



*Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, <sup>2</sup> in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began <sup>3</sup> and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior;*

*<sup>4</sup> To Titus, my true child in a common faith:*

*Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.*

*<sup>5</sup> This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— <sup>6</sup> if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. <sup>7</sup> For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup> He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*

As you should have seen in the church email this week as well as in the bulletin, we have men who are elder candidates that we have presented for your consideration. The cool thing about this is that we have seldom had two elder candidates at the same time and we have never had two candidates at the same time who have never served as elders. This is an encouraging fact.

I'll tell you what I would like to see happen. I once heard it said that any vision statement should be small enough to fit on a t-shirt. Otherwise it is probably too long and complicated. Here is my vision for discipleship at Grace...on a t-shirt.

To make the job of the elder selection committee very joyful and very difficult.



Let me break this down for you. I would love to see a small army of men at Grace who are qualified to serve as an elder. Imagine if we had twenty or thirty men who were able to serve in this way? How would that impact the elder selection committee? They would be full of joy, wouldn't they? What a delight it would be to know that the committee would have so many men from which to choose? A few years ago we did not put forth any new elders for consideration. It's not that there were no qualified men but at that time, we didn't have any qualified men who were also available to serve. This year we have two. What if there were 20-30? Obviously we would never have an elder board

that large but just knowing there were that many qualified men would cause the elder selection committee to be very joyful. But it would also make their job very difficult, wouldn't it? If you had 20-30 potential candidates, how would you decide among them? Their job would be both joyful and difficult.

But why would we even want that many qualified men? Isn't being an elder a really high calling that doesn't apply to most men in our churches? This is a common misunderstanding about what it means to be an elder. There are two Scripture passages that teach about elder qualifications—Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3. 1 Timothy 3:1 has a somewhat shocking start. The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

Now why would I say that is shocking? At best, it seems odd to us because of the word *aspire*. Somehow it doesn't seem right to *aspire* to be an elder. It's OK to be willing to serve as an elder but if you actually *aspire* to it, if this is something you want to do, then it feels sort of selfish and self-promoting. Now it certainly is possible that some men might have poor motives for wanting to be an elder. Maybe they do want recognition and personal glory, but we could probably weed out those guys pretty easily. However, just as it is wrong to want it for selfish reasons, the Bible is clear that you should actually want to be an elder.

Let me show you the depths of this desire by comparing it with a well-known verse. 1 Timothy 6:10 reads, *For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.* I think we can all agree that the longing in this verse leads to bad things. Longing here means coveting and selfish desiring and the consequences are extremely harmful. But the point is the word "longing." It is a very strong desire. This is what it means to *aspire* to be an elder. Any man who is considering being an elder should desire and long to be an elder.

Tim Farrell and I had a good conversation about this when he was considering becoming an elder. He did not want to be an elder and he described that as an instance of "false humility." He didn't want to presume that he was qualified or that it would be a position of prestige in any way, which was good. But he did not quite grasp that it was something to *aspire* to, that desiring to serve is not only acceptable, it was necessary. It helped him have a very different understanding of serving the whole church.

So any potential elder should desire to be an elder but I believe that desiring to be an elder is potentially a good thing for any man and here's why I say that. The qualifications of an elder are obtainable by any man. And more than that, they should be desirable because they are simply the traits of a mature disciple. To aspire to be an elder is to aspire to know Jesus better. It's not like there is some golden crown that descends from heaven and anoints a man to allow him to be an elder. This is merely a matter of growing in your relationship with Christ.

<b>Titus 1 (elders)</b>	<b>Titus 2 (all believers)</b>
Not arrogant or quick tempered	Not slanderers, dignified
Not a drunkard, violent or greedy for gain	Not a slave to wine
Lover of good	Model of good works
self-controlled, holy, and disciplined	Self-controlled, reverent, steadfast
teach sound doctrine	Teach what is good
hospitable	Rom. 12:13, 1 Peter 4:9, Heb 13:2
Husband of one wife	

I can demonstrate this just the book of Titus. Chapter one lists the character qualities for an elder and chapter two lists the character qualities for every believer. The two lists are almost identical, aren't they? Titus 2 does not have hospitality but that is found in several other New Testament passages that apply to all believers. The one thing that specifically applies to elders is that they must be the husband of one wife. And we'll get to that shortly.

So my vision would be to have an army of men who could serve as an elder, whether or not they ever do so. So men, let me challenge you. Do you aspire to be an elder? Do you want to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the image of Christ?

With that in mind, let's work our way through these elder qualifications. And as we do this, let me say something about our two candidates, Don Green and Luke Hartkopf. I certainly don't mean to pick on them! Ideally, this message would have occurred before we had two candidates on the docket. Actually, we are voting on all 4 elders this time since Rod's and Scott's term have expired. So keep them all in mind at some level if you wish. In our context, it's sort of hard not to. However, as you are being discerning, do your best to be gracious as well. And don't forget, Seth and I are both elders also, so these apply equally to us.

If you recall from last week, there are two basic tests—a character test and a doctrinal test. Paul began with the character test. *if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believer and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.* Twice in two verses Paul laid down the need to be above reproach. This does not mean perfection or else there would never be any elders at Grace. But to be above reproach is a summary statement of the rest of the character qualities. If this were an athletic contest, Paul may have said something like this. The athlete needs to be in tip top shape. He must be able to run a 7 minute mile, bench press 200 pounds and have a vertical jump of 18 inches. The list of athletic achievements describes what it means to be in tip top shape. In the same way, everything that follows describes what it means to be above reproach.

The first item on the character test is for an elder to be the husband of one wife. And we've already seen that it is one of the things on the list that only applies to elders and not to all believers. This phrase literally means a "one woman man." There has been some debate about the meaning of this phrase. In the context of the early church it could have been a prohibition against having multiple wives. Despite what we might think of paganism in ancient Greek culture, polygamy was not that common, but it did exist. Some of those men with multiple wives would have gotten converted to Christianity. This still happens today in cultures throughout the world. So at the very least it means that an elder cannot be a polygamist. As far as I know, every man at Grace Church meets this qualification. 😊

But some say this eliminates anyone who has ever been divorced. We know that God hates divorce but even then he does allow it under certain circumstances even for believers. But as with most sins, I think it depends on when it happened. An elder can't be a drunkard or violent but if someone was an alcoholic before they got converted, would that forbid them from ever being an elder? Most definitely not. If we start to have these sorts of standards then again, no one will ever be qualified. So I believe the same standard applies to divorce. It's not even clear that the phrase "one woman man" applies to divorce but if it does, a pre-conversion divorce does not apply so long as the man is currently a faithful and loving husband.

Even the rigorous process for becoming ordained in the EFCA has this as an exception. They will not ordain a divorced man with only 3 exceptions.

1. Adultery by one's spouse, based on Matthew 19.
2. Desertion by an unbeliever based on 1 Corinthians 7.
3. Pre-conversion divorce.

So even the Free Church recognizes that sins that occurred before a person was saved are perfectly valid exceptions. I wish more churches and elder boards had this standard. Perhaps some are too stringent and would not allow any exception but nowadays, far too many seem to have little to no standards. I know of several pastors who have had affairs and have returned to full-time ministry within a year. Billy Graham's grandson was a pastor who had three affairs and tried to have affairs with three other women. He divorced his wife and married the third woman he had an affair with. About one year later he was hired as an associate pastor. Just this past Sunday he started a new church in Florida. Here is a section of their website.

The Sanctuary is a judgment-free zone where people can come as they are, not as they should be. A place to find love and laughter and hope and healing and acceptance and forgiveness and mercy and help. Sadly, churches tend to be the scariest places, rather than the safest places, for fallen people to fall down and for broken people to break down. The Sanctuary strives to be different.

Does this sound like a church you might want to attend? Maybe, right? Many churches are very judgmental and are not safe places to be. Many churches are not very good at welcoming broken people. There's no question about that. But that's not what this pastor means. He means that he should not be held accountable for any of his past sins, no matter how terrible they are. And it's not like he ever repented. He has never apologized to any of these women.<sup>1</sup> What he wants is not just a judgment-free zone but also a morality-free zone. We've come a long way from what is

called the Billy Graham rule. Billy Graham was never alone with a woman other than his wife and always traveled with other men for close accountability.

Yes, any sin can be forgiven. There should be some sort of process for restoring men and women to full fellowship and even ministry, provided there has been genuine repentance and a long time of testing. However, I feel that adultery permanently forbids a man from ever serving as a pastor again. And since a pastor and an elder are the same thing, this would apply to all elders as well.

But being a “one woman man” means a lot more than avoiding adultery. It means that the husband only has eyes for his wife. It means that there is never the slightest hint of impropriety. It means that if humanly possible, you are never alone with another woman. It means never allowing yourself to have any emotional attachment whatsoever. It means having accountability software installed on all of your devices to help you battle any temptation to view pornography. Some men should install this software on their devices because they have an addiction to porn, but all men should do it to avoid temptation. It means loving Christ so much that you would never want to be anything other than a one woman man.

The next phrase might be the toughest one of all. *and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.* I have had at least two elders tell me that they have been squirming in their seats the last two weeks I have read this passage. This one is so challenging because it’s not just the character of the man that is in question, but that of his entire family. Maybe the most challenging part of this challenging section is the fact that an elders children have to be believers. It seems like if any of your children are not believers then that man cannot be an elder. We need to get some help from the parallel passage in 1 Timothy 3.

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive (1 Timothy 3:4)

The key word here is “manage,” which is another way of saying the man is being a good steward of his family. He is training and disciplining his children so that his children are generally submissive. There is no standard of perfection expected here but there is a general principle that the man stewards his home as well as possible.

But notice that it says nothing about his children being believers in the 1 Timothy passage and I think that is significant. There are a few reasons why I don’t think that an elder’s children all have to be professing believers.

The first reason is that the text may not even mean that they must be believers. The word can be translated as believers or it could be translated as faithful. And what does a “faithful” child look like? A faithful child is generally a submissive and obedient child, which is exactly what it says in 1 Timothy.

The second issue is how do you know if the child is a genuine believer or not? Children can make a profession of faith and even get baptized, but often this faith does not become their own until their adult years. Moreover, if this was the standard, some men might lay too much pressure on their children to make a profession of faith.

Karen and I were very careful not to put the pressure of a “pastor’s kid” on our three children. There is some parts of this that you can’t avoid. They are under the watchful eye of the congregation whether you want that to happen or not. And of course, with their permission, they end up in some of my sermon illustrations. But what we didn’t do is put pressure on them to be good simply because they are the children of a pastor. They have shared this with us on several occasions, that they felt more or less like a regular part of the church and were not under the spotlight. It doesn’t mean we were perfect parents, but we did our best not to pressure them in this way. It’s all about motives, really. Our training and discipline came because it was the right thing to do as a parent, not because we were in full-time ministry.

I’m sure you have run across a pastor or two where there has been pressure on the kids. Such a scenario can create massive hypocrisy. The pastor, his wife and their kids are all on their best behavior at church because it’s their job all the while their family life is a mess. They look like a model family but in reality, the pastor is not managing his household at all.

Think about it this way. As parents, are we responsible to make sure our children are converted to faith in Christ? No, we are not. We are responsible to lead them to Christ. We are responsible to follow Christ ourselves and model a healthy relationship with the Lord. But we can’t make our children believe any more than we can make other family members or anyone else in the world believe. Salvation belongs to the Lord, so it seems odd to make an elder responsible for all of their children to be believers.

Problems will always arise in any family just as they continually arise in all of life. The key is not perfection but how a man manages the struggles and challenges of parenting. When issues arise, is he trusting the Lord for the outcome or does he try to control the outcome? Is he seeking Godly counsel from others or is he afraid to be vulnerable and ask for help? Is he modeling patience and love and steadfastness or does he force his children into submission?

The vast majority of being an elder is simply growing in your own relationship with the Lord. Do you see that now? Yes, it is a calling. Yes, you have to desire the responsibility and challenge. And almost everything in this passage applies to everyone. Furthermore, it is a call to serve and a call to ministry. It could be that the Lord would use a passage like this to call someone here to vocational ministry or to the mission field. But each step toward that kind of decision begins with a simple obedience done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Rich Maurer**  
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<sup>1</sup> <https://spiritualsoundingboard.com/2019/06/19/warning-tullian-tchividjian-attempts-a-ministry-comeback-by-faking-true-restoration-and-repentance-with-his-victims/>