

# Biblical Eldership - Lesson 4

by John Piper

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*John Piper discusses the essential functions and qualifications of elders in the church, emphasizing the dual roles of governing and teaching.*

**Duration:** 1:10:58

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, 1 Timothy 3:2, 1 Timothy 3:4-5

**Topics:** "Church Governance", "Elder Responsibilities"

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## Description

In this sermon, Pastor John Piper discusses the function of elders in the New Testament, specifically focusing on governing and teaching. He emphasizes the importance of pursuing and caring for the sheep who may be drifting away or facing various challenges in their lives. Piper acknowledges that there may not be clear-cut answers on how to implement the shepherding ministry, but emphasizes the need to try and put structures in place. He also highlights the responsibilities of elders, which include governing and teaching, and references 1 Timothy 5:17 as a biblical basis for elders who rule well.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at [www.DesiringGod.org](http://www.DesiringGod.org) Okay, we've got an hour and fifteen minutes, and we've got two more units. The two units are the function of elders in the New Testament, governing and teaching, and the last one is qualifications for elders.

And those will easily fill up this time, and I want to make sure that you feel free to ask questions along the way. Some of you have asked good questions in the break time here, and I hope some of those will come out. And I do not presume to have answers for all these questions that you're asking, because while we've worked hard to create a structure at Bethlehem, the implementation of the shepherding ministry is the greatest structural frustration of my life in this church.

How to shepherd faithfully the twelve hundred members, and then there are hundreds of people who come to this church who aren't members, when the small group system that you create, partnering with elders to oversee those people, half your people don't go to. So how do you provide crisis care and know the spiritual whereabouts so that they're not into sin or drifting away when they don't participate in the structure that you've provided at a volunteer level, like the small group system. And we just don't have good answers to that yet.

I don't think you can be satisfied as shepherds who will give an account someday of the souls in your charge by just saying, well, they don't come. And so, tough. There needs to be some kind of way where you get at people, you pursue people according to James 5. You pursue them if they're sheep that are drifting away into the thicket, or ready to fall over a cliff, or about to leave their wife or husband, or starting to commit some kind of financial inappropriate behavior at work, or they just haven't read their Bibles anymore, they hardly go to church.

Elders are responsible to figure that out and pursue those people. Now, there always will be people like that. Always, in every church.

That's clear from Jesus' teaching about the parable of the tares and so on. There will never be a perfect church. If you get too rigorous and say, we're going to have a church where every member is accountable and every member fulfills the responsibility for X number of attendance to church and tithing and this, well, you will either go crazy or you will have a very tiny legalistic church because, at least in our culture, and I don't think it would be New Testament anyway, you can't make people.

You just can't make people do all the things they ought to do and not every one of those things is a disciplinable thing. I think discipline really is for the major, gross, flagrant, community known acts. Not every little shortfall or how many small group meetings can you miss before you're disciplined and how many Sunday mornings or Wednesday evenings or whatever can you miss.

I just don't know how you would draw lines like that without going beyond the New Testament. So, I just say I don't have answers to all these questions about how to implement the care ministry, the shepherding ministry, but just to say, and I'll probably say this in 15 years when I'm about to be done here, we tried hard. We tried hard.

I've been here 18 years and here I am saying we try, we think about it, we try to put staff in place, we try to put structures in place, we try, but my oh my, we have a long way to go. Well, let's try to organize what I think has been implicit already as we talk about the function of elders in the New Testament, namely, governing and teaching. I'll try to show why I think those are the two ways and what governing or oversight involves.

The responsibilities of elders are summed up under two heads, governing and teaching. Let's take those one at a time and see the text that points in those directions. First, governing.

1 Timothy 5.17, Let elders who rule, prostates, literally stand before. It's a vague etymology there, but it's used for leadership, guidance and authority several times in the New Testament. Those who govern or rule, stand before.

Let the elders who govern well. See, that's what we're talking about here. Govern well.

That doesn't mean have slick, efficient meetings. It means, are the people cared for successfully? That's what governing well means. Are they mobilized and taught successfully? Are they giving richly? Are they living upright and godly lives? Have you put structures in place that help them do that and call them to account when they don't? Let them be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

So, governing here comes from this word. That's where I'm getting at. And in a minute, I'm going to put number two after governing, teaching.

And I'll come back and I'll get it here. So, within the elders, the Presbyterian church has distinguished often between teaching elders and ruling elders. And I believe they've always said, I hope they do, I would say, that the ruling elders still have to be apt to teach.

Because all elders have to be apt to teach according to 1 Timothy 3.2. And they have to be able to correct doctrine. But, some do it especially. See that word? Malistas.

Especially. That's me. That's my specialty.

I devote my life to studying the Bible and to teaching it and preaching it. 1 Timothy 3.4.5 He must manage. That's the same word right there.

That's a participle. Different participle. He must lead, govern, manage, rule his household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way.

For if a man does not know how to manage same word, his own household, how shall he care for God's flock? We'll talk more about this when we get to qualifications and ask, okay, how successful does he have to be? Does this kid ever mouse off at him? Does he have to get off the council? You know, if his kid skips school one day? How bad can a teenager get before his dad shouldn't be an elder? Not an easy question. I've been through pain with my kids. I've shared it with those who should know.

We wept together and cried together. And now things are good. I don't say it to my family because I think it would be too big for them to carry, but I've said to myself, my kids and my wife can destroy my ministry.

The point here is simply, the reason for looking at a man's family is to see if he can govern. Same word. Can you manage your household? Do you know how to lead a wife and children to the Lord in devotions? If you can't lead devotions at home, you're not going to be an elder in this church.

I don't check up on the elders real carefully, but we do remind each other around our council, how is it going at home? Are you slipping into careless activity? If you can't gather a few children and a wife and lead them in prayer and sing a song and pray together and teach your children how to pray, for example, that's just a piece of it, how in the world are you going to lead a huge family to God in prayer and in the Word? So governing, overseeing, or managing would be another word for it there. Just continuing text now that point towards governance. The duty of elders to oversee or shepherd the flock implies a governing or leading function.

Acts 20, 28. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. To shepherd.

Overseers to shepherd. This is so crucial that we don't see the power dimension and the authority dimension and the oversight dimension as something that gives you a right to lord it over others, but rather to shepherd. Shepherds care for sheep.

They rescue sheep. They feed sheep. They comb the wool of sheep.

They stay out late at night to protect the sheep from wolves. Shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 1 Peter 5, 1-2 Therefore I exhort the elders among you, shepherd the flock of God.

1 Thessalonians 5, 12 We beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you. There's that word again. Pro-estimi.

Pro-estelens. Are over you. That is, govern you, rule you, stand before you, manage you in the Lord and admonish you.

So, I'm simply pointing out here there are leaders in this church who do this sort of thing. No reference to elders in this verse. I know that.

But the function of the leader is governing and the natural assumption is that the leaders are elders that Paul had appointed according to Acts 14. Last text on governing. Hebrews 13, 17 Obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as men who will have to give an account.

Obedience and submission implies a role of leadership and governance. And again, the reference is probably to the elders, though the leaders are not described as elders explicitly. So, my simple point there is there are these texts that say the leaders of the church have a governing, overseeing, leading, managing role.

That's not just to be done by the congregation as a whole. If you have a tiny little house church, it may be that the distinctions are almost negligible because everybody knows everybody and all the meetings are everybody together. But once you broaden out to just 30, 40, 50 people, you immediately have to have somebody coming to the top who tends to organize, manage, think through, solve problems, make suggestions, and lead.

I'd love to do a seminar right after this one on just the nature and the dynamic of leadership because I think in a healthy church, the saints love to be led well. They love to be led well. Led with prayer, led with the Word, led with humble service.

They don't want bumblers making stupid decisions or passive pastors and elders who just never dream any dreams. Never dream any dreams. What are we going to do? How are we going to win people to Christ? How are we going to do missions here? How are we going to train people? You guys got any ideas? Do something! That makes the church real sick and just sad.

That's a much greater danger than to have visionary leaders who are just trumpeting vision and then effectively recruiting the troops to follow. The question is, if you're in a local church and you're plugged in and therefore there are a group of men to whom you look as those whom you will try to key off of and submit to their leadership and their authority, what if you leave? Leave in mission or leave in vocational or leave to go to another church. I'm not sure just what kind of leaving you have in mind.

At what point does that leadership and that governance and that authority and that maybe fathering, mentoring dimension stop? It's probably ambiguous at certain kinds of leavings, but I think if everyone were taught to plug in significantly to the local church where they are, that would be the point where you shift your leaning on leadership. As long as a person is a member here, we should feel the responsibility, but we shouldn't abuse membership by stopping coming or leaving and go to, say, Spring Lake Park Baptist and leave your membership here for three years. That's a mistake.

And that creates the ambiguity of your kind of question. Who are my elders? Well, it should be Spring Lake Park. Now, of course, there's a transition period whether you move to Colorado or where you go to California or New York or whatever.

There's a transition period where you need to look for a church and find a body of believers and then fold in and sometimes you're not sure and so it can take a year. And during that time, it's ambiguous, but I think you should feel free to write letters back or make calls back and say, I'm having trouble finding a church and I'm kind of drying up out here and would you pray for me? And we should feel some sense of responsibility. Yes, we'll pray for you.

And whatever little clusters of small group you were in, they still care about that. For example, when Noel and I left Lake Avenue Congregational Church in 1971 where we had been plugged in for three years, that's all, but we really plugged in. I taught 7th grade boys.

I taught 9th grade boys. I taught one adult Sunday school class. I had a disciple relationship with a senior pastor for about six weeks.

We plugged in with all our might during seminary into this local church. Alright, then we decided we were going to Germany for three years. Now in Germany, we never joined a church.

That church, one man in particular on the Council of Elders, wrote me almost monthly hoping that I would come back there someday and let them do whatever ordination might follow. And that resulted in my being ordained at Lake Avenue Congregational Church in 1975, four years later. So he cared for me and others that we had befriended, but when we left, they all prayed and said, and they gathered around us and said, may the Lord open up a structure for you into which you are enfolded of small groups for nurture.

And God answered those prayers in incredible ways. So that was kind of like a missionary situation, I think, temporary. But ideally, I should have joined a church in Munich for three years.

There was language problems. There was cultural problems. There were other things.

I just kind of left my membership there. So I would say, let's try to teach our people that if they change churches, they should change membership and do it as quick as they can. And if you jump from church to church because your job moves you every six months or so, join a new church every six months.

Membership does not have to be a long thing. It means I'm here and I want to be responsible for you. I want you to teach and care for me, love me while I'm here.

I'm part of this body and I'm here as long as I'm here. Another question on governance before I go to teaching? Yeah, they do. The question is on the flip side, what if somebody is running from spiritual authority, trying to get away from the church or get away from anybody in their face or in their life because of the sins in their lives or the mess of their marriage or the habits they're in or whatever? Do the elders have responsibility? And the answer is absolutely yes.

James 5. You should pursue the sinner and pluck them and save them from the flames. You leave the 99 and you go after the one. That's what the shepherd does.

And that's what we're not as good at. I would like to see, I'm just tipping my hand here, I would like to see in the year 2000 a new staff member at this church whose main job would be called something like pastoral care slash congregational care something. We lift certain things from David Livingstone.

He does everything. And we install that and they say, your job is to create structures and oversee structures of our members so that number one, we know the spiritual whereabouts of everybody who's on

this covenant membership list. That's a huge job.

But otherwise, we're just playing games with membership. I just thought of somebody last night. Noel said to me, where's so and so? Huh.

I haven't seen them for a long, long time. I would tell you who they were, but I don't want to. And now, I'm a real busy person.

Do I call all those people up? I mean, there's so many like that. We need a structure. And then we need structures for discipline those who are running and others who've just stumbled and fallen and a loving embrace would bring them back.

Or encourage them, get your membership changed for goodness sakes. It's been five years and you're going to this other church and you're functioning there. Stop this negligence.

And there will be a couple of other things. But we as elders, we are so busy and so many things on our plate, we push that to the back over and over and over again to our own discredit that we don't follow through on knowing the spiritual whereabouts of our covenant members. Here's the second function of elders.

There's the general management, governance, oversight, and it's done mainly through teaching. Not just formal teaching in classes and pulpit, but word use in counseling settings, word use in small group settings, the use of the Bible in powerful, effective, convicting, winsome ways. Ephesians 4.11 Pastors and teachers are pictured as one office so that the pastor, whom we have identified as an elder, has the responsibility of teaching.

Ephesians 4.11 He gave some as apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers. So the teaching function there seems to be folded right into the pastoring dimension. And that's to equip the saints for the work of the ministry to the upbuilding of the body of Christ.

We should constantly have a view use the word of God to equip saints to do ministry. Use the word of God to equip saints to do ministry. Be thinking of mobilization all the time.

1 Timothy 3.2 The overseer must be apt to teach or able to teach. We've seen that the overseer and elder are the same office. This qualification is not included in the list of qualifications for deacons.

1 Timothy 5.17 We've seen already those who labor in preaching and teaching the elders. And then I think I've said already, but say it again, not that all have to be able to teach. Not that all don't have to be able to teach.

They do, but some labor, that is they devote more time and energy to it, than perhaps earning their living by it. Each elder is vested with the right to teach and exercise authority in the church and so must have the qualifications for it. And then Titus 1.9 I read to show that it may not necessarily mean an upfront charismatic kind of gift in communication, but he must hold firm the sure word as taught.

So there's a firm hold. So when you're interviewing these men, you try to discern, does he have a firm hold here on the sure word as taught? Can he get his head into the head of the apostles and does he have a firm hold on it? Or does he sound like he doesn't really know what he believes? And does he sound fragile so that if a strong charismatic voice leading in another direction came along, he would just kind of go flop

and fall into line with that new teaching. Well, he's not going to make an elder if he lacks firmness.

So that he may be able to give instruction, now that may be private, like Priscilla and Aquila with Apollos in his house, took him aside, set him straight, to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it. So, along come... people walk up to me, a young man three weeks ago, he walks to the front and he says, I was converted in Korea about five years ago and I knew nothing and I went to the church that I was sent to and now I think the church was a cult. And he was referring to the church of Christ.

That branch of it that views baptism as necessary for justification and who thinks all other baptisms are defective such that the only Christians belong to their church and so on. And he's in torment and he says, I need somebody to help me because I'm not sure what I believe about this. Our elders should be able to help us.

Not all elders need to be able to do public preaching. Conclusion on this point. The function of elders may be summed up under two heads.

Teaching and governing. They are the doctrinal guardians of the flock and the overseers of the life of the church responsible to God for the feeding and care and the ministry. Question about function? Application question you want to raise here before I turn to the qualifications of elders? The question is, how do elders guard the time for study and meditation and prayer while undertaking the necessary oversight and governance of the church which will necessarily involve some pretty practical things because while everyone in this room would say why in the world are elders talking about parking until midnight? Don't you have a parking committee? Can't you have some deacons to do that? And the answer is we may have made a mistake that night.

The other answer is it takes a lot of work to put in place the kinds of structures that make sure that things like parking and finance happen or say greeting ministries on Sunday morning or building a new building which reflects the values of this church which we are on the brink of doing. That old sanctuary there is going to fall down if we don't take it down. And the way that ministry intersects with practicality forces governors to do some of that overlap.

And so I hear the problem that you're raising. And I would say we need to encourage each other and help each other to be students of the Word. We need to tell each other make sure you get up early enough or stay up late enough or carve out a time in the middle of the day when you are in the Word and meditating.

Then the elders who are lay elders and have jobs besides all this governing need to say to those of us whom they pay to do this full time you be sure that you do the hard work so you understand this issue this complex issue say of foreknowledge God's foreknowledge or baptism or something and write things for us to read. Help us because we can't read all those books. We can think, we can read our Bibles but there's a distinction of balance here.

So especially in 1 Timothy 5.17 and you're one of those especially people your elders need to say David we will help you and your deacons need to say we will help you because we want you to spend X amount of time in prayer and in study so that you can feed us in our various settings in this council, on Sunday and whatever and probably the way it's actually going to the rubber is going to meet the road is for you to be constantly in touch with those people saying I'm really frustrated because I'm getting these calls or I've got to do this and this and I haven't read a book in six months. Do you think that's healthy for us long term?

And they'll hopefully say that's not healthy long term. We've got to help you and so then you devote till midnight working out some structure that figures that out.

In my case my sort of week and job description and allocation of energies has changed every couple of years the whole time I've been here. As the church has grown there's been more staff or less staff there's been different challenges there'll come a season where there's a building season and we just say okay 1996 we're going to raise 1.1 million dollars here John you with us? You going to help us? That means back burner to the books. You've got to be in every small group about 25 of them for a season of three months here.

I say alright give myself to that for these three months but don't make me do this forever. There's seasons in your life where you make adjustments. Right now I'm in a season and my life has taken on a form that's totally different than any of yours I'm sure in the way I portion my week and the amount of time I give to this or that.

So just be flexible and grow with your church and be open and talk with those deacons and elders to make sure that for some of you in the especially category the time for prayer and study is being carved out that's different from the others. All elders don't have to spend the same amount of time in study and prayer. But some should be especially doing it.

That's very good. The comment was simply made that this qualification which is where we're going to turn to now of being able to manage your household well means that in the actual nitty gritty slogging it out if a man has a wife who needs attention two, three, four, five kids who need a father and need to be with him on the floor sometime during the day playing together plus he has a job at church plus he has a job at work he's got to figure that out. And if he can figure that out then he might be fit to help the church figure out her spiritual needs as well.

Okay. Last section with 40 minutes to go. Biblical qualifications for elders.

And here the issue of whether elders should be men or women or both is covered in the TBI seminar on biblical manhood and womanhood. I know if you're from another church that doesn't help you any because you're not free to be here probably on Wednesday nights. But if you are free the next two Wednesday nights is when I'm going to be tackling this.

This coming Wednesday night we'll be winding up the marriage dimension and then we'll be taking the function of whether women should be elders and why or why not. So I'm not going to deal with that here. I'm just going to assume that there are men the elders are men and ask what kind of men they should be.

Qualifications of elders according to 1 Timothy 3 1 to 7. The saying is sure if anyone aspires to the office of bishop or elder he desires a normal task. So, aspiration becomes significant. I just put the little Greek words over here for any of you who wants to look at those.

At least one way for a man to attain the role of elder is to aspire to it. In fact, since it is the duty of elders to do their work with gladness and not under constraint or for the love of money 1 Peter 5, 1 to 3 this should be thought of as one of the elders qualifications. Nobody should be an elder who doesn't want to be an elder.

Because 1 Peter 5 says let him do his job eagerly. And if you can't do it eagerly you should take a break. Now, that may be an overstatement because everybody has seasons of discouragement and I wouldn't

want to resign every time I went into one of them.

But if that becomes chronic I probably need to step back. Ask for a sabbatical or leave of absence or something. Slogging it out every day.

I hate everything I do. I'm just tired of this thing. If I get to that point I need to be honest with my elders and say you better give me a break or send me packing because I'm... But don't do that if you go into that kind of darkness for a week.

Give yourself some room. So, aspiration I think is important. No pressure should be used that would result in an unwilling half-hearted service.

Chapter 3, verse 2. 1 Timothy. Therefore, it is necessary for the bishop to be irreproachable. So, irreproachability.

Let me just explain to you what you're looking at here. You're looking at... I adapted a little bit in preparation for this class but not much. This comes from a document that we produced before we chose our first elders in 1991 and 92.

And we made an effort as a council of deacons on their way to becoming elders as to what each of these words meant so that we would know there's 15 of them in this and 17 of them, some overlap in Titus. And we want to know well, we can't just use words. We've got to get at meaning here.

What's going on? So that when we interview guys we can ask them about meaning and application in their lives. So, that's what you're looking at here is our effort to do that. We'll try to make that document available eventually.

It needs to be cleaned up a little bit but we will make it available. Elsewhere in the New Testament the word is used, this anapilimton, used only in 5.7 where widows are to be without reproach by putting their hope in God and not living luxuriously or sumptuously or self-indulgently. And chapter 6.14 where Timothy is to keep the commandment irreproachable until Jesus comes.

The word seems to be a general word for living in a way that gives no cause for others to think badly of the church or the faith or the Lord. This tells us nothing about the sort of thing that would bring reproach on the church or the Lord but coming at the head of the list this is interesting, this is first after aspiration coming at the head of the list it puts a tremendous emphasis on what a person's a person's reputation is. The focus here seems to be not a person's relationship to the Lord but how others see him.

It seems therefore right from the outset that the public nature of the office is in view with its peculiar demands. So I'm arguing there that a person who is persistently behaving in ways that bring reproach from outside upon the gospel or the church or Christ you need to look long and hard as to whether he's fit to be an elder. Now you've got to be careful here, don't you? Because Jesus had enemies.

And who doesn't have enemies if he's being a righteous person? Paul said if you desire to live a godly life you will be persecuted. Well, I'll tell you, when people persecute Christians they say nasty things. They reproach them.

So being above reproach can't mean never having an unbelieving person speak an evil word against you. When Paul says, if you want to be godly they're going to speak against you. So you've got to be discerning

as a counsel here as to whether the stumbling blocks that this guy is putting in the way of other people are unwarranted stumbling blocks.

Is he bringing reproach that if he didn't say it that way, if he didn't do that they wouldn't respond that way. Each one of these things is going to be tough. And there's going to be a way you can misapply it and a way you can apply it correctly.

These lists are by no means exhaustive and they are not in themselves without ambiguity. I'll say at the end and we may not get to the end I'm sure we won't get to the end as I look at the clock. But let me just say now these are not exhaustive lists.

You know what's missing entirely from both the lists of Titus and Timothy? There's not a word about prayer. Isn't that amazing? Nothing about don't steal, don't kill, don't lie. Although there'd be implications.

These are not exhaustive lists. So, above reproach, don't cause unnecessary criticisms from outside to arise to Christ. This is the controversial one.

We could spend all the rest of our time on this. It probably wouldn't be wise to do it. We've touched on it.

One woman's husband husband of one woman one woman's husband mias, gunaikas the word mias, one woman, man one woman, man and the one is foremost. The word order emphasizes the word one. So it's not likely that Paul meant to say that the elders have to be married.

But if they're married, they should be married to one woman. There are words for married that he could have used. He could have said they need to be married.

The word order would probably have put husband in the prominent place if that were his intention. Moreover, Paul was not married and he thought singleness was an excellent way to be freer for ministry. 1 Corinthians 7.32 That would be odd if his counsel in 1 Corinthians 7.32 that he wished all people be single like he was meant and none of you can be elders if you're totally devoted to the Lord.

It would be strange. So I can't bring myself to think that's what he meant. In verse 4, Paul gets to the issue of how well a man manages his household.

So the point here is probably not the man's competence as a husband. That's dealt with later. The point probably coming right after irreproachable is one of notoriety.

What is this man's reputation with regard to whether he has had one wife or not? It appears that the public standard will be high. Does the standard mean... Here are the three options that I'll lay out for you. That the elder, one, may not be a polygamist.

Two, may not remarry after the death of his first spouse. Three, may not be remarried after divorce. Which is the meaning of the elder must be the husband of one man? Now this is very controversial.

I've talked to some of you already and I know how painful this can be. I'm sure there are divorced people in this room and you're wondering if you're going to wear the big D letter on your shirt for the rest of your life and be a second class citizen. Those would be the feelings that begin to crop up inside a person who's divorced and remarried.

So let's walk our way through this. I'll give you my reasons for arguing for this third position which is what I think it means. The main argument against number one, namely polygamists, is the use of the parallel phrase one woman, man, in 1 Timothy 5.9 in reference to widows whom the church was to enroll in a welfare service order.

She must be one man's wife. One man's wife. Just exactly the same words reversed to apply to a woman.

There it was one woman, man and here it's one man, woman applied to the widows. Since polyandry, that is a woman having several husbands at once, was simply not a practice. This very probably means that the woman had not divorced and remarried.

Not that she wasn't a polyandrist. So since the phrase in relation to women cannot refer to polyandry, it likely does not refer to polygamy for the men. That's my main argument against polygamy being addressed there.

Now by implication, I think polygamy is wrong. I think it's wrong from Jesus' teaching that every man should have his own wife and from Genesis 2.24 and elsewhere. It's something to be moved beyond.

I just don't think that's what Paul is addressing here because the phrase doesn't refer to that in relation to women. But now, I have not defended this position yet that I think it means she should not have been remarried after divorce while her husband was still living. Why do I think that? Where do I get that? The phrase in 5.9 surely did not mean that the widow was excluded from the order if she had remarried when her first husband died.

Why? Why? For in 5.14 the younger widows so now you have say a woman 25 and her husband is killed at war or something like that. The younger widows were encouraged to remarry. Paul said, I want you to remarry.

He didn't like what became of these younger women when they were gadding about from house to house leaning on so many different people they got into trouble. So he encouraged them to remarry and it is unlikely that having said this Paul would then later exclude them from the widow's order because they had followed his advice. See what I'm getting at? So he says to young women who lose their husbands Remarry.

This is good for you. I want you to remarry. Don't stay single if you can.

And then here they are 65 they lose their husband they don't have any support no federal government can take care of them it's going to be the church or nobody and so they have this system of widows enrolling and Paul says, sorry you had a second husband you're excluded. And she said, well you told me to have a second husband. I don't think one woman one man woman means either polyandry or remarrying after the death of the husband.

Well what's it left to refer to then? And my answer is divorce and remarriage. And if that's what it means for the woman I'm inclined to think that's what it means for the same phrase. That's my basic argument.

Yeah. It is. Yeah, good point.

Good point. If you're going to talk about what? I don't know what the Greek phrase for polygamy is but he certainly could have said not have two wives at once or something. But the answer let me pose the

question again for the tape here.

There is a word for divorce Jesus uses it to forsake or to separate from and why didn't he use that here if he meant to teach clearly that a divorced and remarried person is meant. Why this phrase one woman man? And I hear the force of that argument because I used it just a minute ago. The phrase probably, I mean here I'm just thinking out loud probably is as broad as it is.

One woman man or the husband of one woman to cover a broad range. In other words it's general enough to say there are different ways you can become a two woman man. You can become a two woman man to polygamy.

You can become a two woman man to inappropriate remarriages. And I use inappropriate because there are some remarriages that are not like after death. And you can become a two woman man by having secret affairs on the side.

And not have a divorce. And so he's saying there's a fundamental issue here of the kind of man that should be there with regard to how he relates to a woman. And the answer is he better relate to a woman biblically and one woman.

Now here there are different ways that very godly and very careful scholars come down. For example we referred to Believers Chapel in Dallas when S. Louis Johnson's wife died. S. Louis Johnson main teaching elder in that church for years.

When his wife died he resigned. Because he was no longer the husband of one wife. That's a very literal interpretation.

Very narrow. So I love S. Louis Johnson teacher, great scholar, great thinker. But I say wow Dr. Johnson, really? You want to give it that meaning? That's really tight.

Right. I don't know what else to... I don't know what else it might mean. No? No, it's not that you won't help them.

There's an order here. You're putting your finger on it. Really? I've asked myself this question.

Right, and I'm with you. I want to know what he means too. The question he's asking is am I saying that a woman who divorces her husband say at age 35 repents inappropriately, whatever that may be.

She just leaves him. Doesn't like him anymore. Has a boyfriend.

There's a divorce. Repents. 15 years later meets a godly man.

She marries him. Turns 65. Her husband dies.

And she applies for this order. This order. There's some kind of group going on here.

Because there's qualifications you're supposed to meet to belong to it. And Paul says she shouldn't belong to it. That doesn't mean she can't be fed.

She can't be housed. She can't be clothed and cared for. But there seems to be some kind of order here like a nunnery.

What do you call that? Convent. Like that. And you say you mean then that something in her past way back when will keep her out of this convent or out of this order of women.

And Paul said, yes, I think so. Which is why I would on the flip side apply the same thing to a past issue in an elder's life. Many people will say oh, that's a long time ago.

The man, it isn't what happened. Isn't it what he's like today that counts for the eldership? I say, well, yes mainly. But when it comes to the issue of what his marriage track record is there's something about, and here I'm giving you my bottom line thinking on this.

And I admit to varying interpretations here and we as a council have had varying interpretations on this. But the bottom line seems to be, if you ask why Paul, would you exclude a godly man who's put behind him an illegitimate divorce and remarriage 40 years ago experience a dramatic transformation has proved himself for 30 years as a God-fearing praying upright holy man why would you exclude him from the council for goodness sakes? And I think the answer would be because the marriage issue is the one thing that is when it comes to the public overall representation to the world and the church abides. You want elders who embody in their marriage track record the ideal as much as possible.

And if that's not his reason then I don't have one. There and then back there. Okay.

Very good question. Let me repeat it. Pastor Joe is abandoned by his wife Sally in an affair.

She leaves. She takes all the legal initiatives she can. She divorces.

She remarries. Is Joe disqualified from the pastorate? I think I would say not necessarily if he doesn't remarry. I put it carefully like that because you've got these other issues of irreproachability and ideal and some of these others manage your household well so whatever church is going to call him or keep him must be profoundly satisfied through rigorous efforts that he didn't fall short of those and help bring about this demise of the marriage.

That it wasn't because of a failure to manage his household well. It is a scary and sad thing is it not that a woman who forsakes the faith can hold a man hostage and ruin his ministry like that and hold that over him. Noel could do that to me.

I tremble at that thought that she could go crazy in her head, forsake the faith and say to me, give me all the kids or whatever and etc. and I'm bringing you down. She could do that.

That's very helpful. So the point being made here is that if something in a marriage not owing necessarily to your own defect makes it inappropriate for you to remain as pastor or elder, that may not be thought of mainly in terms of ruining a ministry but opening another ministry. Am I saying it right? And that new calling while it might be incredibly painful to leave the one, you leave it for reasons that simply honor the text.

You know, when you read the Old Testament for example and they say certain kinds of defects in body kept you from being a priest. You say, wow, that seems unfair that the man who's had an infection or something is wrong with his body or something and he can't serve as a priest. You say, our American idea of fairness is oh no, it's his heart that counts.

And yet there might be these wider issues at stake that are not a comment on his own heart but rather are a way of preserving something at the corporate public level that is healthy for the church to preserve. One more comment on this. Whoever had their hand up first.

That's exactly the kind of question we have to answer. Does a past, suppose you were worse than drug culture 20 years ago. You killed.

You were in prison. You stole. Yeah, Paul, murders and threats.

Does that hang on the same way I'm suggesting that your marriage state hangs on? And I don't think so because we'd all be excluded I think if that were the case. Anybody who grew up in an unbelieving atmosphere and did any kind of sin would be excluded. I don't think all those but your present marriage situation is according to Jesus defined in its appropriateness by what's happened in the past as well.

So you take Luke 16, 18 and Mark 10 and Matthew 5 and 19. Whether or not your marriage now is adultery or not, he says has to do with how this thing came to an end or whether you left a woman or not. So there's the difference I think that the present marriage is a reflection of something either good or bad presently right now that is owing to a marital situation in the past.

The question is what about Jeremiah if his wife, I don't remember the details here, abandons him. He continues to be a Hosea. You said Jeremiah is a Hosea.

I'm forgetting here. Well, yeah, they were told to walk naked for three years too. There's some strange things going on here in these prophetic texts.

Go get yourself a prostitute for a wife. I think the Lord makes exceptions to make some really wild statements at times. I wouldn't want to build on those prophetic symbolic activities, any normative church activity.

Now, we've got ten minutes to go here and we really could spend the rest of it on this issue of divorce and remarriage. We have a statement on this, a statement on divorce and remarriage, and I have a paper about divorce and remarriage. Our council does not have one mind about what divorces and remarriage are appropriate and inappropriate.

We never have been able to come to a consensus on that. We haven't worked on it for years, but back when we spent four years working on it, we didn't. So we drew up a paper that was the closest thing we could get that we agreed on.

And we produced that. We make that the guidelines for discipline in the church. Not my more narrow view, but what we could come to a consensus on is now what functions as how we govern.

And then we decided that at the level of leadership, we would draw a fairly narrow circle so that an elder should not be divorced and remarried here. Others of you, let's just face it, that phrase, husband of one wife, is not crystal clear. I'm not going to go on a war path against any of your churches that interpret that in a way that is less narrow than we do.

It's just you make an effort, you do the best you can contextually. You try to bring in Jesus' teachings about what you thought He meant about the kinds of divorces and remarriages that were appropriate or inappropriate. You talk about, I think, the cultural milieu.

It affects me and the risks I'm willing to take these days and who I will marry and not marry. I think just somebody in our wild-eyed litigious divorce culture needs to stand up and take a strong view about the preciousness and the sanctity of marriage even if not many people agree. Those kinds of things figure in, so maybe we've said enough that you can see the difficulty of it.

You see where we are and you hear me say you're going to have to... It really will not matter in the end if every pastor in this room comes to a strong conviction and you can't get anybody to follow you. You're going to have to go back to the drawing boards anyway because if you're going to lead a people you're going to have somebody following you. It won't do any good to have a view and nobody in your church will submit to the view.

You're either going to have to leave the church or you're going to have to live with some compromises. And you've got to decide what are the issues in which we're going to compromise and the issues in which we're not going to compromise. And this is one I am going to compromise on.

Just because at the level of leadership a phrase like one woman man is not lucid enough for me to be sure that the narrow circle we drew around it is the only legitimate one to draw. You just have to draw one and agree on it as a church and get the biggest consensus you can get. And if that feels too big for your conscience you'll have to leave.

So, that's enough maybe on that. Take ten more minutes on a few of these others. He needs to be temperate it says.

What's that mean? The word is used two other times in the New Testament in 3.11 of the women, deacons and in Titus 2.2 about older men. It's odd that it is used here even though in verse 3 the elders must not be addicted to wine. Ne paroinon.

Not addicted to much wine. Perhaps here the point is more general, namely that his temperance extends over other things besides wine. Or perhaps the repetition comes because in verse 3 following there begins a list of things which the elder is not supposed to be and Paul felt obliged to include the problem of wine in the negative list as well as the positive list.

At any rate, I think temperate is broader here than just wine. This needs to be a person who is not given to excesses in things that would be harmful to him. Coffee sugar overeating etc.

The standard is one of self-control, mastery of his appetites wine would surely not be the only drink or food that a person can misuse. Next qualification is called sensible. Sophrona in Greek.

Sensible, prudent, reasonable. The word is used in those places it is related to sophroneo which means to be of sound mind, like the demoniac after he was healed in Mark 5.15. The basic idea seems to be having good judgment which implies seeing things as they really are. Knowing yourself well and understanding people and how they respond.

We might say being in touch with your feelings as they say or used to say or being in touch with reality so that there are no great gaps between what you see in yourself and what others do. This is a this idea of self-knowledge and the knowledge of others with a sober wise, prudent reasonable assessment of circumstances and persons. This is something you can't begin to quantify.

This is why you have to have remarkably mature people in the interview process to try to discern this or as you watch men in the church over the years do they rise to the surface as men who, when they stand up at a business meeting, when they say something you say, that was insightful that was helpful, that was balanced that reflected insight into human nature and the dynamics of this moment. He didn't stick his foot in his mouth over and over again. He pulled people's feet out of their mouths and they didn't even mind it.

What a gift. He should be a leader here. We have people that are really good at that.

Dignified. Cosmos. Respectable or honorable.

The idea seems to be one of not offending against propriety. A person who comports himself in situations so as not to step on toes unnecessarily. In other words, there's probably no absolute about dress in the world, for example.

Or absolute about demeanor in certain situations. But every culture has certain expectations and you can fall off the end on either side of these expectations. And a respectable or honorable person, a cosmos person, will take thought for what is beautiful and what is appropriate.

And he'll try to discern a situation and he won't go blundering into the situation and bring reproach again upon the gospel or himself by dressing in some absolutely ludicrous way or speaking in some language that offends everybody or ignoring norms and customs and mores. But respectable. Hospitable.

One who loves a philoxenon, love of strangers, the literal translation. One who loves strangers, that is, who is given to being kind to newcomers and makes them feel at home. A person whose home is open for ministry and who does not shrink back from having guests.

Not a secretive person. In other words, an elder should be a more capacious type. And we're not all the same here on the Elder Council.

Everybody is not the same personality, but there should be some sense of on Sunday morning, they're not running away from people mainly. They're running toward people. And it helps to have a wife of a certain kind here, but that too is another one of those ambiguous, difficult things.

What if the man is hospitable and the poor woman is so self-conscious and so nervous she thinks she's going to be judged by every speck of dust that's there? We need to breed real freedom to serve soup and paper plates on Sunday dinner to guests. My wife made a great hit in the first year we were here when President Lundquist came from the Bethel College and Seminary and spoke for us, and we invited him over and she served him on paper plates with soup and salad because she's not about to cook on Sunday. And it ain't for any religious reason either.

And we just said, you're just one of us today. And it gives you a great freedom to have lots of people over because soup is easy, right? The bowl can be huge and the paper or styrofoam bowls are cheap. So invite over every other person you see until your table is full.

Needs to be an apt teacher. Goodness, we've said enough about that, I think. We invite you to visit Desiring God online at [www.DesiringGod.org](http://www.DesiringGod.org) There you'll find hundreds of sermons, articles, radio broadcasts and much more, all available to you at no charge.

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