastor. He knew things about the former associate pastor that disqualified the man from the pastorate, and had the deacons continued on their self-willed path apart from proper pastoral oversight, they could have made a terrible decision that would have potentially destroyed the church.

TO USURP AUTHORITY IS EVIL.

1. It is the sin of Korah (Num. 16).
2. It is the sin of Aaron and Miriam (Num. 12).
3. It is the sin of a rebellious wife (1 Pe. 3:1-5).
4. It is the sin of a rebellious child (Pr. 30:17).
5. It is the sin of a rebellious servant (1 Pe. 2:18).

Usurpation of authority is a very serious matter before God.

1 Timothy 5:24-25 reminds us that judgment does not always come in this life. Some sins follow the Christian beyond the grave before they are settled. A group of deacons, for example, might rule over pastors for many years without any obvious judgment, but they will no doubt face this matter at the judgment seat of Christ, unless repented of.

I think of a man who was a deacon in denominational Baptist churches for 30 years and was guilty of getting rid of good pastors. Eventually he saw the error of his ways and rejected that type of church polity. When the book *Thirty Years a Watchtower Slave* was published, about a former member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, he joked that he should write a book, *Thirty Years a Deacon*.

The Deacon's Number

The Bible nowhere says a church must have deacons. In the church at Jerusalem, deacons were not chosen until a distinct need arose (Ac. 6). When Paul instructed Titus about how to set in order the things that were lacking in the churches of Crete, he required the ordination of pastors, but he did not mention deacons (Tit. 1:5-9).

Only, therefore, when a church has a definite need for deacons should they be appointed, and then only when qualified men are available according to the high standards of 1 Timothy 3. Better no deacons than the wrong deacons!

The size and particular needs of a church determine how many deacons are selected.

The Deacon's Qualification

“grave” (1 Ti. 3:8)

This is the Greek word “semnos,” which means “venerable, honorable, respectable” It “combines the thoughts both of gravity and dignity” (Vine). It speaks of “both seriousness of purpose and self-respect in conduct” (Moule).

“not doubletongued” (1 Ti. 3:8)

This speaks of honesty, integrity, trustworthiness. The qualified deacon is a man of his word. He isn't a liar. He doesn't say one thing but mean another. He does not say one thing to one person and a different thing to another person. He is able to keep confidences and not spread things that should be private. I think of two men who participated in a church's weekly leadership meetings and heard things about various members in the context of pastoral ministry and deciding on disciplinary matters. Unknown to the pastor at the time, they went directly to the people involved and told them what the pastor had said. They did this to hurt his ministry and to poison the people's minds against him, and it worked very well and would have destroyed the church had God not intervened. “A man who earns the reputation of being conversationally unreliable is rendered useless in his office, for no one really wants to confide in a loose-tongued deacon” (John Phillips).

“Not doubletongued” speaks of candor and courage. It means not telling people what they *want* to hear, not being “all things to all men” because you are afraid to take your stand for the truth.

“Not doubletongued” speaks of Christian love. The Bible warns that a lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it” (Pr. 26:28). The doubletongued are selfish, caring only about themselves and their agendas. An example is David’s wife, Michal. She helped David escape from Saul, but fearing her father, she lied about the matter, claiming that David had threatened to kill her (1 Sa. 19:10-17). This doubletongued statement was a slander against the good character of her own husband, but she cared only about her own wellbeing.

The devil is the chief of the doubletongued (e.g., Ge. 3:1-4; Joh. 8:44), and those who practice this sin are following his wicked example.

The doubletongued are extremely destructive to churches, and this is even more so if they are in some ministry position.

“not given to much wine” (1 Ti. 3:8)

This means that the deacon must not be under the influence of alcoholic beverages. The term “given to” is the Greek *prosecho*, often translated “give heed to” (1 Ti. 1:4; 4:1, 13). “Not holding the mind on much wine” (*Robertson’s Word Pictures*). “The words ‘not given to’ mean not only not paying attention to but not giving assent to” (*Everyman’s Bible Commentary*). Compare 1 Pe. 5:8, “Be sober, be vigilant...”

“not greedy of filthy lucre” (1 Ti. 3:8)

“Greedy of filthy lucre” is the Greek *aischrokerdes*, which is a compound of three Greek terms--*a* (not) *aischros* (filthy) *kerdos* (lucre or gain). It means one who is greedy of improper gain, one who is desirous of base gain.

There are at least three ways that a man can be greedy of filthy lucre: First, a man is greedy of filthy lucre when he loves money and personal gain. This is the man who is

not content with godliness (1 Ti. 6:6-10). The greedy man should not be in the ministry. Second, a man is greedy of filthy lucre when he is willing to use unlawful or unjust means to obtain money and possessions. In this sense it refers to “gain obtained by base arts and employments” (*Family Bible Notes*). Third, a man is greedy of filthy lucre when his motive for Christian service is personal gain. Compare Tit. 1:11; 2 Pe. 2:3. Many men are in the ministry for what they can get out of it by the way of money and prestige.

“holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” (1 Ti. 3:9)

This means the deacon is a genuine believer and not a hypocrite. To “hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” refers to having genuine faith in Christ. The opposite of this is the “faith” of Judas, which was a hypocritical faith. He pretended to be like the other disciples, but in reality he was a deceiver and a thief. There are multitudes like Judas who profess to believe the gospel, but they do not hold this profession with a pure conscience. Profession is not necessarily possession (Tit. 1:16).

This means the deacon is sound in doctrine. The “mystery of the faith” refers to the doctrines of the New Testament. Compare Jude 3, where “the faith” describes the doctrines of the faith. The term “mystery” refers to those things that were hidden in the Old Testament but revealed in the New (Col. 1:26-27). While it isn’t required that a deacon be trained in doctrine to the level of a pastor or that he be apt to teach, he must have a good understanding of fundamental Bible doctrines such as law and grace, repentance and faith, atonement, propitiation, redemption, justification, and sanctification.

“And let these also first be proved” (1 Ti.3:10)

Before a deacon is ordained to hold office, it must be shown that he is the type of man described in these standards and that he has the faithfulness and the commitment to Jesus Christ and to the church that is required.

This qualification is an important principle for appointing people to any position of church ministry. They should first demonstrate that they have the Christian character and ability to do that particular job. When churches are careful to abide by this principle and avoid being hasty in appointing people to ministries, they are protected to a large degree.

“being found blameless” (1 Ti. 3:10)

The word “blameless” is the Greek *anegkletos*, meaning “that which cannot be called to account, i.e., with nothing laid to one’s charge as the result of public investigation” (Vine). It is translated “unreproveable” (Col. 1:22). Blameless does not mean sinless or perfect according to man’s standards. It means blameless according to God’s standards.

“honest report” (Ac. 6:3)

The first deacons are mentioned in Acts 6, and the qualifications that were given by the apostles in that circumstance should be included with those that Paul gave in 1 Timothy 3.

An honest report speaks of the man’s reputation in the church and the community. A man who steals or lies or does not pay his debts in a timely fashion or is not faithful to his employer (e.g., stealing time), and does not otherwise have an honest reputation, is not qualified to be a deacon.

“wisdom ... faith” (Ac. 6:3, 5)

The deacons must have godly wisdom and faith. Many financial decisions and other practical matters handled by the deacons must be made before God through much prayer and BY FAITH rather than sight. The deacons, then, must be more than good businessmen. They must have faith in God and understand the spiritual aspects of God’s financial and church program. Churches have often been hindered from supporting missionaries or doing other things God was directing them to do simply because some men involved were not men of faith.

We witnessed something in the early 1980s that illustrates the importance of this. At a preacher’s fellowship, I was introduced to a pastor in North Carolina who was interested in our missionary work. His church was only a couple of years old and had just moved into a new building and they had a large debt. He was working a regular secular job and was not supported by the church. In fact, he had placed a mortgage on his own house to help finance the church building. He told me that he would like to have me visit his church and speak, but under the circumstances, they could not possibly support us financially. I decided to go anyway and I arrived the next Sunday morning to preach and tell about the Lord’s work in South Asia. Before the service, the pastor took me aside and said, “Brother, God has spoken to me this week that we should support you. I don’t know how we will do it, but I believe we must. For now, we want to promise you \$25 monthly support, and we will trust the Lord for that amount.” That was forty years ago, and they have never missed a month. In fact, they quadrupled the original amount. They obeyed God by faith, and He enabled them beyond their visible means. The congregation doubled and doubled again in size. The church was able to support its pastor full time as well as several

assistants. They have given hundreds of thousands of dollars to missions. This isn't surprising, as the Lord promised, "Give, and it shall be given unto you"? (Luke 6:38). But it requires faith to believe and act on this promise.

In the early 1990s, *Bethel Baptist Church* of London, Ontario, was meeting in a storefront building and though they had a growing building fund, they saw no reasonable possibility of purchasing their own property because of the high price of real estate in the area. Pastor Wilbert Unger had a burden to start a printing ministry to send out the Word of God and sound Bible teaching via the printed page across this needy world. He approached the congregation about using a large portion of the building fund to establish a print shop and to hire a printer. The people agreed, and the project was completed. From the Bethel Baptist print shop, hundreds of thousands of books and Scriptures and magazines in many languages have since been distributed to the glory of God. Within one year of their decision to use part of the building fund to print the Word of God, the Lord opened the door for them to get into their own building and that building has long been debt free.

When *Tri-County Baptist Church in Katy, Texas*, was starting out in the late '70s, they were meeting in a storefront building and were saving toward the purchase of their own property. Eventually they obtained some acreage north of town and had \$10,000 in the bank toward a building fund. At that time they received a letter from a missionary they supported, requesting help to put the roof on a missionary church. The missionary congregation had poured the foundation and put up the walls of their building, but they needed help to finish the roof before the rainy season began. It did not seem reasonable for Tri-County Baptist to use their money to

help this missionary church with its building when Tri-County did not have its own building; yet this is exactly what the Lord led Pastor Rick Shrader to do. His men agreed, and the church sent its entire building fund to the mission field! God richly blessed this sacrificial step of faith, and within one year, Tri-County had its own building debt free!

What if there had been men involved in the above decisions who were not men of faith and evangelistic burden--worldly-minded deacons, for example? They would no doubt have discouraged the idea of helping missionaries by faith, arguing that it would not be reasonable "under their circumstances." Rather than praying and ascertaining the will of God in the matter, they would have complained and resisted. If men who lack faith and spiritual vision are appointed as church officers, the people will be discouraged about following God by faith, just as the children of Israel were discouraged by the ten faithless spies (Nu. 13-14).

“Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things” (1 Ti. 3:11)

The same qualifications are given for the wives of both pastors and deacons.

The man's wife is a very important part of his life and ministry, and her spiritual condition and thinking will greatly affect his personal life and ministry. If church officers have unspiritual wives, the entire congregation will be injured. I have known of many cases in which the wife of a pastor or deacon weakened his hands and undermined his ministry. I think of wives who aren't kind, gracious, compassionate. I think of wives who have no great love for God's Word and aren't Bible students. I think of wives who lack spiritual wisdom and discernment. I think of wives who are not modest in attitude and dress. I think of wives who are worldly-

minded, who want their children to excel in worldly education rather than surrender to finding their part in Christ's Great Commission, who would rather that their sons be engineers and doctors than preachers, who would rather that their daughters be fashionable and popular with the worldly crowd than modest pilgrims. I think of wives who have critical spirits and are gossips and spend their time tearing down the flock rather than building it up. I think of wives who form cliques and show favoritism and cause division rather than spiritual unity. I think of wives who are petty in their judgments, criticizing something like a little makeup or jewelry while overlooking a heart that loves Christ. I think of wives who are hasty in judgment and do not allow the saints space to grow.

These qualifications are also important because the older women in the church are to instruct the younger women (Tit. 2:3-5). If the wives of church officers are not godly women who are an example to others and who can instruct the younger women in the practical aspects of Christian discipleship and godly family life, the work of God will be greatly weakened. This does not mean, of course, that the work of teaching the younger women is limited to the wives of church officers.

The deacon's wife is "grave." This "speaks of that combination of gravity and dignity which invites the reverence of others" (W.E. Vine). The wife of the pastor and deacon is the type of Christian lady who lives her life with a godly seriousness of purpose. Her life is the kind that causes others to respect her spiritually and morally. She is spiritually minded. She loves God and is serious about serving God. The "gravity" of the qualified pastor's or deacon's wife causes other women to accept her teaching (Tit. 2:3-4) and to seek her counsel. This does not mean, of course, that she has no sense of humor. It is referring to a dignified manner of life, not a

humorless personality. Spirit-filled women have many types of personalities, but one thing they all have in common is a spiritual dignity that causes others to look upon them with respect.

The deacon's wife is not a “**slanderer**.” The Greek word used for “slander” (*diabolos*) is used elsewhere of the devil. The word means “accuser.” In Revelation 12:10 the devil is said to be the accuser of the brethren. He loves to say evil things about people with a malicious goal of hurting them. He slandered God to Eve (Ge. 3:4-5). The wife of the pastor or deacon must be a woman who is especially careful about her conversation and attitude. Otherwise she can easily hurt the church and spoil her husband's ministry with her tongue. Slander refers to lying, gossiping, backbiting, and other hurtful conversation, especially that which is untruthful and mean-spirited and spoken with the object of hurting people or getting back at them for some perceived injury. Gossip and slander involve deception, untruth, and an injurious attitude and purpose. It is the fruit of a mean-spirited person rather than a Christ-like person who loves people. Lying comes from a heart of hate (Pr. 26:28). Jezebel slandered Naboth to steal his property (1 Ki. 21:9-13). God hates lying lips (Pr. 12:22), and the righteous also hate lying (Pr. 13:5). We must emphasize that it is not wrong for the wives of pastors and deacons to discuss the spiritual condition of people in a godly manner so that help can be given to them and so that others can be protected from possible harm. To “speak the truth in love” is not slander (Eph. 4:15). To admonish or reprove is not slander (Ro. 15:14; Eph. 5:11). To discuss and report spiritual and moral problems in a godly manner is not slander (1 Co. 1:11; 5:1). For Paul to warn Timothy about Alexander and other false teachers and evil workers was not slander (1 Ti. 1:20; 2 Ti. 2:16-18; 4:14).

The deacon's wife is **“sober.”** This is the Greek “nephalios,” which is also translated “vigilant” (1 Ti. 3:2). To be “sober” means to be in control of one's mind and life with the goal of pleasing God and fulfilling His will. The wife of the qualified pastor or deacon is spiritually and morally circumspect. She meditates on God's Word and tests everything by God's Word. She is on guard against spiritual dangers, watching over her own life and her family and those to whom she ministers. To be “sober” is the opposite of being under the control of wine or anything that would destroy one's spiritual vigilance. Consider some examples of things that can take control of one's mind in an unwholesome manner: Alcohol and drugs; sensual music such as rock and roll, country/western, pop, rap, CCM, and contemporary Southern Gospel; unwholesome television programs; filthy literature; worldly social media; the *vast* majority of Hollywood movies; television “soap operas:”; romance novels; sensual beauty magazines; gossip magazines; or any other influence which would draw one's mind away from fellowship with Christ.

The deacon's wife is **“faithful in all things.”** In a word, this is God's standard for the wife of a church officer. She must be a faithful Christian woman in all aspects of her life: in her home, in the church, and in society. She has a good testimony before her family, the church, and the community. She is dependable. When it comes to any service of God, she gets the job done and she gets it done right.

“Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well” (1 Ti. 3:12)

Notice that God requires that the deacon be a man who rules his household “well.” He must be a godly father

and husband with a good family life. He must be doing a good job in his home.

Any serious problems in the home should be worked out before a man is considered for a church office. It is not uncommon for a man to have problems in his life and family which must be worked out by the Spirit of God before he can be the kind of church officer God describes in the Scriptures. In Christ, any spiritual and moral problem can be healed. Indeed, we read that “his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Pe. 1:3). Thus, there is always the possibility of working out problems in the home and developing the kind of family life required by God. The Bible makes it plain, though, that until the man has the right home he is not qualified for church office. He must rule his family “well.”

The Deacon’s Appointment

The Scripture does not give an absolute method which every church is bound to follow in selecting deacons. The standards God requires for deacons are clear, but the actual method of selection can vary from church to church.

Following are some methods that are used:

1. Some churches have the congregation (after being taught God’s standards for deacons and the biblical view of the deacon’s work) put forth names of possible deacons. The pastors modify the list as they see fit. The church then votes on the deacons from the approved list. This is similar to the example of Acts 6:1-4, which is a good biblical guideline.

2. In some churches the pastor directly selects the deacons as the need arises.

3. In some churches the pastor selects a list of names of men he would approve as deacons, then submits this list to the church for a vote.

4. In some cases the first deacons are selected by the pastor and the church. Thereafter, new deacons are chosen by the pastor and the deacons without further church vote.

The Deacon's Term of Service

Since the Bible does not say how long deacons should serve, each church must decide that for itself. Some churches have definite terms for deacons, such as two or three years. Others ordain deacons for life-long terms. There are advantages in both customs. The limited period allows the ordination of better men when such become available and allows opportunity to prove the men who are chosen. The unlimited term "tends to secure a higher regard for the office itself and greater usefulness on the part of those who fill it." (Edward T. Hiscox, *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches*, 1980 edition, p. 113).

The Deacon's Reward

"For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Ti. 3:13).

1. The first reward mentioned is "a good degree." The word "degree" is the Greek *bathmos*, which is "a step, i.e. (figuratively) grade (of dignity)" (Strong). It is "a grade of dignity, degree, rank, standing" (Mounce). The good degree or a good standing refers to two things, at least. It refers to a good standing before men in this life, and it refers to a good standing at the judgment seat of Christ in the next.

2. The second reward mentioned is "great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." A good deacon makes special

progress in spiritual growth, power, and zeal. This is God's blessing upon his life for his faithful work in the church.

The Deacon's Discipline

“Who ever heard of a deacon being deposed, or even impeached, for lack of fidelity in his office? I never did! Why is this? Has none of them never materially erred? This cannot be supposed. Does it not go far to prove that there is some thing on this point exceedingly wrong, and singularly unguarded? The church, I answer, has the same remedy here that she has in all other cases. ... Does the unfaithfulness of these officers result from slothful indifference? Then they must be admonished. If it is voluntary and continued, and neither instruction from the pastor nor admonition from the church can procure reformation, they must be impeached, and, by a regular vote, removed. The same power that makes an officer, is always competent, when he proves himself unworthy or unfaithful, to displace him” (R.B.C. Howell, cited from Davis W. Huckabee, *The Constitution of the Church*, Challenge Press).

Way of Life Literature Publications

Order online www.wayoflife.org or by phone 866-295-4143.

Partial listing. Please see our [Store](#) for all titles.

Baptist Music Wars

Believer's Bible Dictionary

Bible Separation: It's Doctrine and Practice

Bible Times and Ancient Kingdoms: Treasures From Archaeology

Commentary Series - Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Minor Prophets

The Discipling Church: The Church That Will Stand Until Jesus Comes

The Effectual Bible Student

The Emerging Church is Coming

The Future According to the Bible

Holiness: Pitfalls, Struggles, Victory

Jews in Fighter Jets; Israel Past, Present, Future

Keeping the Kids: How to Keep Children From Falling Prey to the World

The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church

Music for Good or Evil

One Year Discipleship Course (free eBook)

The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church

The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements: The History and the Error

A Plea to Southern Gospel Music Fans

A Portrait of Christ: The Tabernacle, the Priesthood, and the Offerings

Seeing the Non-Existent: Evolution's Myths and Hoaxes

Sowing and Reaping: A Course in Evangelism

Things Hard to Be Understood: A Handbook of Biblical Difficulties

An Unshakeable Faith: A Christian Apologetics Course

Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible & Christianity

What Every Christian Should Know about Rock Music

Over 88 free eBooks: https://www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/