
WE ARE THE CHURCH

Marks of a Healthy Church

QUALIFIED UNDER-SHEPHERDS

A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter
to First Baptist Church of Diana, TX on March 11, 2018

INTRODUCTION

Authority is not a particularly good word in our modern western culture. Many people decry the abuses of authority we encounter all around us, and rightfully so. However, the abuse of something good doesn't make a good thing bad. In this message, we shall complete our series on marks of a healthy church by considering the godly expression of authority in the unique office of pastor or elder. May God help us to understand, to embrace, and to encourage the good application of authority in our lives.

MESSAGE MADE SIMPLE

"If anyone aspires to the office of overseer (or 'pastor' or 'elder'), he desires a noble task" (1 Timothy 3:1).

Authority is not a particularly good word in our modern western culture. Many people decry the abuses of authority we encounter all around us, and rightfully so. However, the abuse of something good doesn't make a good thing bad.

The Bible's entire storyline is centered upon good and right authority. Essentially, when humans embrace God's authority they flourish; when humans rebel against God and try to establish authority elsewhere they suffer. Adam and Eve exemplify this reality at the very beginning of the Bible, and the rest of the story is a continual picture of God calling humans to submit to His appropriate authority.

In the local church, we discover God's good authority expressed through mutual submission to the Bible. Furthermore, we also come to understand God's design for all sorts of authoritative relationships in our lives. This is especially true in the biblical office of pastor or elder. God delegates authority, and God calls all people everywhere to embrace and encourage godly authority.

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-15 (ESV)

1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the **office of overseer**, he desires **a noble task**.

2 Therefore an **overseer** must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, **able to teach**, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

8 **Deacons** likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

14 I hope to come to you soon, but ***I am writing these things to you so that***, 15 if I delay, ***you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.***

THE POINT I'M AIMING AT TODAY

Healthy Churches embrace and encourage the unique office of pastors/elders.

MESSAGE OUTLINE

- (1) THE CHURCH BELONGS TO THE LIVING GOD
- (2) THERE IS AN “*OUGHTNESS*” TO LIFE IN THE CHURCH
- (3) GOD HAS DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO PASTORS/ELDERS
- (4) GOD EXPLICITLY DEFINES QUALIFICATIONS FOR PASTORS/ELDERS
- (5) HEALTHY CHURCHES EMBRACE AND ENCOURAGE THE UNIQUE OFFICE OF PASTORS/ELDERS
- (6) APP: WILL YOU EMBRACE AND ENCOURAGE GODLY PASTORS/ELDERS?

MESSAGE

(1) THE CHURCH BELONGS TO THE LIVING GOD

- God’s household: “*the household of God*” (v15)
 - In Ephesians 2:19, we are told that God’s saving work makes us “*no longer strangers... but... members of the household of God.*”
 - In 1 Peter 4:17, we read that God knows and rules and judges those who are in “*His household*”... those who “*obey His gospel.*”
 - Who are *God’s children in the world*?
 - *Church membership* claims to answer this question.
- People Owned by God: “*the church of the living God*” (v15).
 - In 1 Cor. 6 and 7, we read that Christians are “*bought with a price*” and Paul says elsewhere what that price was: “*he [God] obtained [His church] with his own blood*” (Acts 20:28).
 - Therefore, we are *doubly owned by God*.
 - (1) God *created* us; and (2) God *redeemed* (or bought) us.
 - Friends, *do you think this way*?
 - Do you know that the local church is claiming to be *the visible representation of God’s people in the world*?

Summary: This local church belongs to the living God, who purchased it with the blood of His own beloved Son.

(Segue) *Therefore, Christ is the head of this local church, and He gets to say what we ought to be and do.*

(2) THERE IS AN “*OUGHTNESS*” TO LIFE IN THE CHURCH

- Christians in a local church ought to behave
 - *“I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God”* (v14-15).
 - While we want to be quick to make the Gospel of grace loud and clear, we do not mean to communicate that God does not care how you behave.
 - **Justification** is through **faith** alone in **Christ** alone (Eph. 2:8).
 - **Saving faith** is always linked to **good works** (Eph. 2:10).
 - The Bible clearly says, **“this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments...”** (1 John 5:3).
 - The Bible is our authoritative rule of faith (belief) and practice (action).
 - **Who is God?** The answer is in the Bible!
 - **What is the Gospel?** The answer is in the Bible!
 - **What is a Christian?** The answer is in the Bible!
 - **What is a church?** The answer is in the Bible!
 - **How is a Christian to live?** The answer is in the Bible!
 - **What is a church supposed to do?** The answer is in the Bible!
 - **How should church members relate to one another?** The answer is in the Bible!
 - **What is the responsibility of pastors? ...church members?** The answer is in the Bible!

- Friends, do you believe that the **Bible** really does **hold all the answers** for **this local church**?
 - Do you expect to answer questions about **who we are** as a church or **what we do** from the **Bible**?
 - Do you **really expect** to find answers to questions about church **government, programs, and membership** in the **Bible**?
 - **I do! ...I'm staking my life on it!**

Summary: Good order should mark the local church, because we understand that Christ is our head... our king... our master

(Segue) **And He has delegated specific authority in the local church**

(3) GOD HAS DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO PASTORS/ELDERS

- **The Title**

- The title "**pastor**" comes primarily from what the New Testament says about **what a man does**, rather than **what a man is**. Ephesians 4:11 is the only place in the New Testament where "pastor" is used a label (noun) and not a function (adjective).
 - Much more frequent is the title of "**elder**" (Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:2, 16:4, 20:17, 21:18; 1 Tim. 4:14, 5:17, 5:19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14)...
 - or "**overseer**" (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-2; Titus 1:7).

- **The Function**

Pastoring or shepherding includes:

- **Preaching and Teaching the word of God.**
 - Paul said to Timothy, "**I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching**" (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

- **Praying for his church family.**
 - When there was an organizational need among the church in Jerusalem, the elders “**summoned the full number of the disciples**” (in other words they gathered the whole church) and said, “**It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.**” They had the church pick out seven men who might serve in an administrative capacity so that the elders could continue to “**devote [themselves] to prayer and to the ministry of the word**” (Acts 6:2–4).
- **Overseeing the affairs of his church family.**
 - The task of overseeing and leading is focused on **continually calling the church** family to increasingly **submit themselves** to the teaching of **Scripture** (see especially 1 Tim. 4:6-16).
- Friends, when you think about **what you want in a pastor...** or **what you value** in a pastor... is this the kind of stuff that comes to mind?
 - Do you want your pastors to be men who have **worn out Bibles** and **broken hearts** over **your spiritual stagnation**?
 - Do you want your pastors to be men who **don't trust your wisdom or theirs**, but only trust that wisdom that comes from **Scripture** (*whether it comes out of your mouth or his own*)?
 - Do you want your pastors to be men who **care more about the spiritual health** of their **church** family than how high or low their **public approval** is at the moment?
 - Do you want your pastors to be men whose **aim in life is to be holy**, whether they experience worldly success or not?
 - Friends, do you want your **pastors** to be men who **authoritatively teach and lead you according to God's word**?
 - Or do you want **leaders** who merely have the **title of “pastor”** but act more like a **life coach** or **motivational speaker**?

- **The Authority**

- *“I exhort **the elders [presbyteros] among you... shepherd [poimante] the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight [episkopeō], not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you... not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock**” (1 Pet. 5:1-3).*
- Let’s recall how Paul spoke to the elders in Ephesus: *“**Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [episkopos]...**” (Acts 20:28).*
- And consider the potent and direct call from the author of Hebrews: *“**Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls...**” (Heb. 13:17).*

Summary: Pastors/Elders are charged by God to shepherd, oversee, pay careful attention to, and keep watch over the souls God has placed under their care...

(Segue) **(1) What a weighty task this is!**

(2) God has explicitly defined what kind of men should serve in this role / office

(4) GOD EXPLICITLY DEFINES QUALIFICATIONS FOR PASTORS/ELDERS

- **They should be Qualified men (stressing spiritual maturity/integrity)**
 - **Clean Reputation:** *“above reproach,” “respectable,” and “well thought of by outsiders” (1 Tim. 3:2, 7; Titus 1:6-7)*
 - **Faithful husband:** *“husband of one wife” or “one-woman man” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6)*
 - **Godly household:** *“he must manage his own household well... keeping his children submissive [to his fatherly authority],” and “his children are... not open to the charge of debauchery [while they are under his care]” (1 Tim. 3:4-5; Titus 1:6)*

- **Self-controlled:** “*self-controlled,*” “*sober-minded,*” “*not a drunkard,*” “*not violent but gentle,*” “*not quarrelsome,*” “*not arrogant or quick-tempered,*” but instead “*upright, holy, and disciplined*” (1 Tim. 3:2-3; Titus 1:7-8)
- **Financially Temperate:** “*not a lover of money*” nor “*greedy for gain*” (1 Tim. 3:2-3; Titus 1:7-8)
- **Godly wife:** “*he must manage his own household well*” (1 Tim. 3:4)... and such a wife is described in better detail as being “*dignified, not [a] slanderer, but sober-minded, [and] faithful in all things*” (1 Tim. 3:11).
- **Hospitable:** “*hospitable,*” and a “*lover of good*” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8)
- **Mature Convert:** “*he must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into condemnation*” (1 Tim. 3:6)
- **Doctrinally Sound:** “*he must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught...*” (Titus 1:9)
- **Able to Teach:** “*able to teach*” and “*able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it*” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9)
 - In summary, the qualifications include:
 - **(1) the character and life** of an **exemplary Christian**
 - and **(2) the ability to guard and teach** the content of **Christian beliefs** from **God’s word**.

Because of the **serious weight of the task,**
 the **necessity of faithfulness,**
 and **the biblical evidence...**

I want to also argue that there should **always** be **more than one** pastor/elder.

- **They should be more than one** (*emphasizing spiritual and personal need*)
 - When the church in Antioch sent financial support to the church in Judea, they sent Paul and Barnabas with the finds to the “**elders**” of that church (Acts 11:30).
 - When Paul returned to the young and leaderless churches in Iconium and Antioch, he appointed “**elders for them in every church**” (Acts 14:23).
 - When there was a question about what to do with Gentile Christians, Paul and Barnabas went to discuss things with the “**apostles and elders**” in Jerusalem (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4).
 - When Paul was about to leave the church in Ephesus, he called “**the elders / overseers of the church**” together in order to warn and encourage them (Acts 20:17, 28).
 - When Paul came to Jerusalem to give a report of his missions activities and to be encouraged by the church, “**all the elders were present**” among the church in Jerusalem (Acts 21:18).
 - With his opening greeting in his letter to the church of Philippi, Paul addresses “**all the saints**” and especially the “**overseers and deacons**” (Phil. 1:1).
 - When Paul left Titus in Crete, Titus’s job was to “**appoint elders in every town**” (Titus 1:5).
 - When James instructs Christians about prayer, he said wrote of a kind of prayer to be done by “**the elders of the church**” (James 5:14).
 - When Peter wrote to encourage persecuted Christians, he especially exhorted “**the elders**” and urged those under their care to “**be subject to the elders**” (1 Pet. 5:1-5).

Summary: The biblical office of pastor/elder should be filled by qualified men in every local church...

(Segue) ***And such pastors/elders are a blessing to the local church...***

So healthy churches embrace and encourage this unique office/role.

(5) HEALTHY CHURCHES EMBRACE AND ENCOURAGE THE UNIQUE OFFICE OF PASTORS/ELDERS

- **Healthy Churches embrace & encourage this unique office**
 - Healthy churches understand what they have in their pastors/elders, and they appreciate them as pastors/elders (1 Tim. 4:6-16).
 - Healthy churches regularly remember the biblical role as Christ's good gift to the church (Eph. 4:11-16).
 - Healthy churches do not expect their pastors/elders to be community organizers, CEOs, motivational speakers, or entertainers.
 - Healthy churches do not let the varied strengths and weaknesses of individuals cloud their appreciation for what a pastor/elder is.

- **Healthy Churches embrace & encourage the elders who pastor them**
 - Healthy churches welcome the particular men who pastor them, despite their inevitable defects (1 Pet. 5:5).
 - Healthy churches appreciate the particular men who pastor them well and in the power of God's Spirit (1 Tim. 5:17).
 - Healthy churches do not bemoan the weaknesses of the men God has providentially given for the care of their soul (Heb. 13:17).

- **Healthy Churches encourage some men to aspire to the office**
 - Healthy churches are about the task of making disciples (Matt. 28:18-20)
 - Healthy churches know that God raises up elders/pastors to lead and exemplify discipling efforts (2 Tim. 2:1-2; Eph. 4:11-16)
 - Healthy churches celebrate the budding of new growth among them (Eph. 4:11-16)

- **Healthy Churches welcome and enjoy godly leadership**
 - *“I am writing these things to you so that... you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, **a pillar and buttress of the truth**” (v14-15)*
 - Godly leadership makes people flourish.
 - *“Now these are the last words of David... ‘The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue. The God... the Rock of Israel has said to me: **When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth**” (2 Sam 23:1–4).*

Summary: Healthy Churches embrace and encourage the unique office of pastors/elders...

(Segue) *Will you embrace and encourage this office among our church family?*

(6) WILL YOU EMBRACE AND ENCOURAGE GODLY PASTORS/ELDERS?

- **Will you embrace the biblical understanding of pastor/elder?**
 - Will you resist worldly wisdom and pragmatic experience?
- **Will you resist the temptation to think and speak about pastors/elders with anything other than a biblical description in mind?**
 - Will you honor God’s description of pastors/elders, and seek to cultivate an environment where God’s word carries the day?

- **Will you embrace and encourage the one official pastor/elder you have?**
 - Will you appreciate and celebrate my godly service?
 - If I am a man of character, integrity, biblical fidelity, and able to teach you God's word well...
 - Will you praise God for such things and pray that God will continue to grow me?
 - Will you be gracious with me in regard to the ways I don't measure up in areas of lesser importance?
 - If I fail to be an administrative whiz, a likeable public figure, an inspiring vision castor, or a captivating entertainer...
 - Will you be gracious with me, and remember that these are not essential to a good and right and successful pastoral ministry?
 - Will you remember that God intends for us all to use the gifts and talents He has given us for the benefit of the church family?

- **Will you encourage the rise of other pastors/elders among this congregation?**
 - Will you hear the biblical case I have presented today in arguing for a plurality of elders/pastors?
 - Will you hear my own plea for biblically ordered and congregationally recognized accountability?
 - Will you open your eyes to the reality that God is raising up some men from this church family to do the work of pastoring among us?
 - Will you pray that God will continue His good work here and preserve the legacy that has been handed down to us from generations past?

Major Point: Healthy Churches embrace and encourage the unique office of pastors/elders.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

The 9 Marks of a Healthy Church by Various

<https://www.9marks.org/about/>

Looking for a Few Good Men by Mark Dever

<https://www.9marks.org/article/looking-few-good-men/>

What is a Church Elder? by Various

<https://www.9marks.org/answer/what-church-elder/>

Qualified Elders by Steven Cole

<http://www.fcfonline.org/content/1/sermons/022507M.pdf>

Authority: God's Good and Dangerous Gift by Jonathan Leeman

<https://www.9marks.org/article/authority-gods-good-and-dangerous-gift/>

A Job Description for Lay Elders by Jeramie Rinne

<https://www.9marks.org/article/journaljob-description-lay-elders/>

Who Should Run the Church? by Daniel Wallace

<https://bible.org/article/who-should-run-church-case-plurality-elders>