



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Timothy 3:1-7

"The Office of the Elder - I"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our subject in our general study on Wednesday night is "Paul, Timothy, and the Study of the Church" or an exposition of 1 Timothy. And what we have been doing is to expound the first two chapters of 1 Timothy and seeking to lay a little bit of stress on those aspects of 1 Timothy that have to do with the doctrine of the church. Now tonight, our subject is "The Office of the Elder," and we will due to the depth and the difficulty of this particular topic we will consider this not only for our study tonight, but also for our study on next Wednesday night, the Lord willing, and the subject is "The Office of the Elder." And I want to read the first seven verses, although we will not cover the seven verses tonight.

"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 behavior, 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 outside; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

It is claimed by some that the New Testament gives us no settled church order. And we agree that there is a bewildering variety of church orders. For example, there's the Episcopalian church order, an order in which there is a hierarchical church order, in which there are three forms of offices, bishops, priests, and deacons, and generally with a claim to apostolic succession for archbishop. There is the Presbyterian order, which is a representative form of church government, by which the congregation elects its representatives who represent them in representative form. In a local Presbyterian church the government is in the hands of a body of men who are called the elders or the session. And in the hands of deacons who are helpers of the elders. Then over the local church there is a series of church courts. There is the local Presbytery, which is made up of the ministers of the churches of the Presbytery together with one of the elders from each of the churches. There is also a synod which is a larger body, a larger court, which has authority over Presbyteries. And finally, there is the general assembly which meets once a year usually about this time, incidentally, and that body has the ultimate control over the denomination. Presbyterian government is generally called representative government, because it is the responsibility of the members of the local church to elect its representatives who represent them.

And there is congregational government, which is a form of democratic government, in which a local church is an autonomous unit. This is generally the kind of government that Baptist churches have, each local church claiming to be autonomous. And in the Baptist church, the elder or the minister of the church is the elder, generally speaking. Now you realize, of course, there will be some slight variations in each of these distinct forms of church government. But in the congregational form and in the Baptist application of it, the minister of a Baptist church is the elder in the church, and so

if there is one minister there is only one elder in the church. The governing body is made up of the deacons.

Then there are also forms of church government, which for the sake of simplicity we could just call free. We could even call them charismatic in the sense that the government rests largely in the hands of gifted men, rather than in any specific office. But no connection is made by the use of the term charismatic with the tongues movement, known also as the charismatic movement. But generally speaking these four forms of church government prevail in Christian churches. Now, this is a bewildering variety of church orders and it is not surprising that it is claimed by some that there is no settled church order taught in the New Testament. One outstanding reformed professor; Professor of New Testament at the University of Zurich in Switzerland, Edward Switzer has said in the opening of his discussion of the question of church order, "There is no such thing as the New Testament church charter." And then this is the general opinion of a number of other men, too, that when we look at the New Testament we see variety, but we do not see any regular or any form of church government that we could call the New Testament form of church government or church charter.

Now of course, you recognize if you've been in Believers Chapel very long, that the elders of Believers Chapel disagree with that opinion. They do believe that there is a form of church order that is taught in the New Testament and that it is very simply understood in its major features, not that every single aspect of it that is clear. Because there are certain aspects of church government that pertain to minor matters that the Bible doesn't say anything definitely about, and we must feel our way very carefully through the principles of the word of God to what seems to be a reasonable solution to the problem without claiming dogmatism on all of the minor points. But so far as the major features of New Testament church order is concerned, it is the opinion of the elders here that the New Testament is very plain in these features here. And it is one of the purposes of this series of studies to make clear the major features of the New Testament church order.

There are men who do not accept the church order that the elders here accept that agree with that statement. For example, I'm going to read a statement to read statement by E.J. Fish who has written a book on Ecclesiology called *A Fresh Inquiry as to the Fundamental Idea and Constitution of the New Testament Church*. And this paragraph of Professor Fish's is one with which I would generally agree, and with the main point I would definitely agree. "But shall we not have to concede," he says, "that the policy which was actually instituted is not as sharply defined as we must think it would have been had it been for a precise and final pattern." He's repeating the objection of others. "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," that is of church government, "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 truth, 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 many fold more controversies than has the subject of church organization or government."

Now, what Professor Fish has said here is essentially this, if we should look into the Bible and expect to find the church government is set there for us in the plainest of words in diagrammatic form, with visual aids, so it would be impossible for anyone to misunderstand, then of course, we have to say the New Testament does not teach that particular presentation of church order. The New Testament counts upon us to study, to ponder, to consider the principles in the light of other principles of human thinking. And if then we may grant that the Bible is given to us in the form that it requires our mind's

study of the principles, then we can say that there is contained in the New Testament a clear church order. And in fact, Professor Fish has made the startling statement that the church order of the New Testament is clearer, or at least as clear, as the doctrine of justification by faith, regeneration by the Spirit, or the atonement itself. Because there have been just as many, in fact he says many fold more controversies over these doctrines which we all accept in evangelism as clear and plain in Scripture than in matters of church order. I used to make that statement. In fact, not long ago someone came to me and said that they had a friend who heard me make the statement that the doctrine of justification by faith in the Bible was no clearer than the doctrines that have to do with church order, and they were astounded and upset and stumbled by what I had said. And all I had said was exactly what Professor Fish had said, and when I found this statement in Professor Fish's Ecclesiology I copied it out because it was, to my mind, a confirmation to something I had come upon myself.

Now let me just illustrate this, what I am saying and what he is saying is that the doctrine of New Testament church order is just as plain as the doctrine of salvation by faith through the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I'm sure that many of you, particularly seminary students who are exposed to people saying the New Testament does not give us any definite church order, would puzzle a great deal over that statement, would probably think that it's ridiculous. But let me ask you this question now. Let's suppose that you accept without any question the doctrine of justification by faith that is that we are justified in simple faith in that which the Lord Jesus has done. I want to ask you a question or two. I want to ask you, what do you do with Acts chapter 2, and verse 38 in which the Apostle Peter, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, says, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now, this text states that we are to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Do you

not see how it is possible for an individual to promulgate on the basis of this text, the claim that justification is not by simple faith in the Lord Jesus, but is by faith plus water baptism? Do you not see that that could be a problem from that text? Now, if you have no problem with that, I ask you to turn over with me to Acts chapter 22, and verse 16. In Acts chapter 22, and verse 16 we read, and this is a reference to the Apostle Paul's conversion, and we read, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Does not that text seem to suggest that baptism is necessary for salvation?

Now, what I am saying is simply this, that we accept the definiteness of the doctrine of justification by faith, often overlooking the fact that we have to think through this doctrine, and we have to have answers to these texts which have been used by others to teach a form of salvation which is quite different from evangelical salvation through faith. What I am simply saying is that it is true that there are controversies over the doctrine of justification by faith. There are controversies over the doctrine of regeneration by the Spirit. And there are many controversies over the nature of the atonement of Jesus Christ. What kind of an atonement did he accomplish? Was it exemplary? Was it moral influence? Was it simply substitutionary or vicarious? Was it a penal satisfaction theory involving substitution? What kind of theory of the atonement does the New Testament teach? There have been great controversies over these questions. What I'm saying is that the doctrine of the church, the doctrine of church order, is just as plain as these doctrines which you accept as being clearly taught in Scripture. And Mr. Fish's statement is designed to support that.

I know a question that might come now is does it really matter? Yes, although church order is not enough. Unfortunately, people have given the impression when they have sought to show what the New Testament teaches concerning the manner of the church's meeting and the manner of the church's carrying on its ministry, that if we get our church order right, then we'll a living vital evangelistic fruitful impressive church that

will be influential not only here, but to the four corners of the earth. They have put their trust often in their correct order.

Now, let me say right at the beginning that it is possible for a church that has everything in order, so far as church order is concerned, to be very dead and not fruitful at all in the things of the Lord. Now, that's evident if you just read the epistles of the New Testament. They were written to churches that had difficulties, and some of them had big difficulties. The church at Corinth had large difficulties. We read later on that the church at Ephesus had lost its first love. We read of a church that was dead and our Lord addresses them. Undoubtedly so far as we know they were organized properly, organized either by the apostles or under the influence of the apostle, and so they met in proper order, but they were dead churches. So the fruitfulness of a church does not depend only upon church order. Church order is not enough, but all things being equal, church order, if it is New Testament church order, will enable a church, give it the opportunity to be as fruitful and as vital and as properly influential as God would have it to be, so church order is not the secret of a church's success. But church order is of great benefit in the fulfillment of the will of God for the church.

In the final analysis we all know that there are churches which are organized very improperly, probably organized in ways that all of you in this audience would find some fault with, but which have nevertheless been fruitful and useful to the Lord, because there were vital questions in the group who had a vital relationship to the Lord, who knew what it was to be converted, who knew what it was to be saved by grace, they knew the principles of grace, and they sought in their daily lives to live to the glory of God. And they were fruitful, and profitable, and useful to God. I know it's probably the experience of many of you, it's an experience that I have constantly, to leave Dallas and to go to some other community and to enter the church. Often in the churches in which I am invited to speak, after being there a time or two I can almost tell from the Spirit of the meeting how fruitful that church has been. There is a Spirit there that communicates

itself, that the Lord is there and that he is working. And then there are others in which that Spirit is not there, and sometimes it's in the churches that are organized more spiritually where the deadness abounds. Not always, of course, because generally speaking, it should be the other way. But we all know that church order is not enough. But does it matter? I think it does. I suggest to you three reasons why it matters.

First, theologically, the nature of the church itself demands order. We are told in Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 10 that it is the purpose of God through the church to display his manifold wisdom. This, I think, has always been one of the most startling of the texts that the Apostle Paul ever wrote. In Ephesians chapter 3, and verse 10, let me read verse 9 while you are finding it, "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places," that is to the angelic hosts above, "might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." Do you see what the apostle is saying here? He is saying that it is by means of the instrumentality of the church that God is demonstrating his manifold wisdom to the principalities and powers above, to the "angelic hosts."

Now, that is an amazing statement, to think that the angels should be hovering over us, and learning something from the church of Jesus Christ. It would seem to be a simple inference from this, that if the angels are learning from the local church, or the church or Jesus Christ, it must be a church in which there is order. It would be possible for the angels to learn from a church that was in complete disorder. Now, they may learn some bad lessons from that, but they would not learn the manifold wisdom of God. The very fact that we are an instrument for the teaching of the angelic hosts' demands; it seems to me, order. We are also said, in 1 Timothy chapter 3 in verse 15, this very chapter we're going to look at, that the church is the house of God.

Now, think of that for a moment, the church is the house of God. Now, if the church is the house of God, then we all should sense immediately the importance of order. How can you have a house of God that is pleasing to God if there is not order in it? There must be order, and an order that he himself has set forth, that the head of this house is responsible for. How many of you have been in homes and found complete disorder? Disorder in that the house is dirty, the beds are unmade, the meals are not put on the table in orderly fashion, the people don't meet at the table for the times of fellowship together. If I'm stepping on your toes, I'm sorry. Perhaps that's just my cultural orientation. Perhaps there is some order there that I don't see, but we all appreciate a home in which there is order.

Now, the house of God is the church, and if he is the head of this house, and the church is his home, you can be sure that there will be order in that home. Therefore, that itself would compel us to find in the New Testament and order for the church to meet. There should be that. We should expect to find this. We shouldn't come to the meetings of the church and expect anything under heaven to happen. We ought to know, generally speaking, what are the limits of the activities of the local church. Now, I think it also a matter that is important from the standpoint of the biblical texts themselves. This 15th verse incidentally of 1 Timothy chapter 3 has a little word "must" in it, or "oughtest to behave thyself." "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God." There is a logical obligation to have order in the house in which certain things are set forth as being proper behavior in the church of God. There, of course, we have those statements in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, in verse 37 and 40, which it seems to me settle the question beyond argument, for the apostle says in verse 37 of 1 Corinthians 14, after he's given some lengthy instructions about things that should take place in the meeting of the church, he states, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the

commandments of the Lord." In other words, we have in the passages in 1 Corinthians God's orders for the church.

And finally he states in verse 40, "Let all things be done decently and in order." So the church should meet decently and in order. And even in its most charismatic expression. For 1 Corinthians 14 has to do with speaking in tongues and prophesying in the church. Even in its most charismatic utterances and activities in the local church in those days it had to be done in order and decently. You see, even in the funniest expression of the church, there is the injunction that it should be done in orderly fashion, and of course in other texts there he stresses the fact that it must be done for edification. And practically, from the standpoint of the order that is revealed in the New Testament, this order that many of you are acquainted with, it commends itself to us from this standpoint. Any kind of church order that is scriptural must be a kind of church order that will enable the church to exist under any form of political government. I would imagine that when the United States of America, if it should actually happen that the Russians should come, if they really should come, then we would find most of our gigantic Ecclesiastical organizations toppling and falling away, disintegrating into nothing, because the organization is so contrary to that set forth in the New Testament, it could not stand under that form of government.

Whereas in the New Testament there is set forth for us a church order that is able to sustain itself under any form of political government. Now, there is one reason why the simple church order set forth in the New Testament is probably or is likely to be that which the Spirit designed, because it is suitable for a universal expression, no matter what kind of government one might be exposed to.

Well tonight we are going to come to the elder, and of course, the elder is one of the important features of the New Testament church government. And even if you don't agree with my introduction tonight, I'm sure you can agree with me that the elder is important in church government. The office of elder was derived from the Old

Testament, evidently, because in the New Testament when we have its first occurrence in the church, in relation to the church in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 30, we have no explanation of how that office came into existence. So we assume then that it must have been carried over from the Old Testament, because there were elders in the Old Testament Israel. Now, when we speak about elder, we are not simply talking about old men. George Bernard Shaw once said, "Youth is a wonderful thing, and it's too bad that it's wasted on young people." [Laughter] And then some wag, evidently a young person countered and he has left himself in anonymity. He countered, "Old age is a time of great usefulness with accumulated knowledge and experience, but unfortunately it's wasted on some old grouches." [Laughter] Both of these have a great deal of truth to them, of course.

But when we speak about an elder in the local church, we are talking about a man who functions in a certain way. Now, in chapter 5 we will talk about old men, "rebuke not an elder but exhort him as a father, and the younger men as brethren." That text in 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 1 is a reference to the old men in the assembly. But the elder is a reference to an office or a function. The eldership was, I say, probably derived from Judaism, but in ancient times, as well as in modern times, elder was a broadly used term. For example, the Spartan, who we know as the great enemies of the Athenians in Greek history; the Spartans were governed by elders, and they were called the gerousia, which is a Greek word that means "the eldership." So they had elders.

The Romans had elders, and no one has studied Roman history at all without becoming acquainted with the Roman senate and you know that the word senate or senatos is derived from the Latin adjective synex, which means old. So the Roman senate was a group of elderly men. We still use the term senate in university language, because many of our universities are governed by a senate, and particularly in Great Britain. All of the universities that I know there have senates, and it is there that the affairs of the university are ultimately carried out. Even in English politics and in American politics we

have the use of the term elder. We have in politics the term alderman. And alderman really means an elder man, and alderman comes from that. So the idea then of an eldership is engrained in human history, and it is not surprising to find then that in the local church the affairs of the local church should be committed to men who are called elders.

The text which we want to look at tonight and use as a springboard to talk about the office of elder before we look at the qualifications next week is the first verse. "This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." Public worship, incidentally, usually precedes the institution of offices, and we had some instructions from Paul about public worship in chapter 2. So now he turns to the offices. This chapter was outlined by Guy King in this way. He said in the first part of the chapter we have the major office, which is elder. Then in the second part of the chapter, verse 8 through about verse 13 we have the minor office, which is deacon. And then we have the Messianic office, which is a reference to our Lord Jesus in the last few verses of the chapter.

Let's think now about the term elder, or as we have it here, bishop. Now this Greek word bishop is a term that suggests function. Bishop is the translation of a Greek word, which means an overseer. So to act as a bishop is to have oversight, to oversee. Now, you can see that suggests a function that suggests the function of oversight. Elder refers to the same office that suggests the dignity of the office. Bishop refers to the elder, but stresses the function. He is an overseer. Now, there are some people who question the fact that elder and bishop are the same, so we must, for a few moments now seek to show this from the word of God in case you are in doubt about it. I hope you will follow with me as we look at several passages which indicate, I think, rather clearly and convincingly that the term bishop and the term elder refer to the same office, one looking primarily of the function, the other looking at the dignity of the individual who functions.

Now, I want you to turn with me first to a text that is not convincing in itself, but is only ancillary evidence, Philippians chapter 1, in verse 1, Philippians chapter 1, in verse 1. In Philippians chapter 1 in verse 1 the Apostle Paul writes to the church at Philippi and he says, "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." Now notice, he addresses the saints and then he addresses the bishops and the deacons, or he says he addresses the saints and he includes in his address the bishops and the deacons. Now, there are two things that are missing here. Number one, the pastor is missing, and either they were without one at the present time or they were without one. And the idea from the Scripture is that the idea of a pastor as a man who has jurisdiction over a church by virtue of his office, that did not exist in New Testament times. Never in the New Testament anywhere is anyone called "the pastor of a church" in the sense of a man who is the administrative head of a church. That is an office that has arisen in the course of the church's history outside of Scripture. There is no such thing as "the pastor" of a local church.

Now, that is such an easy thing to see from the study of the word of God that it has never ceased to amaze me that the evangelical church has been unwilling to recognize that fact. It is to me one of the standing illustrations of how it is easy for us to have blind spots in our understanding of the word of God. Now, there is another thing missing here, and that's elder. Elders are not mentioned, bishops are mentioned and deacons are mentioned, but elders are not mentioned. We will conclude from this that probably, we could not prove it from this text, but probably the term bishop is another term to refer to the other office, for we have deacons mentioned. It would be most natural for us to think of bishops as being elders, since he's already addressed the saints. So we have here saints, bishops, deacons, we assume that probably bishops includes elders.

Now turning back to 1 Timothy chapter 3, for just one moment, let me remind you of what happens here, as we read through this chapter. I'm not going to read through it

but you know it well enough to know that in the first part of the chapter, the apostle gives us the qualifications for an elder. Then in the next part of the chapter he gives us the qualifications for the deacon. Notice the 8th verse for example. Then at the end of it he says, "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." So he tells us in the 15th verse that he's written these things so that we might know how to behave ourselves in the church, the local church. But if he has not given us instructions concerning the elders, then how can we possibly know how to behave ourselves, since the elder is so obviously important for our behavior in the local church. It would, therefore, be concluded from this that probably again the term bishop in verse 1 is a term for the elder.

But now, let's get on to the texts that prove this point. Will you turn with me now to Acts chapter 20 and verse 17? Acts chapter 20, and verse 17, now I would like for every one of you in this audience, if you had a little discussion with, for example, a good Baptist brother, incidentally they may be an excellent Christian and even a better Christian than you; with a good Baptist brother, and he were to ask you, "Where do you get your idea of there being a plurality of elders in the local church. We are taught in our church that there is one elder, and he is the minister who ministers the word of God to us. Where do you get your doctrine?" I would love for every one of you to be able say, "Well, now, I want you to turn with me to a couple of passages that show that the office of elder is the same as the office of bishop, or that the elders and bishops are synonymous terms with different emphases. Acts chapter 20, verse 17 and verse 28 is one of the two important passages.

Now, in verse 17 we read from Luke, "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus," that is Paul, "and called the elders of the church." So he sent to Ephesus and he called for the elders of the church, elders, notice, elders of the church in Ephesus. Incidentally, it is

singular church, not plural churches, but singular churches, the elders of the church. Now, of course, there could be a number of little different churches in Ephesus, but we always argue on the basis of what is written, not on the basis of what we presume might be there. In other words, the burden of proof rests upon others to prove that there were different bodies in Ephesus called church. Now what we have in the text is the singular. So he calls for the elders of the church.

Now, will you look at verse 28, when after they have come and the apostle addresses them, what does he say to them? Why he says, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you" now here is the word for bishops. Unfortunately in the Authorized Version it was not translated bishops, but it should have been translated bishops. If it had been, then there would be no problem about 1 Timothy chapter 3. "Over which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops, overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." So you see Paul called for the elders of the church. He met the elders of the church at Ephesus, and he said, "I want you to take heed for the flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you bishops." So here it is plainly taught that the elders and bishops are the same people. Every elder is a bishop.

Now, I know that it might stretch your willingness a little bit to call me Bishop Johnson. [Laughter] And I'm not asking that. You can reserve that for Mr. Prier. Call him Bishop Prier, that's all right with me. But the elder and bishop are synonymous terms. They refer to the same individual. One referring to the dignity, an elder, he's old, not in that way. We'll talk about that later. It's entirely possible for a young man without those beautiful gray hairs to be an elder, but ordinarily we would expect an older man to be an elder, but the primary reference, of course, is to spiritual maturity.

Now, there is another text that teaches the same thing. This is the other text that I would want you to be able to bring forth in support of the church order that you approve, that you think is taught in Scripture. So will you turn with me to the 1st chapter

of Paul's letter to Titus, Titus chapter 1? And we're going to read verses 5 and 6 of Titus chapter 1. Incidentally, any Presbyterian in the audience, this is your doctrine, too. So you should know this also, because it is upon this very same exposition of Scripture that your own church order is based with regard to the office of elder. Verse 5 of Titus chapter 1, "For this cause left I thee in Crete," Paul writes to Titus, "that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; If any be blameless." So you see, he said, "I'm leaving you in Crete. I want you to appoint elders, and if you find some blameless people there, they are the husband of one wife and so forth, they are candidates for the "bishop must be blameless." And again in verse 5 and verse 7, by the comparison of these texts, it is obvious that the elder is the bishop and the bishop is the elder, one suggesting the duty the other the dignity.

The modern term bishop then is referred in the Anglican church, and the Lutheran church, and the Methodist church, I'm not trying to attack these denominations, just these particular teachings. The idea of a bishop as being a hierarchical man over a particularly territory is not taught in Scripture at all. And, according to the best opinions of church historians, arose with the 2nd century, and specifically there seems to be some reference to it in the epistle that Ignatius wrote. Ignatius was martyred in 112 AD and there are some indications that by that time there had arisen this monarchical bishop idea, which penetrated the Christian church, and has been in various manifestations of it down to the present time. But it is not a New Testament teaching. So then, when Paul then open 1 Timothy chapter 3 by saying, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work," he's speaking about the office of elder. For bishop and elder refer to the same thing.

The second thing I want you to notice is the evaluation that Paul puts upon this office. He says that "if a man desires the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." I

wonder why it was necessary for Paul to say that. Why was it necessary for him to say, "If you desire the office of elder you desire a good work?" Well, the reason, evidently, is this; it was not as it is today. Men needed encouragement in those days to assume civil office and they particularly need encouragement to exercise the office of elder. Having been appointed by the Holy Spirit, for this is the origin of one's eldership, they still needed encouragement in the exercise of it, because it cost them a great deal to do the work of an elder in a local church. It involved a tremendous amount of sacrifice. It exposed them to serious persecution. Their lives were often at stake. And furthermore, evidently as we shall see when we get to chapter 5 of 1 Timothy, in those days the elders frequently devoted a great percentage of their time to the work of the church, giving up opportunities for monetary gain by service to the saints. Because we read in the 5th chapter concerning the elders there, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." So there were some elders who gave themselves so wholeheartedly to the work of the Lord, that the saints helped them. The evidently helped all of the elders financially, and especially helped those who labored in the word and doctrine. So elders really did a serious work of oversight in those days, devoting themselves wholeheartedly to the ministry of the word of God. And therefore, the apostle when he writes concerning it, he says, "If desire the office of elder, you long for it, you desire a good work." He encourages them, having been appointed by the Holy Spirit to, but the Spirit's enablement, fulfill that which God has laid upon their hearts.

Then let's move on to the declaration of the duties of the elder. Now, what were the duties of an elder? What were the duties of a bishop? You can draw out certain things from the text here, and when we talk next Wednesday night about the qualifications some of these things will emerge, but let me sum it up tonight by saying that I think we can include the activities of an elder or a bishop under three heads. First of all, leading; now this could also be called shepherding, and in fact, that is the common

word that is used in the New Testament, shepherd the flock of God. But I will call it leading. This term lead or to shepherd is a word that has to do with government, so it includes certain specific things that come under the elders' responsibility. He should be a shepherd of the flock. That means that he should care for their needs. When the flock are in danger, when the flock in need, whatever it may be, anything that comes under the head of being a shepherd to them, that is the responsibility of the elder. He is responsibility, evidently, for the finances of the congregation, from Acts chapter 11 and verse 30, that is, he oversees the spending of the money, the disposition of the money. That, I think, is also confirmed by the fact that it is specifically stated in the qualifications that he should not be greedy of filthy lucre, and this is set forth more than once in the requirements in the various places, so evidently it was a temptation.

Because he was the shepherd he's responsible for the teaching of the flock. Now, in the light of chapter 5 we shall see that there were two kinds of elders. All elders ruled but some of them also taught the word themselves. Therefore we gather from this that the elders themselves are not necessarily to do the teaching. Exclusively, but they are responsible for the feeding of the flock. The sheep feed themselves, but it is the responsibility of the shepherd to lead them to proper pasturage. And so in the case of the flock of God, the elders have responsibility for ministry. They are to lead then in matters that have to do with the shepherding of the flock. And incidentally, that's a great responsibility. Elders have the responsibility of leading the congregation. I read a story today of a man who was running as fast as he could after a crowd of people. Somebody asked him the reason for his hurry and he gasped out, "I've got to catch up with them. I'm their leader." [Laughter] And sometimes in our churches we have had leaders like that. The second thing that characterizes the elder is that he should be an individual who guards or protects the flock. Will you turn over with me to Titus chapter 1? I think in Titus chapter 1 we have the best section having to do with the guarding ministry of the elder. Notice what Titus says about the elders here, verse 9 of chapter 1, '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 opposers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially 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 Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." So one of the characteristics of an elder is that he guards the flock of God from false doctrine.

Now, this is one of the reasons why you constantly hear me, I think I have a special gift along this line, I don't know how good a shepherd I am. I hope and pray that I measure up to the qualification of the New Testament in shepherding. But I do feel a little more confident, that's bad, when you feel confident, but I feel a little more confidence in the fact that I do try to protect the saints and guard the saints from false doctrine. That's why you so often hear me talk about universalism and warn you against it. That's why you hear me talk so often about liberalism and what is being said in the theological centers today. Because it always filters down to people in the pew, such as you and I are. This is why you always hear me speak out against Arminianism, for Arminianism, even in evangelical Arminian, is mistaken. And in my opinion is a compromising of the grace of God. So I warn you against any kind of doctrine in which salvation depends upon our cooperation with God. I try to warn you against that, so you understand the free grace of the word of God and rejoice in the free grace of the word of God. Because all these errors lead inevitably to a weakening of the spiritual life, and you often hear me talk about semi-palagianism, which is just another form of sophisticated legalism, which is so prominent in our churches today. This is why I speak so often against the doctrine of free will, because it too is a compromise of the grace of God. Whenever you hear someone say that our salvation depends upon our free will, he may say in grace it depends upon our free will, he's only speaking the language that

contradicts itself. It is impossible for our salvation to depend upon our free will and at the same time upon God. So I warn you against this. I try to confute those who preach that kind of doctrine. And every elder should have this ministry of guarding the flock of God deeply upon his heart. It's important. So he leads. He shepherds the flock and teaches them. He sees that they are taught and fed. He guards them from error.

And third, and this is the unpleasant task of an elder's work. He must be engaged with the other elders in discipline. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, we don't have time to look at that text, because I have only a couple of minutes, and I want to speak a word about this. That passage there, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 14 through verse 23 expresses the fact that it is the responsibility of the elder to discipline. Now, to discipline means that it is his responsibility if there is moral or doctrinal error in the congregation it is his responsibility to carry out the steps of biblical discipline, which are designed not to rid the church or the body of Christ of the brother or sister, but which are designed to restore them to right relationship with the Lord Jesus. Discipline is most important if the purity of the body of Christ is to be preserved. Our testimony can never be vital, effective, influential, and a testimony that is used by God in the winning of others and the building up of the saints if there is moral evil in our midst or doctrinal evil in our midst. And it is the responsibility of the elders to carry out biblical discipline, which is the reason why today, in so many of our large and influential denomination we have seen liberalism come in and take over. And that is why it often happens in the local church, because weak men have been unwilling to carry out the New Testament teaching concerning biblical discipline. So the work of an elder then is the work of shepherding the flock, of guarding the flock, of disciplining the flock, in order that God may accomplish through the flock the things that may lead to the building up of the body and the extension of the body to the accomplishment of the purpose that God has for them.

Now, I just got started, and it's already time to stop. I know you don't feel that way. [Laughter] But it is time to stop, so next week we will conclude our study of the

elder by dealing with the qualifications and why there must be a plurality of elders in each single local church.

[Prayer] We are thankful to Thee, Lord, for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures, and we pray that in Believers Chapel, and in the other churches represented by those who are here, there may be faithful men who shepherd the flock of God, who guard the flock of God, and who discipline the flock of God...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]