



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Basic Bible Doctrine, 1Timothy 3:1-16

"Local Church Organization"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Tonight we are turning to 1 Timothy chapter 3, and I want to read verses 1 through 16 which is the entire third chapter of this epistle, as a background for some of the things that I want to talk about in this hour. We are having two or three studies on the church in our basic Bible doctrines series, the design of which is to specialize on the rather simple things, but important things, that have to do with the local church. So, will you turn with me to 1 Timothy chapter 3, and will you listen as I read beginning at verse 1.

"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, temperate, sober minded, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, not violent, 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. In like manner, must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to

much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober-minded, faithful in all things."

There have been some who have interpreted this 11th verse as a reference to the office of deaconess. And quite a few churches down through the years have had such an office, the office of deaconess, but in the light of the fact, now there are many things that could be said about this exegetically, in fact we could spend about thirty minutes on it, at least, just setting the things forth that might be said on one side of the question, then the things that can be said on the other side of the question. But one controlling factor, I think, is that we have reference to the qualifications for a deacon in the verses that just precede this verse, and then you'll notice in verse 12; we again have reference to the deacons. And so, it would seem unlikely for the office of deaconess to intrude into the requirements that are given for the deacon. So, I'm inclined to think that the reference is to the deacons' wives, as is found here in the Authorized Version translation. Verse 12,

"Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 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. These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the nations, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

Our subject tonight is primarily, "The Local Church in its Organization." Now, we did announce this as "The Local Church and its Ministry," and I want to try to consider that question, but I think it would be better for us to, in this part of our series, to deal with this particular subject. Let me introduce what I want to say by a few comments. From the divine standpoint, Genesis to Malachi might be called the age of the Father. In that, as you read through the Old Testament, the person of the triune God who is most prominent in the Old Testament is probably the Father. Then in the Gospel of Matthew through the Gospel of John, we have, from the divine standpoint, the age of the Son; for it is the second person of the trinity who is particularly prominent in that stage in the divine revelation. But from the Book of Acts through the epistles, we could call that age, from the divine standpoint, the age of the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is exceedingly prominent in that section of the divine revelation.

This, incidentally was not a modern analysis of the emphasis of the Scriptures, but among the earliest of the church fathers, these comments were made that in the Old Testament we had the age of the Father, then the age of the Son, and finally the age of the Holy Spirit. From the human view point, we live in the age of the church, the church universal and the church local. Now, there are different aspects of the teaching of the Bible concerning the church. The church may refer to one universal body of believers, whether on earth, or on earth and in heaven. And in our last study we talked about that. The church also may denote a group of local churches. No denominational concept is found in this, of course, but we do have the use of the term church in the singular as a reference to a group or body of local churches, which meet in different localities.

For example, right here we read, "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God." It's possible that the apostle means here, not the specific local church in a particular locality where Timothy was, but the church. That is, the various bodies of

believers, looked at as a unified group. And then the term church may refer to a single local church in some geographical locality.

Now, last time we referred to the church that was at Corinth. Or in 1 Thessalonians, we have the church in Thessalonica. So, the term church then refers to a universal body of believers. It may refer to a group of local churches that meet on the earth, but without any denominational connection. And it also may refer to a single local church in some geographical locality.

Now, we talked last time, for a few moments, about some of the faults, current senses of the church. That is, people speak of the church as a building. They look at the building, and they say, "That is a church." But we pointed out that that is not a church, from the standpoint of the Bible. The word church is never used in the New Testament of a church building. Bishop Langford pointed out that there was no clear example of a separate church building set apart for worship until the 3rd century of the Christian era. Furthermore, there is no use of the term church in the New Testament in the sense of a denomination. There is no use of the term church in the sense of a state church, such as the Anglican Church or the Church of Scotland, and there are other types of churches that are called by national entities. Nor is there any reference in the New Testament of the church as the kingdom of God. It is very common for people to speak of the church as the kingdom of God, but there is no real clear use of the term in that sense, either.

We're concerned primarily, however, with the local church, about which the New Testament is remarkably clear, and over which there is a great deal of confusion, and a great deal of neglect. I think perhaps it would be wise for us to define a local church. What is a local church? Well, a local church, I just throw this out, not as a technical definition that is absolutely accurate in every respect, but I think in most respects it is true to the New Testament. A local church is a group of professing believers. There may be in the local church, as far as I can see from the New Testament, some who are not believers, but they all profess belief. They meet regularly in one geographical locale, and

they meet for the observations of the ordinances, for worship, and for the ministry of the word. And they also meet under the oversight of officers- elders, and then also the church ultimately has deacons as well.

Now, a church may exist without elders and deacons. That is evident, because in the New Testament from the Book of Acts, because the apostles went back to appoint elders in the churches which they had already established. And so, it's conceivable that a church may be a church without elders, but the normal expectation is that the church, in order to reach its full organizational status, it would have ultimately officers in it. So, the church then, to sum it all up, is a body of professing believers who meet regularly in one geographical locale for the observation of the ordinances of baptism, and the Lord's Supper, for worship, and for ministry under the oversight of officers, particularly the oversight of elders.

I say that the church doctrine in the New Testament is remarkably clear, and yet there is great confusion and great neglect over it. There are, as a matter of fact, many who feel that the New Testament does not really give us any settled doctrine of a local church, and particularly of a local church's organization. There are some people who affirm that what we have in the New Testament is a development of teaching concerning the local church, which justifies further development in the present day. I don't think that is really true. I think the New Testament is as clear in its Ecclesiology as it is in its Soteriology. I know a lot of people seem upset when you say something like that, but I think that is true. I don't think that the things that are practiced in Believers Chapel that are true to the Bible, and which seem strange, are hard to find in the New Testament. I think they're very easy to find.

Some years ago, I was reading a book on Ecclesiology written by a man named Fish and it was called *Ecclesiology: A Fresh Inquiry as to the Fundamental Idea and Constitution of the New Testament Church*. It was written about a hundred years ago now, but it was not that long ago when I read this book. And in the midst of this book I

found a quotation, which really summed up exactly what I believed about this, and he wrote this seventy-five years before I ever made the statement, as far as I know. He said, "But shall we not have to concede that the polity," incidentally, the term polity, in case you're not familiar with it, is the term that is used by theologians to describe church organizations of different kinds. That is, Presbyterians have a church polity, Baptists have a church polity, Anglicans have a church polity. Those are the principles of local church organization.

He says, "But shall we not have to concede that the polity, which was actually instituted, is not as sharply defined as we must think it would have been had it been meant for a precise and final pattern. We answer, this depends upon the divine purpose in the revelation given. If God intended to strip the subject of all mystery, so as to save us any study or questioning about the matter, we say yes, we must concede; but if he intended study, not merely of the word, but of history, and the philosophy of history, to be a means of grace. If he intended we should comprehend church polities in their relations to human minds, and to the dissemination and preservation of great fundamental truths; if he meant that we should sense the force of systems, as well as work them, we reply, no, the very want of definiteness or clearness may be an essential element in the divine scheme of training. All that can be said on this score can be alleged with equal force on the subject of justification by faith, regeneration by the Spirit, or the atonement itself. Indeed the very character of Christ has drawn forth manifold more controversies than has the subject of church organization or government."

Now, Professor Fish has just essentially said this, the Bible's doctrine of the church is as clear as the Bible's doctrine of justification by faith, or is as clear as the doctrine of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. It is as clear as the doctrine of the atonement. But of course, we must look at the Scriptures and study them with that in mind. Now, I think for a person to say the teaching of the New Testament concerning the teaching of the local church is as clear the doctrine of salvation, that tends to throw people a little bit, because

they look around. They see the Baptists meet one way, and the Presbyterians meet another way, and the Episcopalians meet still another way, and the Methodists meet another way still, and just name the denomination, and they almost all differ from one another in their church organization. So, how can you say something like that?

Well, let me remind you that there are great controversies over the way of salvation. The Lutherans do not believe that the way of salvation is the same as the Presbyterians. And the Presbyterians do not believe that the way of salvation is the same as the Catholics. And the Catholics do not believe that the way of salvation is the same as the Church of Christ. And the Church of Christ does not believe that the way of salvation is the same as Believers Chapel. And so on, we do differ among ourselves. We differ very strongly over the place of baptism in salvation. And so, even such a fundamental thing as the doctrine of salvation is a matter for dispute among large bodies of professing Christians.

Now, I say all this because there are people who say that the doctrine of the church is not clearly taught in the New Testament. I think it is clearly taught in the New Testament. But we do have to study it, just like we study the doctrine of justification by faith to arrive at an accurate understanding of it, or just as we have to study the New Testament to understand the doctrine of regeneration or whatever the doctrine may be. It is true, too, that the doctrine of the church is ordinarily not set forth in our theological works. For example, in the theology of H.B. Smith and the theology of Charles Hodge, and the theology of William GT Shedd, and the theology of Robert L. Dabney, there is no locus; no place, where the doctrine of the church is discussed in fullness. Now, it can be said for Charles Hodge, that one of the reasons he didn't is because he wrote a separate book on the church, but nevertheless it's not uncommon for some of the great theologians to have no place in their theology for a doctrine of the church. That's rather peculiar. And Professor Berkhoff, in his systematic theology, comments upon it, says it's peculiar that these men, with whom he's in essential agreement, it's peculiar for them not to

discuss the church. That's one of the reasons we have such great differences over how we should meet. We don't take the Bible and open it up, and take a look at it, and say as we do, well, we're going to meet as the Scriptures determine that we should meet.

Now, it is an important subject. God's primary purpose in this age, if we were to seek for one primary thing that God is doing, is the building up of the church of Jesus Christ. Some years ago when Billy Graham had a meeting at the University of California at Berkley, you may have seen some of the pictures of the meeting, because it was widely publicized, and it was during the times of many of the protests of the young people back in the sixties. And there was a sign that frequently was seen in the meetings which had words on it like this, "Jesus yes, Christianity no." Well, that's not so bad, because it is true that Christianity often has been substituted for Jesus Christ himself. And many of our large churches, and small churches as well, seem to major on things that do not really build up the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But sometimes one hears a similar statement; one sometimes hears a statement like this, "We need Christianity, but we do not need Churchianity." There is a sense in which that is true, if what we mean by churchianity is an overly unscriptural stress on the doctrine of the church, an over emphasis upon the church. But the Bible has a great deal to say about church, and churchianity, looked at in its rightful emphasis in the New Testament, it is an important subject. Furthermore, Christ's work is directly related to the church. In Ephesians chapter 5, it is stated that he came in order to give himself for the church. And Paul himself says that he suffered many things for the church. And he considered his greatest sin the persecution of the church. And we are called, by the apostle, to follow him.

Now, let me first of all, as we turn to the subject, deal for a moment with the fact of church organization, local church organization. There are three primary systems of local church organization. There is the congregational form, or the democratic form, in which authority rests in the congregation itself. Then there is the Episcopal form, or the

autocratic form. And authority there rests with a body of bishops. And then the Presbyterian form, which is generally thought to be, by those who hold to this, a representative form of government. Now, in the case of the congregational form, as I've said, authority rests in the congregation. In the case of the Episcopal form, authority rests in the Bishop in the local diocese, and in the house of bishops, generally. And then in the latter case, the Presbyterian, authority rests in the Presbytery. And the Presbytery is the body of ordained men, also aided and abetted by certain of the locally ordained elders in particular churches.

Now, as we think about this, and as we read through the New Testament, we ought to have these forms of church government in our mind in order to compare them with what the Bible teaches. Probably it's better for us to speak of the term of the organization in the churches, since the universal church has no visible organization. And the church on earth, that is in that broader sense, has none. We are, so far as the New Testament teaches, independent bodies of believers. And as far as I can tell in the New Testament, the only kind of relationship the churches had was a relationship of common convictions, and common interests. And so in that sense, there was a unity between that, a doctrinal unity. But there was no outward organization by which, for example, one church was governed by another church. The authority of the apostles in the earliest stages of the church was a universal authority among the churches, and therefore the apostolic pronouncements had special significance then. Today, we have the body of apostolic teaching in our New Testament, and that is our overall guide. But so far as the churches themselves were concerned, one church did not have authority over another church. They were all independent bodies of believers, but also very dependent in the sense of common convictions, and common interests, and common aims. That's the best form of unity, of course.

There are indications of organization in the local churches, and some of them are these things. The local churches had officers who cared for ministry, and for the work of

the church. The churches met at appointed times. We can tell that from the statement in Acts chapter 20, in verse 7, the very familiar statement, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread." The apostle urged the Corinthians to lay by themselves, speaking about giving, on the first day of the week. And we know from history, following New Testament times, that the churches met on the first day of the week. So, they met at appointed times. The church also exercised discipline, and this discipline is set forth, the principles of it, in the New Testament. The discipline is referred to in passages like 1 Corinthians chapter 5; Romans chapter 16, verse 17; 3 John, verse 10. That discipline was exercised by the elders over the body of believers. The churches also regulated their meetings. That is evident from the instructions given in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, the apostle there sets down certain things that are to characterize the church meeting.

He even sets down certain principles by which men standing up in the meeting are to be guided. It talks about speaking in tongues, how that is to be carried on, how it should not be done unless there is an interpreter, and in certain order, not in confusion, there should be order and decency in the meetings of the church. The churches also collected and dispensed money. Now, this is evident from the instructions that the apostles give concerning giving, and also in their practices. But it was again not something that was required, but something that was voluntary, even in those very places where collection was referred to, it is stressed that it is voluntary giving. But in that sense, there was organization.

The source of local church organization is an interesting subject. One might ask, well where did this tendency to organize originate? For we don't have anything in the New Testament that gives us precise information concerning the origin of local church organization, so, we are left with the necessity for inference. And the inference that most have drawn is simply that the Jewish pattern of the synagogue was the model for the beginning of the local church, and also for the beginning for the local church

organization. The elders controlled matters in the synagogue, and it's not surprising then that the elders should be the ones who have oversight in the local churches.

Furthermore, and this is a rather interesting thing. In the synagogue, ministry was free and impromptu. You may remember that when the apostle came to Antioch, in Pisidia, he was asked, given the privilege, to stand up in the meeting and expound the Scriptures.

In fact, if they did not have freedom to speak in the meetings of the synagogues, then we wouldn't have had that great sermon in Acts chapter 13. So, there was freedom for ministry in the synagogues. They had a pattern of service, in the sense that they had openings, they had prayers, they had readings of passages from the Old Testament, and specific sections of the Old Testament. They read from the law, and they read from the prophets. You remember the Lord Jesus, in the synagogue in Nazareth stood up to read in the regular synagogue service, but at a certain point in that service, it was free for individuals, who were teachers of the word, to expound the Scriptures. That's what our Lord did, he read and then he expounded the Scripture. He says, "Of this day, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears." And so Paul, was able to stand up in the Book of Acts there, when he was there, evidently the word had gotten out that he was a teacher, and those with him, and so he was allowed to speak.

You may remember that the word that was spoken in the meeting was simply this, "But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the ruler of the synagogue," and incidentally, the rulers of the synagogue were responsible primarily just for the arrangements of the meeting. The rulers of the synagogue sent unto Paul and the men with him and said, "Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." In other words, stand up and give word of exhortation. So, "Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience." And he gave that great sermon. So, there was freedom in the meetings of the synagogue, and that came over into the New Testament,

so that there was freedom in the meetings of the local church. That is the main reason why, in Believers Chapel, we have a meeting on Sunday night in which the Holy Spirit is free to guide and direct the men who have spiritual gifts to teach the word, and also free to guide the priests of God to stand up and give praise and thanksgiving and prayer as a part of the meeting of the local church.

Elders first appear in the New Testament in Acts chapter 11, in verse 30, and we do not read anything in the New Testament about how the office arose in the New Testament, so we assume that it arose out of the fact that in the Old Testament, elders appeared in Israel. So, the apostles evidently had oversight in the beginning, because of their apostolic relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, but then they appointed elders in the local church. And the elders had oversight in the local churches. This carry over from the Old Testament into the New Testament seems to be a reasonable inference, because it is never explained in the New Testament.

Now, let me say just a word about the nature of local church organization. In the local church, the invisible head of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ. That is something that I think needs constant stress, and we need to remember it constantly. This church does not have as its head any one man. The local church never was intended to be the church of one man. You never read in the New Testament, Paul's church, a reference to a certain church, or Diotrepheses' church. Even where Diotrephes met, it's said of him, "He loveth to have the preeminence." Well, he may have been preeminent in his own mind, but he was not really the head of the local church. The head of the local church is the Lord Jesus Christ. The elders are under-shepherds, that is, they serve under the shepherd. And so, he is the head of the local church, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is made very plain in passages like Colossians 1, and verse 18. In fact, one of the most interesting things to me about New Testament church order is the fact that the term office, in the sense in which we commonly speak of the term office, is not really found. The New Testament authors really avoided, so far as I can tell, the term office. They avoided title

and position, and when, for example, they refer to elders, the idea that you get from reading the New Testament is that the primary stress is not upon the fact that these men are officials, but rather that they are men who function in a certain way.

A man who was Professor of New Testament at the University of Zurich in Switzerland wrote a rather interesting book on church order. And this book, written by a man who was Presbyterian in his background is particularly interesting in the light of his background. If you read through the New Testament, you will find that the word office occurs in the following places in the Authorized Version. I won't mention them all, but there are about nine places that the term appears. And the term office is in these places as the rendering of one words that means to serve as a priest or priestly serve. One time it is the rendering of *diakonia*, which means service. And it's the rendering of a word that really means practice. It's the rendering of a word that means oversight. It's again the rendering of a verb that means to serve. And then it's a rendering of a word that means really something like priestly service again. So, you can see that there is no real stress in the term office, in the New Testament, on position.

Now, the Greeks had a lot of words for office. They had for example, the term *archae*, it's used in the New Testament, it's translated often principality. It was a term that denoted office in the sense of precedence, being at the head of something, ruling. That word is never used of an elder, for example. The Greeks also had the word *timb*. Now *timb* referred to office, but in the sense of dignity, because it's the word that means something like precious. So, *timb* was used of office in the sense of dignity, position of dignity. That however, is a term that is never used of an elder in the New Testament. We also have in the New Testament a word that defines the complete power of the office, *telos* that word is never used of an elder. The most suitable word would be the term which means priestly service or simply rather than priestly service, but simply a form of civil service, and it would refer to voluntary services undertaken by a citizen for the community, and also by a worshipper for the gods. It is used in the Old Testament a

number of times in that sense, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. That word is never used of the elders in the New Testament. So, you can see that the force of all of this is really an avoidance of any suggestion of the fact that a man, because he is an elder, holds an office in the church that is to be exalted above membership in the body. The elder is always a person who is of the body, and his place in the local church is best described as a function. He functions in a certain way. The deacons function in a certain way. So, there is a studied avoidance, it seems to me, of the idea of being over someone.

Now, we do have expressions in the New Testament, "those that are over you in the Lord," and so we must temper what I am saying by that. But I think the New Testament, in the total body of its teaching concerning an elder lays great stress upon the fact that the elder is always simply one of the flock, as well as having certain organizational duties in the flock. "Take heed to the church of God over which the Holy Spirit hath appointed you overseers," the apostle said to the elders in Corinth. And if you'll look at that in the original text, it's likely that it means "among which the Holy Spirit hath appointed you as overseers." So, I'm saying this in the beginning as we think about the body of the church.

There is first then, the congregation, or the body. Membership in the local church is first of all, by new birth. Usually, also, when a person came into the local church, he was baptized in water. So far as we can tell, there were no church rolls, there was no need for a church roll, but a person was a member of the local church when he had been born again, when he had requested baptism, although that is not set down as a specific requirement in Scripture, it's only an inference. And when they began to meet regularly with the body of believers, they were recognized as part of that body of believers, just like the others who met regularly. The church also had a body of men over them called the elders. They were the under-shepherds, under the great shepherd. But they served in the midst of the flock, and they had responsibilities of oversight. They are called elders,

because of their dignity. They are also called bishops in the New Testament, because of their function, because bishop means to oversee.

George Bernard Shaw once observed, "Youth is a wonderful thing, and it's too bad it has to be wasted on young people." In a countering wag, no doubt, a young man said, "Old age is a time of great usefulness, with accumulated knowledge and experience, but it is unfortunately wasted on some old grouches." [Laughter] Well, the elder is to be a man of spiritual experience. He must have a certain level of spiritual life, set forth in the passage that we read in the beginning of our time together. So, the church is a body of believers, it is also under the oversight of under-shepherds or elders.

Now, the passage that we looked at is a passage that does not make plain that bishop and elder or the same. But there are two classic passages, one in Titus and one in Acts chapter 20, which make it very plain that the term elder is the same as the term bishop, in so far as the office is concerned. In Acts chapter 20, in verse 17, the apostle said, "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church." And then we read in verse 28, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops," overseers. So, these same men are called elders in verse 17. In verse 28, they are called bishops. In Titus chapter 1, verse 5 and verse 7, we have the same type of thing. The elders are called elders and then they are called bishops.

Now, the Bible also teaches that there is, in the local church, a plurality of these elders. There are some who contend that a local church should be organized under one elder, then plurality of deacons. But the New Testament, it seems, makes it fairly plain that there was a plurality of elders in the local churches. We don't have time to go into all the details of this. But that passage that I just read of the elders in the church at Ephesus would be part of the evidence. The passage in Philippians chapter 1, verse 1, the apostle writes to the church at Philippi, and speaks of the bishops, plural, there. 1 Thessalonians 5:12, he refers to those who have the oversight in the plural. And you'll

remember that it was just a few weeks after the founding of that church that the apostle wrote them. So, the fact that they had a plurality of elders would seem to indicate it was a very small group, but nevertheless they had a plurality of elders.

And there are other passages that also touch on that subject, such as James 5:14; Hebrews chapter 13; 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 17, and in that passage there is a division among the elders. All elders are ruling elders, but there are some that are teaching, and the apostle says, let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and teaching." So, there are two kinds of elders. All rule, all have oversight, but some have gifts of ministry that others do not have, evidently. They labor in the word and in the doctrine.

The functions of the elders are set forth in a number of passages. They essentially shepherd. Now, to shepherd the flock one must lead. I would, myself, think of that as the government of the flock, including the superintendency of the use of funds. It certainly includes such things as guarding the flock from false doctrine, from disciplining the flock when there is evidence of sin among those who have professed believing in Jesus Christ. To lead the church would involve, also, the pastoring, the teaching. And so consequently, the elders have authority in the matter of the feeding of the flock. That is, in superintending the ministry of the word of God to the body. Their qualifications are set forth in 1 Timothy chapter 3. They are to be blameless, now if that meant absolutely blameless, no one could be an elder.

But I think that the meaning of the term is blameless with respect to those qualifications that are set forth there, and those we have just read. For example, the elder is to be a person not given to wine, not violent, not greed of filthy lucre, patient, not a brawler, not covetous, one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity, must be blameless, the husband of one wife, which incidentally means one wife in his lifetime, not one wife at a time. That's evident from 1 Timothy chapter 5, where speaking about the widows and their eligibility for enrollment

in the church for receiving funds from them, it's said that the widow should be the wife of one husband. Now, if she's a widow, it means one husband in her lifetime. And the same type construction is used there that is used in 1 Timothy 3. So, when we read the husband of one wife, then an elder who serves in the local church should be the husband of just one wife in his lifetime. That seems to me to be very plainly the teaching of Paul, and the early church carried this out, as a general rule.

The method of choice of the elders is not set forth in detail in the New Testament. That's a question that Bible students have wrestled with for a long time. Unfortunately, today with the condition that the church is in, it is very difficult to carry out what probably was the intention of the apostles, humanly speaking. That is, elders were to be appointed by other elders from other churches. Now, that's done in many denominations. For example, in the Presbyterian denomination, in which I grew up, if a new church is formed, then a body of elders from some of the present churches will go there and they will ordain elders in that church so that there is a continuation of eldership, one following from another. I like that, but unfortunately, the condition of the church is such now, that that is not practiced as a rule. In fact, it hardly can be practiced. The church is in such a poor condition. We're like the condition of Israel in the latter days of the Old Testament.

Let me say one last thing, and then we must stop tonight. As far as tenure is concerned in the New Testament, the Bible does not say anything about the fact that we must rotate elders, or rotate deacons. In my opinion, that is unscriptural. It was done largely in other churches, because men did not have the will to go to an elder or deacon who was not doing his job, and say, "Look, you're not really functioning." So, a nice way of doing it is to just rotate the elders. So, after three years of service you can just eliminate those who are not serving by voting. But one thing we must remember about the Bible, we must never be wiser than God, and consequently, it's better to stick with what the Scriptures say than it is to invent new ways of solving problems, frequently which are avoiding our responsibilities.

Now, I'm sorry. I've gone a few moments over them. But we will finish our study next week. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee that the New Testament does teach us concerning the local church, and its organization, and we pray that as we think about this great truth in our scriptural reading, we pray that we may learn the things that the Holy Spirit would have us to learn. And enable us, Lord, together to practice the principles set forth in the Scriptures. We commit the evening to thee for the further ministry of thy word. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]