



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Titus 1:5-9

“Paul and the Elders”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] For the Scripture reading, will you turn with me to Titus chapter 1? And I am going to read verses 5 through 9, which is the next section of this little epistle that Paul wrote to Titus, which is the subject of our exposition for these six or seven Sundays. This is the second of the expositions. Titus chapter 1 and verse 5,

"For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate (or self-controlled); Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers."

May God bless this portion from his word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the opportunity before us. And again we ask that Thou would guide and direct us in the exposition of the Scriptures. We would pray particularly for these young men who have just given us an accounting of their burden which they believe Thou hast placed upon their hearts. And we pray, Lord, that Thou wilt bless them; make them fruitful in the ministry to which Thou hast called them. We pray that through their ministry, through the teaching of the Scriptures, through their personal counseling in spiritual things that numbers of young people may become true disciples of Jesus Christ, maturing in the faith and useful to Thee. We pray for others who are engaged in similar ministries, and we ask, Lord, that Thou would bless them. May our outreach be enlarged as Thou dost increase our vision. And so, Lord, enlarge our vision. And enable us also to understand, each one of us, our part in that which Thou dost desire that should be accomplished. Wilt Thou direct us with regard to our participation in all of the ministries which Thou art engaged in? We pray again for our country. We pray for the entire church of Jesus Christ. We pray for the ministry of the word here today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for today as we continue our exposition of Paul's letter to Titus is "Paul and the Elders." With this section of Paul's letter to Titus, we come face to face with the subject of the local church, about which the New Testament is remarkably clear, but over which there is great confusion and great neglect. Perhaps the confusion is due to the neglect. But at any rate there is a great deal of confusion and a great deal of neglect of the subject of the local church.

It is often said that the reason, perhaps, for this confusion and neglect is that the New Testament does not really give us any sound, reasonable and systematic presentation of the local church. And consequently, we are left to freedom with regard to its organization and with regard to its ministries.

Now with this I should like to disagree. I feel that the New Testament is just as clear in its teaching concerning the local church as it is in its teaching concerning the plan of salvation. That may seem to be a rather strange and startling statement to make and not justified by the facts, but I think if you were really to study what the New Testament has to say about the church, you would find that it is so. The idea that the New Testament is clear in its doctrine of salvation, the person and work of our Lord, but unclear here is just not true.

As a matter of fact, the very character of Jesus Christ has drawn out in the history of the church many more controversies than the subject of church organization or church government. In the early centuries a great deal of discussion and dispute raged over who Jesus Christ was and what he had done. And it is safe to say, I think, that the New Testament is capable of less misunderstanding in its teaching concerning the local church than it is in these great doctrines of justification by faith, regeneration by the Spirit or the atonement itself.

And it is startling in the light of this to see how much the theologies of the New Testament, or the theologies of the Bible, have omitted the subject of the local church. Among the Presbyterian dogmaticians or theologians, and I happen to believe that they are, generally speaking, the best, it is remarkable how many of them have omitted a consideration of the church. For example, in the theologies of the two Hodges, the theologies of Smith, of Shedd, of Dabney, there is no separate treatment on the local church in them. And what they have to say about them is very little.

Now I know that my Baptist friends would say, Well, that's perfectly understandable because what the Presbyterians have to say about it is wrong, and that's why their theologians have said little about it. But the same thing can be said about the Baptist theologians by and large. The truth of the matter is our theologians have neglected this subject. And yet it's important. I think it should be important, that we should realize its importance, if we simply reflected on these things.

One of the chief purposes of God in the present age is the building of the church. Now that is evident from the words which our Lord spoke to the Apostle Peter. You remember that he was with the disciples, and he asked them who men were saying that he was. And Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." And then our Lord said to Peter, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." And then he went on to say, And thou Peter (or Petros), but upon this petra, this great confession that I am the Messiah the Son of the living God, I will build my church.

Now the term church is not found but in one other place, two times in this place in the whole of the gospel records, in the 18th chapter of that same Gospel of Matthew. And there it is a reference to the local church. And so it seems evident that when our Lord said, "I will build my church," that he had in mind not only the church invisible and universal composed of all believers from the day of Pentecost on, but he had in mind the local manifestations of this, our local churches.

When Campus Crusade conducted its meetings on the campus at Berkeley, it was understandable that we saw signs passed around, carried around by the young people, "Jesus, yes, Christianity, no." But I have also seen some signs, "Christianity, yes; churchianity, no." Or "Christianity, not churchianity." Now the second sign is not so understandable if we are knowledgeable in the Scriptures, for we cannot really have Christianity without a consideration of the local church.

Now if you mean by churchianity the kind of church in which Jesus Christ is not honored and glorified, in which the word of God is not preached, in which there is no fellowship, then I think I can understand. If you're thinking just about a big organization with no vitality and reality, I can understand. Christianity, not churchianity. But in the final analysis, if we are to have Christianity, we must have the doctrine of the church and particularly the doctrine of the local church.

The apostles again suffered many things for the church, they said. And Paul considered his greatest sin the persecution of the church. He said he was the chief of sinners because he persecuted the church. And he calls upon us to imitate him.

Now Paul and Titus had been together in Crete, and they had been preaching and they had been forming small churches all over that island. Homer speaks of Crete as "Crete of the hundred cities." And so, it was an island which was known for the multiplicity of its cities. And apparently Paul and Titus went over the island, and they preached the word, and they formed little groups of believers. And they were meeting in numbers of the cities, but Paul felt it necessary to leave and carry on ministry elsewhere. And so he wrote Titus a little letter after he had left and said, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had commanded thee or appointed Thee."

Why Paul wrote Titus the letter, well, we're not absolutely certain. He does not really tell us. Perhaps he wrote this letter to Titus because it would be a convenience to Titus to assist him in his memory of what Paul had told him when they were there. Or it may have been for the confirmation of his authority in the event that some should say to Titus: Titus, why are you appointing elders? What right do you have to do that?

And Titus would have said I am the deputy of the Apostle Paul, for that is what Timothy and Titus were. They were not pastors in the sense of men in control of the organization of the church. There is no such thing in the New Testament as the pastor of a congregation like the president of a corporation. Titus was an apostolic deputy or legate, and he would pull out his letter and say to that person, this is my authority and it come from Paul.

Or perhaps, and I'm inclined to think that this surely is included, Paul wrote this letter for future ages, so that we would have the opportunity to perceive the instructions that Paul gave this apostolic legit, so that down through the centuries we would know the apostolic mind on these points. At any rate in these verses Paul sets forth for us the

requirements for the elder. And these requirements are given us in three spheres: in the elder's family life, in the elder's personal life and in the elder's doctrinal life.

Now, I think we should begin speaking about the requirements of the elder by asking the question, What is a local church? Well, that may help us as we consider not only this passage, but others in the Epistle of Titus.

People often think that a church, well, a church is just a group of people who meet in the name of Jesus. If several of us on Thursday night should come together in Believers Chapel and meet over in the room here and have a little prayer meeting, people are inclined to think that that's the church. But does not the Bible say, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst."? That's a church. But that is not necessarily a church. The fact that two or three people meet does not necessarily mean that the church has met.

What is the church? Well, there are at least four features of the local church that we must bear in mind. In the first place, the local church is a group of professing believers, that is, they have accepted the apostolic testimony concerning Jesus Christ, his person and work, and they have new life. They profess to have received that testimony.

I stress the word professing because it is true in New Testament times, there were some in the local churches who had made a profession only, it appears. Remember John says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; if they had been of us, they would have continued with us." But they were there for a while. But they weren't really members of our Lord's true body. So the local church is a group of professing believers.

Now, this does not mean that they are believers in anything. They are believers in the apostolic testimony concerning Jesus Christ. If the Unitarians, for example, put out on their lawn of their building The Unitarian Church, that does not make it a church in the biblical sense.

Now I'm not saying to these people that they should scratch out the term church there. I would like for them to do that because it's very confusing to people in the

twentieth century to see Unitarian Church and to realize that they do not accept the apostolic testimony of the word of God to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They do not accept his deity for example. They do not accept the fact that salvation is only through him on the basis of grace. They are not strictly speaking Christians. They do not accept the Trinity. They put out, however, Unitarian Church. It is not a church in the biblical sense. So the local church is a group of professing believers, believers in the apostolic testimony concerning the Lord Jesus.

Second, who meet regularly in one geographical area. Well, that means that if you and I met next week in Fort Worth, if ten or fifteen of us met over in Fort Worth and then the following week, we said, well, let's meet down in San Antonio, and we met in San Antonio. And the next week we'd say, well let's meet in New York next week. And we met in New York the next week. Well, that would not make us a church. The fact that believers meet in various localities does not mean that that is a church. They meet regularly according to the Bible in one geographical area.

And third, they meet for the observation of the ordinances, that is, they meet to practice baptism and the Lord's Supper, baptism, which signifies our entrance into the body, and the Lord's Supper, which is a visible representation of our continuance in that body. And so the people who meet together to have a little fellowship Thursday night on the campus of Southern Methodist University, and they meet there every Thursday, and they are professing believers, but they do not practice the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, we do not have any biblical right to call them a church, for believers in the New Testament in the churches met to observe the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. And they also met for worship and ministry. They met to worship the Lord around the Lord's Table. They met also to hear the ministry of the word of God. That's the third thing that constitutes a necessary part of the local church.

And finally, they should meet under the oversight of officers, the elders and the deacons. So these four things, the local church is a group of professing believers in the

apostolic testimony, who meet regularly in one geographical area, for, thirdly, the observation of the ordinances, worship and ministry, and fourth, under the oversight of elders.

Now if we have these things, then we have a church. And they may meet in Joe Blow's barn, or they may meet in a beautiful church sanctuary like a cathedral. But they are no more a church in one or the other. But they are just as much church if these four features are met. Now that is a local church.

Now when we think of a specific local church, there are two entities within it. There is its head. And that head is the Lord Jesus Christ. I am not the head of Believers Chapel. If you have that idea about Believers Chapel, you have the wrong idea about this particular manifestation of the church of Jesus Christ. The head of this church is Jesus Christ. The elders are simply under-shepherds. He is the head. And it is our desire, we do not always succeed, it is our desire that he be practically the head of this body. He is the head of the church. He is always the head of the church. He is preeminent in all things. He is our head. We do not have an earthly head.

It may surprise you to know that the only person in the New Testament who is called pastor is Jesus Christ. He is the shepherd of the sheep. The shepherd. No one else is the shepherd of the sheep. Now elders do shepherd, but they shepherd under him. They are little under-shepherds.

Now as far as the second entity is concerned, it is the body. He is the head; we are the body. But we are composed of three elements. There is, of course, the congregation. How do you enter the congregation? Well, you enter the congregation by new birth and then by baptism. If you receive the message concerning the gospel, and you are born again, you have new life; then the next step is to be baptized in water. That's testimony to what has happened to you. You don't raise your hand in a meeting. You don't sign a decision card. You don't come down front. The biblical way to confess your faith is to be baptized in water, on October the 10th if you've never been baptized to

this point. So you enter the local church in that way. You become a member of us when you have become a believer in Jesus Christ, you have been baptized in water and you begin to meet with the saints around the Lord's Table. That is the normal way to identify yourself with a Christian community or a local church.

Now the second entity or the second group within the congregation is the elders. They are the under-shepherds, we have said. And thirdly, the deacons.

Now elders, I know, are called elders. That means old men, really. George Bernard Shaw once said, "Youth is a wonderful thing, and it's too bad it has to be wasted on the young people." And one of the young people, a budding wag, replied, "Old age is a time of great usefulness with accumulated knowledge and experience, but is unfortunately wasted on some old grouches." [Laughter]

Now both of these are interesting statements. Both of them, of course, are scripturally wrong. But perhaps they explain something of the generation gap that sometimes exists.

Now elders are called elders because they should have spiritual maturity. One does not have to become fifty years of age to become an elder. But at the same time, a new Christian should not be appointed elder. Paul tells us that in 1 Timothy chapter 3. These qualifications that are set forth here are qualifications that are primarily moral qualifications. In other words, the elder must be tested in the fires of family life. He must be tested in the fires of his personal spiritual life. And he must be tested in the fires of his knowledge of holy Scripture. Let's look at them now.

First, the requirements for elder in his family life. Verse 6, "If any be blameless." Now of course, we are inclined to stop right there and say, Blameless? Why, my goodness, no one can be an elder. Who is blameless? Obviously Paul does not mean perfect, for it's true, no one could possibly be an elder. But what does he mean when he says blameless? Well, he means, the Greek text says, unchargeable literally. He means a man of unblemished reputation in these specific qualifications that are mentioned here.

In other words, there should be no loophole for criticism regarding these qualifications, blameless in these respects.

And then, isn't it interesting that the first thing that is said about him is that he should be the husband of one wife. It is sometimes thought that what Paul meant was one wife at a time. Now that is not what Paul meant. It is evident that Paul did not mean that because the early church did not interpret it that way. After Paul's day, many of the fathers spoke on this point, and they interpreted this to mean to wives throughout his lifetime. And fortunately, in Paul's own writings we have a clue, for in 1 Timothy chapter 3 he says this same requirement. And he gives this same requirement concerning the elder.

And then in the 5th chapter, he has an interesting statement regarding widows and their qualifications for enrollment on the roll of widows to receive financial help from the local church. And he says in verse 9 of chapter 5 of 1 Timothy, "Let not a widow be taken into the number (that is, be enrolled) under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man." And the construction is similar to this construction here. And so the widow eligible for enrollment for help in the church must be sixty years of age. She must also be the wife of one husband.

Now if she's a widow, it means one husband in her lifetime, not one husband at a time. And likewise here, when Paul says the elder should be the husband of one wife, he means one in his lifetime. Why? Why would this be a requirement? Well, remember, while an elder's spiritual qualifications are no higher than the standards for every person's spiritual life, the elder and the deacon have minimum standards that the ordinary Christian does not have. Our maximum standards are identical. But if a man is to serve as elder or deacon, he must have certain, meet certain minimum qualifications, too. And a second marriage might be considered a sign of weakness even if not of sin.

Now in case you've been married twice, I'm not suggesting to you that it is necessarily sin. Your wife may have died, and you may have become married again.

There is no evidence of any sin whatsoever. But you are not qualified to be an elder. But that does not mean that you may not live a fruitful Christian life, maybe, possibly, more fruitful than some of the elders. But for men who are to be elders, these requirements are very stringent because God considered it very, very important. And Paul thought that the church should be without any possibility of accusation, not only of sin, but even of weakness.

I've often tried to illustrate this by saying, let's just suppose for a moment that Tommy Manville, who was so well-known back in my young days because he had so many wives. I think he's been married eleven or thirteen times. I believe he's still living. And let's suppose that he should be converted, if he's not converted. And let's suppose he should grow in grace. Would we appoint him an elder in the church? I doubt it. We would consider that that man had a weakness, and we would not appoint him.

And Paul says an elder should be the husband of one wife. Now one commentator said perhaps one of the reasons for this is that an elder with two wives or three wives would have two or three families. And he would have no time to devote to the Lord's work because of his responsibilities. That may have entered into it. We should also remember, too, that he would have at least two or three mothers-in-law, and that might be very, very bad. [Laughter] I read the other day of a man who said, "If I could do it over again, I'd marry a Japanese girl. They're graceful, obedient and attractive, and your mother-in-law is in Yokohama. [Laughter] So Paul says, "The husband of one wife."

Now notice the next thing he says. And I think this is very important for us who are parents and for you who are young people. "Having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly."

Now the word faithful may be translated believing or trustworthy. Or we may say having believing children. In other words, the elder's children should all be converted. Well, that's a possible interpretation, for the Greek word pistos does mean believing on occasion. Or it may mean trustworthy in the sense of reliable, in subjection to their

parents even though not converted. I'm inclined to accept that second interpretation. I took down my Greek concordance this past week, looked up *pistos* in the pastoral epistles because they form something of a unity, and discovered that while this word is used in both ways in the pastorals, by far the greater number of occurrences, the author uses it in the sense of trustworthy or loyal. And in the Epistle to Titus, it occurs three times and in each occurrence it means trustworthy.

For example, verse 9, "Holding fast the faithful word," not the believing word. The word doesn't believe, but it is trustworthy. "Holding fast the faithful word." So the elder's children must be trustworthy.

Now that, I think, agrees with Paul's statement in 1 Timothy chapter 3 when he, in this second passage, gives the requirements for elder. He does not say having trustworthy children, but he puts it in another way which explains what he meant by that clause. For he says in 1 Timothy 3, verse 4, "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity." And so having them in subjection is equated with having trustworthy children. That's one of the requirements for the elder. He must have trustworthy children who are not accused of riot, profligacy. That's the term that is used in connection with the prodigal son, of profligacy. Not having children who are accused of profligacy or who are unruly.

Now to put that down in our common language, if we were a Britisher, we would say he should not have children who are scatterlings. Or in Scotland they would say he should not have children who are ne'er-do-wells. Or in the United States, we would say he should not have children who were bums.

Now that is a test of the elder's fitness for the office. These are the things that are stressed in his family life. The elder, after all, is a steward of the household of God. He is an under-steward in God's house. He's the caretaker of God's house. And if he doesn't know how to take care of his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God,

Paul says? And it's just as plain as that. If he cannot take care of his own home, he surely cannot take care of God's home. And the church is the household of God, Paul says.

Well, let's move on to the second requirements. The requirements for the elder: His personal life. Now these are partly negative, partly positive. I shall just select some of the negative and some of the positive. In verse 7, "For a bishop must be blameless."

By the way, that is evidence that the term bishop and the term elder are the same. He told Titus, "Appoint elders," verse 5. Verse 7, "For the bishop must be blameless." So the term bishop and the term elder are the same. One of these is a term that looks at the man in his dignity, he is an elder, and in his spiritual maturity. Bishop means overseer. So this is the term that looks at him in his duty, in his work that he does. So an elder is an elder and a bishop.

I'm not recommending that you call me this, but I happen to be a bishop in Believers Chapel because I'm an elder. Now, I am an elder. I got a letter this week addressed to me. I just got it this morning. Elder S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. Now, that is what I am, an elder. But I am also a bishop biblically.

Now the bishops in Scripture were not men who had charge of a territory and a number of churches under them. But they were in one local church. They were elders.

"For the bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God (as the house caretaker of God); not self-willed." Now that quality is fatal to a ruler of free men. You can be very self-willed if you are a ruler of enslaved men. But no one can be a ruler of free men who is self-willed. And so the elder must not be self-willed. He must not be arrogant. He must not be the kind of person who does not seek to please anybody but himself. He cannot be a successful elder if he is arrogant, self-willed.

Second, "Not soon angry." He must not have a short fuse because they'll be many, many occasions to get angry in the church of God. He must not be "given to wine." He must not go around "sudsing it up" as young people often say today. He must not be a

striker, "no striker." That means the kind of person who has such a short fuse that he explodes in fisticuffs, not that kind of person.

Now apparently there were some in the early church. I know there are some in the latter church. But in the apostolic canons it is said, "We order that the bishop who strikes an erring believer should be deposed." We had a graduate of Dallas Seminary some years ago who was a very volatile kind of person. And I wondered how he would do when he got out in the ministry. And he went in a church. It was in the north. And they had immediate problems. And in the course of it, they had a church fight, but this was a physical one. And he took the lead. And so they had a physical battle in the church. Now that man was not qualified to become an elder, "no striker," not warlike.

And then Paul says, "not given to filthy lucre." In other words, he must not be the kind of person who adapts his teaching to the hearers in the hopes of gaining money. As Paul said, "I coveted no man's silver or gold, but as a matter of fact, I worked for my own living in your midst." There is nothing more despicable than the person who stands up in the pulpit with God's word lying on the pulpit desk, and then because there are people in the audience who pay him money, he tailors his message in order to please them.

Nothing more despicable than that for the man of God.

Now that is a great temptation. And it's not surprising that Paul put it here, for every man who has ever taught the word of God, and who in a sense is dependent upon God's people for his support, knows precisely why Paul put here "not given to filthy lucre."

You know, that is one reason why I do not know what anybody gives in Believers Chapel. In all the churches that I've been associated with, God gave me grace a long time ago not to have anything to do with the money. Now if someone comes and puts money in my hand occasionally, I do know something about them. But I do not know who gives thousands, and I do not know who gives pennies in Believers Chapel. I may be looking at you and you may have given ten thousand dollars to Believers Chapel last year.

Well, I thank you for the rest of the congregation. But I do not know that you have. And I may be looking at someone who has never given one penny to Believers Chapel. I don't even know that, so you can strut around as if you're giving ten thousand as far as I'm concerned. [Laughter] I do not know, because I know the weakness of my own heart. If I knew you were a big giver, and if occasion came that I felt that you were not in harmony with Scripture, I might be inclined to tailor my message not to offend you.

So Paul says an elder should not be given to filthy lucre. And I know what a great temptation it is. I remember one person in one of the churches in which I served as pastor. Now this man had charge of the money, and he was taking money out of the collection plate. I know it because years later he came and confessed to me that he had been doing it. But God had so convicted him that he had gone down to the bank through one of the members of our congregation and had borrowed money in order to pay back money that he had taken out of the collection plate. Apparently, elders handle the collections in the early church. They were responsible for money. That is why ultimately in Believers Chapel the elders are responsible for the money.

I know of one man right now who has been deposed from a Christian organization because he has embezzled that organization out of a hundred thousand dollars, so the charge is. I know of another person who right now has resigned because the claims of some of the board are that he has mishandled the funds. "Not given to filthy lucre."

Now the positive qualifications, six virtues counter these five vices. And they are mainly those that fit a man for ruling. Paul says, "But a lover of hospitality." The ancient inns were horrible places. They were dirty. They were filthy. And they were immoral. One of Aristophanes' plays, in one of his plays, Heracles asks his companion where they are going to lodge for the night. And the answer is where the fleas are fewest. And so the term flea-bag is not a modern description of a place to stay.

Plato describes an innkeeper as being like a pirate who holds his guests to ransom. And so, it was a great blessing to Christians to have Christian believers all over the ancient world where they could stay. And so Christians are exhorted to be hospitable in the New Testament and to be a lover of hospitality. Well, an elder must be a lover of hospitality. And temperate, self-controlled, that's the last climactic virtue of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. And here it is, self-controlled.

And then finally, the requirements for the elder: His doctrinal life. Kick-off time is in about three minutes, I presume. [Laughter] So, I'll try to hurry. But again I insist, this is more important.

Now this seventh virtue fits the man for teaching as the others fit him for ruling. For Paul said in 1 Timothy 3 that the elders should be apt to teach. In other words, he should have the right doctrinal equipment. He says in the 9th verse, "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught," the trustworthy message.

Now that suggests a stereotyped outline of the truth. In other words, if you had spoken to one of the Christians in the early churches, one of the elders, and you had asked him: Do you have a theology? He would say, Do we have a theology? We have a trustworthy message. It is our theology. It is the apostolic teaching concerning the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ in all of its ramifications.

And so I say to you, if you feel that God is appointing you to the office of elder, for he is the one who appoints, men only recognize the appointment of God, one of the requirements is going to be that you become a master of the theology of the word of God which is a theology of grace. You must learn what it is to be saved by grace, not free will plus grace. You must learn what it is to be the God-man in all of its significances. You must learn Jesus Christ. You must learn his way of salvation. You must learn what it is to be saved, I say, saved by grace. You must learn that salvation is of the Lord, not of human action or even human free will.

Spurgeon used to like to say, "I have known some of these timorous ones try to say free grace, but they've had a little impediment in their speech and it always comes out free will." We are not saved even by free will. We are saved by grace. And so when you have come to understand the theology of grace in its ramifications, then it may be that you have become possibly qualified for eldership.

You must understand that salvation is all of grace in its planning. God planned it before the ages began out of free grace. You must understand that salvation is by grace in all of its providing in the coming ministry of Jesus Christ. You must understand that salvation is of grace in its application through the Spirit, that you in your sin would never have turned to God, that your will was corrupt, your emotions were corrupted, your mind was blinded, and that the Holy Spirit shown in your mind brought new life to you which brought you to faith. And you came to understand the message out of the grace of God. Then having understood this grace message, then you understand something of that which is a qualification for being an elder.

What a necessary thing it is. And what a consolatory thing it is to know that salvation is of the Lord. For if it were of Gabriel, it would fail. Michael, you could never save me. I would surely in some way or other escape your hands and be lost. But if salvation is of the Lord, then I shall be saved because he does not fail.

And Paul says that he should be a man who holds fast the faithful word that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. An elder needs two voices, one for gathering the sheep and building them up, and one for driving away the wolves and the thieves. And at times, if I speak very sharply, if I speak very strongly about error, it is because every elder must have those two types of voices. He must gather the sheep and comfort and build them up and guard them. But he must also protect them from the wolves. And any congregation of people has its wolves.

One of the tragedies of the church is not that it has apostates. We should expect apostates. One of the tragedies of the church is that having apostates, we have not dealt

with them as elders should. And so the error has spread until finally the church is in its control.

Time's up. If you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is your responsibility to accept the trustworthy message concerning Jesus Christ. May God through the Spirit bring you to faith. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the instructions which the apostle has given us concerning eldership. We pray, Lord, that Thou wilt raise up elders in our midst; appoint them by the Holy Ghost as overseers of the flock of God. And give us who are elders now the perception and wisdom to recognize them and to invite them to help us in the work of shepherding the flock of God. And Father, if there should be one without Christ, O by the Spirit, give no rest nor peace until they rest in Christ, for salvation is of the Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.