Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Call to Lead the Church--Elders, Part 1
Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:1
Code: 54-18

Let's open our Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 3...1 Timothy chapter 3. You will recognize if you've been a student of the Word of God that this is a very very important chapter. It is a chapter that gives the qualifications for church leadership. Those people who serve in the church, in leading the church, in ministering in the church are to be qualified to do so. The qualifications are given here very explicitly. In fact, it is so important that the church understand the qualifications of its leaders that these qualifications are also repeated in the first chapter of Titus. Twice then in the pastoral epistles, once to Timothy and once to Titus, Paul listed the qualifications of church leaders.

It goes without saying that whoever leads in the church will determine what that church becomes in large measure. The life of the church, the ministry of the church, the testimony of the church, the impact of the church, the reputation of the church, the character of the church, the emphasis of the church, all of that is dependent on the leadership of the church. And you can look at a church and you can determine by the nature of its ministry the kind of leadership it has. Church leadership is an essential element of New Testament teaching. Hosea said, "Like people like priests." In other words, people are like those who lead them. That's a proverbial way of expressing the close link between the moral character of the pastor or pastors and the moral character of a person or people. There is an inseparable connection between the quality of the leadership in a church and the character of that church.

Jesus put it this way in Luke's gospel, "When a man is fully discipled, he will be like his teacher." It is inevitable. You become like the one who teaches you. Paul on the church in Corinth and said this, "Be ye followers of me as I am of Christ." He knew that people needed a flesh and blood model to pattern their lives after and he was willing by God's grace working in his life to be that model. To the Philippians he said, "The things that you have seen and heard in me, do them." To the Ephesian elders at Miletus in Acts 20 he said, "You know how I behaved myself among you," and implied, that's how I want you to behave in the church.

The writer of Hebrews calls upon the congregation of the church to establish their life style after the pattern of those who are over them in the Lord. And he says you are to follow their faith and you're to submit to them as your spiritual leaders. The place then of the leader in the church is critical to the life and testimony of that church. Now God has always mediated His purpose and His holy will through leaders throughout all of the history of redemption. You go back to Abraham whom God called out of Ur to be the leader of his nation and Moses whom God called out of the wilderness to lead His people

out of Egypt. And Joshua, to whom the Lord spoke verbally out of heaven and called him to be the leader of his people to bring them into the land of Canaan.

And then there was David whom God called through the instrumentation of Samuel to be king over His people Israel. And then there's Elijah and Elisha, prophets called by God to speak on behalf of Him. And then there was Isaiah whom God called out of brokenness and confession and a contrite heart to speak and to bring about the salvation of a holy seed within an apostate nation. Then there was Jeremiah whom God had called before he was even born to be a prophet. Then there was Ezekiel who was born a priest but God called him out of the priesthood into the prophetic role to speak to a rebellious and sinful people of judgment and doom and of God's law.

And then in the New Testament there was John the Baptist whom God called and anointed from long before he was born in order that he might be sent out as the forerunner to the Messiah. And then there were the Apostles called specifically by Jesus Christ and given directly the task of preaching the gospel of the Kingdom. And of course there was Paul himself. Paul called by Christ on the road to Damascus, blinded, taken out of the darkness of religion into the light of the gospel and made an Apostle to the Gentiles on behalf of Jesus Christ.

And these are only representative of many more through all of redemptive history whom God has called to leadership in the advancement of His Kingdom. And there has always been a premium placed on the quality of that leadership. The church as representative and emblematic and an extension of the Kingdom of God in the world today must have quality leadership. And the blight on the church and the reason for so many of the problems in Chrysostom around the world is that we do not have in all cases the kind of leadership that the Word of God demands the church to have.

And so, as we look at 1 Timothy 3, we're going to see the qualifications that God has designed for church leadership. This is an essential passage. Now I want you to understand the situation. Paul is writing to Timothy. Timothy has been left in the city of Ephesus. Many years have passed since the Ephesian church was started by Paul, since he pastored there for three years and raised up a godly group of men, men who understood the faith of Christ, men who understood good doctrine, men who were so intimately linked with Paul that when he tried to leave them they fell all over his neck, wept and kissed him and didn't want him to go, men who bought into Paul's life and doctrine wholeheartedly and represented that in that church. That was a great church. It was a church God used to found all the other churches of Asia Minor.

But in the time that Paul had left and until the time he had returned after his first imprisonment in Rome, the church had been on a slide downward. And the real tragedy of it was that that drift was being led by false leaders. Paul had anticipated that. In Acts 20 he said to the Ephesian elders, he said, "I know that when I leave perverse men will come in, evil men will rise up on the inside and both from the inside and the outside will come false leaders to lead this church astray." He knew the

enemy Satan. He knew the plan and the plot to work against the Kingdom of God and he knew the inevitability of such an attack. And his prophecy was fulfilled.

By the time he gets our of prison and goes to Ephesus to meet Timothy there, he discovers that the church is filled with false pastors and false overseers and false elders and those who teach lies and heresies. And so leaving Timothy there to set things in order, he goes on to Macedonia. But isn't gone long before he pens this letter, writes back to Timothy and says, "Now I want you to get this settled in that church. There are issues that have to be dealt with." And a major issue that sits right in the middle of this epistle is the matter of confronting the church about the qualifications for church leaders. The passage then is an essential one for us in understanding this important issue. And as I said earlier, if there are those of you visiting us from other churches or if there are those of you who are looking to the ministry or asking questions even about why the church isn't what it ought to be, it comes back to the fact that the church has been far too lenient on its qualifications for those who are allowed at the level of leadership and therefore the church is captive to a lowlevel of spiritual leadership. The standard must be raised not any higher but to the level that the Word of God requires.

Now I need to interject at this point that one of the distinctions of ministry at Grace Community Church has been the emphasis on godly leadership. And there are some things that are perhaps wrong about our church, some things we don't do well, some things that we haven't really come to full maturity on, but we thank God that leadership is what is right about Grace Community Church. God has blessed us with a plurality of godly leaders in this church. And the church life and the church ministry and the extent of its impact is a direct reflection of the godly character of those leaders. I believe our fellowship has been unusually blessed by God because of the leadership that God has given to us and that, of course, by His grace and no credit to us at all. It is a sovereign work of God. He has brought those people to this place and we rejoice in that. Leadership then is an essential ingredient.

Now remember that I told you in 1 Timothy there is sort of a polemic atmosphere and attitude. What I mean by that is there are problems that Timothy is dealing with and Paul writes to the problem. He takes on the issue. He is attacking, in a sense, a very real problem. And when he writes in chapter 3 about what an elder ought to be or what a pastor ought to be or what an overseer ought to be, he is setting that against what the church in Ephesus has allowed to happen so that the qualifications of leadership here could be assumed to be in direct antagonism to what is happening in that church. For example, in verse 2 he says that an overseer must be blameless. That was very likely not the case in that church. He must be a onewoman man...that is very likely not the case. He must be temperate, sober minded, good behavior, given to hospitality, goes on to talk about drinking and not greedy after money and so forth. The implication of all of those things is that this is what they ought to be and this is exactly what they're not. We know from this epistle that the leadership of this church was tragically departed from the Word of God.

Go back to chapter 1 verse 3 for just a brief review of that. He says to them, I want you to stay in Ephesus...he says to Timothy rather, I want you to stay in Ephesus in order to charge some that they teach no other doctrine. Now some had risen to the level of pastor or teacher and were teaching other than the true doctrine. They're not to give heed to fables, endless genealogies, things that minister questions rather than godly edification which is in faith. He talks about some in verse 6 turning aside to vain jangling. He talks about some leaders who wanted to be teachers but had no idea what they were saying or the things they were affirming. They didn't know how to use the law of God, verse 11, they didn't understand the gospel of God and he goes on to talk about that. Chapter 2 verse 12 indicates to me that some women had usurped the role of leadership and he has to say I do not allow women to teach or usurp authority over the man.

Furthermore in chapter 2...pardon me, chapter 4 verse 1, 2 and 3, he talks about those who come in with seducing spirits, doctrines of demons, speaking lies. And some of their lies are in verse 3 regarding marriage and abstaining from foods and so forth. And in verse 6 he says you stick with the good doctrine, the things of the faith. Verse 7, don't listen to their profane, old wives' fables. You stay with godliness. And then down in verse 16 again, stick with the true doctrine, continue in that true doctrine.

And then over in chapter 5 and verse 19 he says if an elder sins, don't receive an accusation except before two or three witnesses but if it's confirmed then rebuke them before everybody. In other words, some of these elders who were in the sin of heterodox teaching or not the truth, some of them who are in to ungodliness and evil needed public rebuke. In verse 22 he says don't put your hands suddenly on anybody, be cautious who you put in leadership. Obviously this church was having some great struggle with their leaders.

Chapter 6 verse 3, "If anybody teaches other than true doctrine and wholesome words, that person," verse 4, "is proud, he doesn't know what he's talking about. He's doting over questions and disputes of words and leading only to envy, strife, railing, evil suspicion, perverse disputing," so forth and so on. Some of them were in it for the money and on and on. The end of verse 21, some have erred concerning the faith.

Now the feeling that you get when you just run by those verses is that there were people in leadership who were teaching lies, false doctrine, false religious systems and living ungodly lives. It is then essential that Paul give Timothy the fuel that he needs, or the ammunition that he needs to attack this issue of leadership. Now in chapter 2 he has dealt with the people, men and women, and their role in the church. In chapter 3, he deals with the leaders, the elders or overseers, pastors, all the same thing, and the deacons who serve under them.

Now I want to remind you that as we begin the third chapter, Paul does not tell Timothy to appoint elders. He does not tell him to ordain elders. Why? They already had them. They had them clear back in Acts 20. They were already in place. He tells Titus to do that in Titus 1:5 because Titus was in an area where they had not yet had that. But here all he wants them to do is to come to grips with the divine qualifications. The church needs to set a high standard. I am amazed, I'm literally amazed at churches all across the country that don't ever really come to grips with this and then they wonder why their church is not what they would like it to be.

I remember one pastor said to me, "I think I've discovered my problem, half of my board is saved and the other half is not." That is a problem. No one would debate that. Unregenerate eldership.

It is essential in the life of the church that it be led by a plurality of godly leaders. And he's going to give all of the qualifications of that godliness from verse 2 through 7 in reference to the leader. Now let me say to you that these are exclusively character qualifications. They do not talk about duties. They do not talk about function. They do not talk about performance. They talk only about character, virtue, morality, godliness, spirituality. The issue is virtue and spiritual character reflecting godliness. These are the standards for leadership. And if a leader does not live up to the standard in his leadership, he is subject, as chapter 5 says, to discipline in front of the whole church. It is a very sacred trust.

So, Paul then moves easily from discussing the people in the congregation to discussing the leaders in chapter 3. Now for this morning I want us just to look at verse 1. We'll save the qualifications for next time and we'll start to dig into them. But for this morning, I want to talk specifically about the call to church leadership, the callif you willto the pastorate, the call to be an elder, the call to be an overseer in the church...whether or not you are the primary spokesman, such as a person like myself, or whether you serve and lead and teach and preach in a church in another way as an elder who has another function or another role over a group over here, a group over there, or young people, or missions or whatever it might be. The whole thing is encompassed in this idea of church leadership. All who pastor in any way are involved in these qualifications.

And the question that always comes to me from young men is how do I know if I'm called? I mean, it's easy in the Old Testament, God spoke out of heaven and you were called. God sent angels and delivered a message. But how do we know? I had a man ask me that just recently on my trip to the south...how do I know if I'm called to the ministry? How do I find that out? The only objective treatment we have in the New Testament of that comes out of verse 1 of this passage, it's really the only objective treatment. And the statement that you need to know there is if a man desire...that's the key. You need to understand that all we know about in the New Testament in relation to call springs from desire. It's a question of...what are you compelled to do? I believe that where the call in the Old Testament might have been verbally from God out of heaven, the call in the New Testament might have been directly from Jesus Christ, the call in this age is the work of the Spirit of God. God the

Father called in the Old Testament, God the Son called in the New Testament, God the Holy Spirit is calling today. And the call of the Spirit of God today comes through the compulsion of the heart...the strong desire. And if you desire that, that's a good thing to desire.

So, I trust that as we look at verse 1 we'll get a better feeling for the essence of the call to the ministry which is really a very strong desire. And to help you understand whether your desire is strong enough or not, we'll look at six facets of this call to leadership that are delineated in verse 1. It's hard to imagine six points in verse 1, but they're there...six of them.

Number one, we must understand in this matter of the call and the desire to minister that it is an important calling, it is an essential calling. And that is indicated to us by a formula that is given at the beginning of the verse. Notice the phrase, "This is a true saying...or, this is a faithful saying." That little formula introduces something that is of great importance, of great importance. It is attached to something of monumental importance. Paul uses that phrase five times. He uses it in 1 Timothy 1:15, he uses it here in 3:1, he uses it again in chapter 4 verse 9, he uses it in 2 Timothy 2:11 and he uses it in Titus 3:8. Five times it is used.

Several of those five times it also says this is a true saying, or this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance. Sometimes that is added. But the main idea is this is a true saying. Now what that means is it is a trustworthy statement, or to put it simply, this is the truth and everybody knows it. This is axiomatic. This doesn't need proof. This is obvious. This is patently clear to everyone. Here is a believable fact. Here is a trustworthy statement.

Now that is only a formula used in the pastoral epistles which means that it didn't come into use until late in the ministry of Paul. It didn't come into use until after the churches were already established and on their way to development. It is very apparent from any study of all five of those that it is a statement that became common in the early church as a way to introduce a very important fact. It's almost an indicator of a creed. For example, go back to 1:15, "This is a faithful saying, true saying, worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." That's a creedal statement. That affirms what the church believes about the work of Christ. This is a true saying, Christ came into the world...the church had probably developed a whole lot of those and Christians would say very often in their proclamation, in their witnessing, in their talking with one another, this is a true saying...and then they would say that saying. All five of the sayings in Timothy, Titus and...1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus, refer to some major doctrinal area about Christ, about the gospel, about holiness. This one is a little different. It is the same formula but it refers to simply a pragmatic issue of being called into the ministry of overseeing in the church, or pastoring. And yet what we learn from that is that if Paul uses this saying and if the church used this saying in connection with this, then they felt it to be of great significance because that formula was reserved for things of great significance.

So, it tells me then that this to them was a very important matter. This is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. We say right, that is a true saying, that is an important essential thing. Well right after that, "This, too, is a faithful saying...if a man desires the office of an overseer, he desires a good work." You put those on the same level? The work of Christ and the work of leading the church? Well by virtue of that formula we can understand how lofty and how honorable this calling was. It is a true saying, in chapter 1:15, about the work of Christ, and it is a true saying about the work of those called to lead in Christ's church. Unquestionably then, this gives to us a sense that the early church put a high value on a call to church leadership. It is a very sacred trust.

It was essential in the life of the church. And let's face it, whereas today there may be a lot of people interested in getting into the ministry and a lot of reasons why. Some for money, some for job security, some because they think they'll like hanging around the church and it's nice to be with Christians. And some because they think somebody would think highly of them if they did that. I mean, who knows what all there are...reasons there are that cause men to do that. But in that particular day and time when the early church developed this saying, you can be sure that people didn't go rushing into the ministry for the wrong reasons because there was high risk connected with that. The church was persecuted. There was not a lot of prominence and prestige in the community for someone in that position. Great danger, great risk, problems, difficulty, hard work, great toil, low compensation, no security, very little future, no guarantees about anything, so the church wanting to exalt that role and encourage the hearts of young people, no doubt developed this saying that it is a worthy thing to desire that, to impel those who were called to think seriously about that as a life career.

And so, we see then that it's important..it's important if you study the New Testament, you can see that because everywhere you go from Acts 14 on you see how important elders are. In Acts 14:23 Paul went out and ordained elders in every city..church leaders, elder, pastor, overseer, bishop, all the same thing. It refers to the same exact ministry. The elder simply refers to his spiritual maturity, he is older in the spiritual dimension. Bishop or overseer refers to his leadership responsibility. Shepherd or pastor, same word, refers to his feeding responsibility. He is a mature spiritual person who leads and feeds the church. And so whether you call him elder, bishop, pastor, overseer, it's all the same...presbyter...all those are simply alliterations of the Greek word or translations into English. And we'll say more about that in a moment.

But it's all the same leadership, but that is high level...a high level thing in the church. In Acts 15 verse 2, verse 4, verse 6, verse 22, verse 23, all mention the role of the elders or the church leaders in the Council at Jerusalem. Chapter 20 we meet the elders again. Philippians 1:1, Paul addresses the Philippians letter to the deacons and the bishops or pastors of the church in Philippi. First Thessalonians talks about the elders. Chapter 5 verses 12 and 13 who rule in the church, who are over the folks there. Hebrews 13, those who are over them in the Lord, who have the responsibility to lead and guide. First Peter 5 talks about those who have been given the responsibility as leaders over

the church and shepherds of the flock. And here in 1 Timothy 3 and then again in Titus chapter 1. So from Acts 14 on through the New Testament you begin to see the rising profile of these men called to lead the church...and it's so essential, beloved, that they be biblically qualified, that they meet the divine standard. And sometimes you'll see a church that is unsuccessful, you'll see a church that's failing, you'll see a church that's coming apart at the seams, and the issue is not poor programs, the issue is not uncommitted people, the issue is substandard leadership. They're not qualified biblically, that is on the spiritual plain that God would desire for the leadership of His church. That's where the first examination needs to take place. That's why when I speak at pastors' conferences I invariably begin by talking about the level of leadership in the church which is such an important issue.

I'm thinking of 1 Samuel 13:14 where the Scripture says the Lord sought out for Himself a man after His own heart. That's really what we're after, men after God's own heart. And in Ezekiel 22 God says, "I searched for a man who should stand in the gap before Me for the land." I'm looking for men who can take My place, who have hearts like My heart. You see, boards and pulpit committees and ordination councils do not make men for church leadership. All they can do is say whether they should do it or not, they can't make that man. Schools and Bible colleges and seminaries don't make men fit for the ministry, they don't call men into the ministry. They can merely give tools to those who are called and often to those who aren't called as well. God wants a certain kind of person that only He can produce.

George Little wrote, "Give me a man of God, one man whose faith is master of his mind and I will write all wrongs and bless the name of all mankind. Give me a man of God, one man whose tongue is touched with heaven's fire and I will flame the darkest hearts with high resolve and clean desire. Give me a man of God, one man, one mighty prophet of the Lord and I will give you peace on earth bought with a prayer and not with a sword. Give me a man of God, one man true to the vision that he sees and I will build your broken shrines and bring the nations to their knees." That's it, it's the kind of man that God wants.

The call to the ministry is the call of a compulsion, a Spiritgenerated compulsion to ministry that cannot be diminished. In fact it can hardly even be analyzed. It is not a question of choosing the best of options. It is not a question of analyzing all of my talents on a personality profile and saying there's the call of God. It is a question of a compulsion to be the man of God. The church must have that kind of leadership.

As Oswald Sanders says, "Those who are willing to endure and suffer for the sake of objectives great enough to demand their wholehearted obedience." Samuel Logan Bringle who was one of the great leaders in the early years of the Salvation Army was a man of scholarship as well as a man of singular spiritual power in his own life and he challenged the people who wanted to go into ministry by outlining the road to spiritual leadership in these words, he said, "It is not won by promotion but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confessions of sin and much heart searching and humbling

before God, by selfsurrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol, a bold deathless uncompromising and uncomplaining of the cross and by an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified. It is not gained by seeking great things for ourselves but rather like Paul, by counting those things that are gained to us as lost for Christ. That is a great price. But it must be unflinchingly paid by him who would be not merely a nominal but a real spiritual leader of men, a leader whose power is recognized and felt in heaven, on earth and even in hell," end quote. That is the type of man God is searching for and on whose behalf he desires to show himself strong in the church.

And so, it is a worthy thing and that is the implication of that opening statement. That statement assigns to this leadership role a high level of worthiness. It is an important calling.

Secondly, it is a limited calling. You will notice further, verse 1 says, if a man desires the office of overseer, he desires a good work. It is limited to men. The use of the Greek tis, t is in English in the masculine form indicates that men are in reference here. It means any man but it is masculine...if any man desires. It must also be noted, please, that we have just covered verses 11 to 15, wherein Paul said, "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection and I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man but be in silence, for Adam was first formed, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."

In other words, he's already said that the leadership of the church does not belong with the women, they are to learn and they are to be under authority. Let the women learn says their equal and spiritual privilege, capacity, blessing, promise. The fact that they are not to teach means they're not equal in role when it comes to the church. Sure they can teach children, they can teach other women, they can present the gospel to people that don't know Christ, they can give counsel to friends within the family of God but when it comes to the one who stands up to preach and teach in the church, that is not a role for woman. When it comes to the matter of leadership, they are to be submissive. So we know then that it is a limited calling.

It's amazing to me how few understand that seemingly today. And what a tremendous and exhilarating steamrolling movement there is for the ordination of women to the pastorate. It's happening very rapidly, in spite of what the Word of God has to say, because people are more concerned with social intimidation then they are with obedience to the Word of God. We know from verse 15 where the balance comes, remember that. That a woman has her impact on society not by being a leader in the church but by raising up a holy seed, right? By child bearing. If her life is one of faith and love and holiness and her priorities are right and she commits herself if God gives her children to those children to raise them in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord to bring about a godly generation...that's how she influences the world. The man has the outward overt leadership, she has the influence. But it is a limited calling.

The third thing I want you to note here, not only is this an important calling and...let me say a word more about that limited calling, I don't want to leave it quite yet. I just remembered something. The limitations on this calling to men are also fortified by verses 2 through 6. And in verses 2 through 6 there is a listing of all kinds of descriptive qualifications, they're adjectives. Every one of them in verse 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 are in the masculine form. The intent of that is obviously that these all refer to men, to the masculine gender. The point that's already been made in verses 11 to 15 is then reinforced in the masculine form of all the adjectives from verse 2 through 6. Furthermore, it would be impossible for a woman to be a onewoman man as indicated in verse 2. And a woman does not rule the house in verses 4 and 5, it is said that this man must be one who rules his house well. So it's obvious then that this is a limited calling.

Having said that, let's go back then to the third. And here we come to the heart of the matter. It is a compelling calling. It is a compelling calling. You will notice that two times in the Authorized version the word "desire" appears in verse 1. If someone desires the office of an overseer, or actually desires the overseer's work, he desires a good work. There are two words for desire, though they're translated as if they were one in English. The first one is orego, what that means is "to reach out after or to stretch out some..oneself, to grasp something." It doesn't say anything about the inside, it just says what you're doing on the outside. It's the idea of going after something. If someone goes after the function of an overseer, that's the idea, if he pursues that and the idea is he gets in that track, maybe he goes to school, he reads about that, he studies about that, he learns to do that, he gets under some people that are doing that, if he sort of tracks that track then it says if he does that he is desiring a good work.

But the second word for desire is completely different. The first word, orego is only used three times. It's used also in chapter 6 verse 10 in a negative way, that's reaching after something bad. It's used in Hebrews 11:16, I believe it is, reaching for something good. It doesn't say what you're reaching for. Here obviously it's reaching out for that pastorate, that leadership in the church. If a person does that, then it says he desires...and he uses a totally different word, epithumeo used many times in the New Testament, also for bad and good. But this word means "a passionate compulsion." Whereas the first word is something you do outwardly, the second word is something you feel inwardly. And it's the two of those things that come together in this verse that give us the embodiment of the full understanding of that desire.

What you have here then is someone who desires to lead in the church and pursues it on the outside because he's driven on the inside, he is compelled on the inside.

I never counsel anyone to go into the pastorate. I don't want people to go into the pastorate because I told them to do that. And some people might take my authority as being more valuable than it really is. It would be nothing more than an opinion for me to tell somebody to go into the ministry. I might suggest that they ought to think about that by virtue of what I see in their life, but that's not something

I can do. I would never encourage anyone to be an elder at Grace Church. I would never pursue that with anyone. I would never ask someone to do that because the whole point is, that's got to come from inside. I can't play God. I have to wait unto the Lord begins to move in the heart.

Now let me tell you something. I believe that the people who lead the church ought to be people who are compelled on the inside and to reach after that. I want you to know that there are people, by the way, who are going along that track but have no such compulsion. They're doing it because it's an analytical thing. They kind of look it over and they think that would be a good thing to do. And maybe they love the Lord and maybe they feel good about the church and they've seen some good models and so they go to college or they go to seminary and they get in that flow but there's really no passion there. And you can watch those people very often because they'll stay in school almost interminably. They'll just stay in school. Almost as if once they're out of school they don't know what to do because once they've gotten through the track, the passion was never there. Now what are they going to do?

That's not true of everybody who stays in school a long time but it is for some. It's the coming together of both of those things. And I have to tell you that college and seminaries are full of people who are reaching after that but have no compulsion. You say, "How can you tell?" I can tell them because they're content to do the academic exercise without ever filling the passion. They'll just go through all of that. You show me a person with a passion and I'll show you a person who is going through the academic exercise and saying to himself, "I've got to get this over with and get on with what it's all about." That's the person whose life is all wound up in ministry to one extent or another. It's the combination.

On the other hand, there are people with the passion who can't ever get their life organized enough to get in the track to learn the content, they need to make the most effect out of that passion. There are people, you know, who jump on their horse and ride off in all directions. They're full of passion but haven't got any direction. But if we can just push the point a little bit here, I believe a man is called into the leadership of the church when he feels the passion of his heart to the extent that he doesn't have any options. He's not saying, "Well, this is the best out of the five I looked at." He doesn't have five, he's got one. And he's compelled into that and he's so compelled into that that's all he can do and he gets himself in the track that reaches after that and then he becomes qualified in that process.

I mean, I never sat down and analyzed my gifts and talents. I don't ever analyze myself. I don't like to do that. I don't know what my gifts are in that sense of human talents...I know what my spiritual gifts are, but I didn't sit down and say, "Well let's see, if I was going to be a doctor, a lawyer, an Indian chief, let's see...if I was going to be a pastor, or a school teacher or whatever, mechanic or something..what would I choose? Well let's see. What are my talents. I better go take a personality inventory test." I never said that. I never said anything like that. All I knew was that by the time I was mid way through college I had one thing in my heart to do and that was all I ever thought about. There wasn't any option. There wasn't any discussion. There wasn't any analysis of that.

Now I don't want to sort of push that subjectiveness in my own life off on everyone. You may be saying, "Well, I'm...I'm thinking about the ministry but I'm not sure." Well maybe the Lord hasn't yet set the fire yet in your heart and maybe that will come, I don't know that because I can't tell you how the Holy Spirit will work. I know people who have done a lot of things for a lot of years and all of a sudden in their mid thirties or mid forties felt a call of God into the ministry, and it was then that the compulsion was born in their heart. People have asked me that all my life. If you weren't a pastor, what would you be? I don't have any idea. I'd be dead. I would be out of existence. There's nothing else. There's...I don't have anything else, I don't know anything else. I can't fix anything. I can't do anything. I mean, you talk about a onering circus, this is it.

I mean, that's all about compulsion. And I don't know where that came from, I don't know why that's there, I just know that's what I desired. And I desired that strongly and God fulfilled that desire. Patrick Fairbaren(?) once said that, "This desire is not the prompting of a carnal ambition. It's the aspiration of a heart which has itself experienced the grace of God and which longs to see others come to participate in the same heavenly gift." There are some people who seek the pastorate for money, that's right. There are some people, like filthy lucre, you know, 1 Peter 5, they seek it for money. There are some people who seek it for preeminence, prominence, Diotrephes who loves to have the preeminence, 3 John verse 9. But it ought to be a compulsion. If it's from God it will be a compulsion. Now the compulsion may be stronger in some than others, but nonetheless it is a compulsion.

Now let me just take you a little bit further along this idea of the compelling desire. Samuel Bringle(?) in speaking to this same matter said this, "The final estimate of men...this is so good...the final estimate of men shows that history cares not for the rank or title a man has borne, or the office he has held, but only the quality of his deeds and the character of his mind and heart," end quote. He's right on. The only thing history's going to write down is not where did you get your degree...not how many degrees did you get...but what was your life like? What was your character and what were your deeds? That's all. That's all.

Let me put it simply. Ambition for office corrupts, desire for service purifies. Ambition for office corrupts, ambition for office always corrupts, service...desire for service purifies. A young man said to me recently, he said, "You know, I can just...I was watching you up there preaching and I can just see myself up there in a couple of years." I felt sorry for him. I said, "That's not right. You don't see yourself anywhere doing anything, it's not a question of what you do as much as it is at this point in your life a question of who you are and I don't think you're who you ought to be before God." You don't seek something other than to serve God, that's a compulsion. Paul says, "Look, don't commend me for my ministry," 1 Corinthians 9, "woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel. I am a driven man. I am compelled...I am compelled."

I think of Hugh Latimer. Hugh Latimer was really the man that God used to bring the Reformation to England in the sixteenth century. They had come out of a thousand years of the Dark Ages when the Bibles were closed and everywhere was disaster. And the Word of God was locked up. And in various parts of Europe, the Reformation started to spring loose and here comes Hugh Latimer in the sixteenth century. He said he was compelled to preach by God. He couldn't restrain himself. He became the most popular preacher of that era. He was compelled to preach, he said, because of the lostness of people and also because, he said, of the emptiness of the clergy in the dead church. And he preached one sermon for which he is famous in church history called "The Sermon of the Plow." And it was a sermon directed at preachers with no passion, at preachers who had no strong desire but who sought only the preeminence, the prominence, the dididа, all that.

This is what he said to them, "And now I would ask you a strange question. Who is the most diligent bishop and prelate in all England that passes all the rest in doing his office? I can tell for I know who he is. I know him well. But now I think you listening and harkening that I should name him. There is one that passes all the others and is the most diligent prelate and preacher in all of England and will you know who it is? I will tell you, it is the devil. He is the most diligent preacher of all. He is never out of his diocese. He is never from his cure. You shall...never find him unoccupied. He is ever in his parish. He keeps residence at all times. You shall never find him out of the way. Call for him when you will, he is ever at home. He is the most diligent preacher in all the realm. He is ever at his plow. No lording or loitering can hinder him. He is ever applying his business. You will never find him idle. I warrant you...when the devil is resident and his plow going, there away with books and up with candles, away with Bibles and up with beads, away with the light of the gospel and up with the light of the candles. Yea, even at noonday, up with man's traditions and his laws, down with God's traditions and His most holy Word. Oh that our prelates...he means pastors...would be as diligent to sow the corn of good doctrine as Satan is to sow cockle and darnel. There was never such a preacher in England as he is."

And then he concluded by saying this. "The prelates are lords and not laborers, but the devil is diligent at his plow. He is no unpreaching prelate. He is no lordly loiterer from his cure. He is a busy plowman. Therefore you unpreaching prelates, learn from the devil. Be diligent in doing your office. If you will not learn from God nor good men to be diligent in your office, then learn from the devil," end quote.

Now what he was calling for was passion in the ministry, obviously. That should be true of all men...all men. The church should be filled with leaders who are compelled to that ministry.

Let's look at a fourth mark of this desire, this strong desire, this call to service. And I think it's an important one. The calling is a responsible calling. If a man desires the office of an overseer...take that phrase "the office of an overseer," if he desires to be an overseer in the church, he is really taking on a great responsibility, oversight of the church. The word is episkopos, the word for "bishop

or overseer." It's unfortunate that we have the word "bishop" in a lot of our Bible editions because bishop has become cluttered with so many ecclesiastical trappings that when we think of the word "bishop" we think of who knows what.

I remember taking our family to an Episcopalian church one time on the east coast and they were all in robes, they wear all the clerical garb. And then they introduced a visiting bishop. And this guy really had an outfit on that was amazing. He had a white and red and ermine fur cape over a gold and stuff and then he had about a twofoot cone on his head, right straight up like a dunce cap. And we had our family, Patricia and I and our kids, and of course, you know, they had never seen anything like that. And when he came in and I remember one of the kids said to me, "Who is that, Dad?" And I said, "Well, that's the bishop." "What is a bishop?" And I tried to explain as best I could but they weren't buying into my explanation very well. And we've sort of had a running, I guess, tradition in our family where we all remember the man they affectionately titled "The cone man" who just didn't seem to fit with anything they ever understood relative to church or leadership in the church.

And I remember we were supposed to go file out and up the aisle and across the front and take a wafer from him in the communion. And our whole family had a unanimous vote, we filed along, got in line, down the aisle and out the side door. And we just couldn't get into it, you know. And I know that for many of you, maybe you come from a background with a few more ecclesiastical trappings, but the word "bishop" will conjure up things that aren't really what is intended in the text, so let's use the word overseer. It really could be used the word...we could use the word leader or ruler because that's the idea.

If you're given responsibility to lead the church, to oversee the church, you are given a great responsibility. It is a very very responsible calling. In fact, in Hebrews 13:17 it says you have to give an account to God for how you handled your leadership. James 3:1 says, "Don't be in a hurry to be a teacher because you'll have a greater condemnation." The responsibility is so great for one in a position of leadership.

Now the word episkopos, or episkopoi comes out of Greek culture. There is a use of that word in the Greek culture. They used it to refer to an inspector, a sort of a city administrator, a finance manager. And some people believe that that word came out of Greek culture into the church. But it's been discovered, too, that among a group of Jews called Essenes, they were monastic Jews, they were sort of heterodox Jews, they lived out in the wilderness by the Dead Sea, they also had episkopoi. They used the Hebrew term mabakar(?) and they...they had these men who would be called by them in the Greek episkopoi and in the Essene culturethe Qumran community, we call itthese men preached, taught, presided, exercised care, exercised authority and did church discipline. It wouldn't be called church discipline but it was community discipline. They had the duty of commanding the people, instructing the people, receiving alms from the people. They had the duty of accusing the people, examining them, dealing with their sins and generally shepherding. So it's probably likely that

the episkopoi really gets its definition out of the Qumran community rather than out of the Greek culture because the Greek culture is such a narrow definition of administration, whereas the Qumran people saw this as a wide range of spiritual responsibility.

So, the overseer, imagine, had that kind of responsibility, to command the people, lead the people, instruct the people, receive the giving from the people, receive accusations against the people and find out of they were true, examine the people, deal with their sins, shepherd the flock. The range of responsibility really that belongs to every pastor and elder. The overseer is the same as a pastor and an elder. As I said earlier, elder...which is the word presbuteros simply speaks of spiritual maturity. It means an older person. Shepherd is the word pastor, it is one who feeds. And overseer is the word episkopos, the one who leads, administrates and coordinates and supervises. They all refer to the same person. They are all used of the same people in Acts 20:28. They are all used of the same people in Titus 1:6 to 9...and 1:5 to 9. They're used of the same people in 1 Peter 5:1 and 2, and we've gone over that in the past. So they refer to the same person. I am an elder, spiritually mature. I am a pastor, I feed you. I am an overseer, I have responsibility of oversight, it's all one and the same, just looking at it from different facets.

And what is the responsibility of the elders at this church? The shepherds and pastors of this church, what is their responsibility? We are to rule, 1 Timothy 5:17 says we rule. That is proistemi, to be ranked first or to stand first. We have the authority given us by Christ to rule in His behalf using His Word. So the church is not ruled by its people, it's ruled by those who stand first, that is those who are its pastors. And anybody who is an elder whether they're paid by Grace Church or employed outside, if we recognize them as an elder, they're a pastor, they're an overseer. It's all the same. Any of us who are pastors are also elders. And our job is to rule and lead the church. Secondly, to preach and teach. First Timothy 5:17 says we are to labor in the Word and doctrine. James 5:14 says if you're sick, call the elders of the church to pray. So we are to pray. We did that this morning for a young couple with a real need. We laid hands on them and prayed for them. So we are to lead the church, teach the church and pray for the church as well.

We are, according to 1 Peter 5:1 and 2, to care for the church. It says, "Feed the flock of God." Take the oversight. Be examples to the flock. So we lead by teaching, an oversight, and example. We are to set church policy, Acts 15:22 shows the elders in Jerusalem involved in the establishment of ministry and policy. We are to ordain others, 1 Timothy 4:14. Timothy was ordained with the laying on of the hands of the elders. Presbyter there is the group of elders.

So, we rule the church, we teach the church. We preach. We feed. We pray. We care for the congregation. We love them. We shepherd them. We set policy. We ordain others. We set an example of life. That's a great responsibility...great responsibility. So when you look at your own life and you ask if you're called, you remember that it is an important calling. Are you willing to do something that is so very important? Are you challenged by that? It is a limited one. You ask yourself

if you're the right sex to start with. Then you understand that it must be a strong compulsion in your heart. And then you must realize that you will be taking on a great responsibility for which God holds you greatly accountable. That's when an elder sins, according to chapter 5, he's to be rebuked publicly so that elders fear that and constrain their life because of that healthy fear.

I just want to mention the two in closing and I'll develop them more next time. It is, fifthly, a worthy calling...it is a worthy calling. It says in verse 1 it is a good work. The word good is kalos, a noble excellent honorable highquality work. This is the high estimate of the pastorate. It is of great great value. I wouldn't stoop to be a king. This is the most worthy task, a glorious task. One of my spiritual heroes, Martyn Lloyd Jones, writing in Preaching and Preachers, one of my favorite books, said, "To me the work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called," end quote. I agree with that. Whatever the role you might have in the group of elders, whatever your function as a pastor, you may not be the chief speaker in a sense, you may have other roles, but still it is the highest calling to which anyone can ever ever be called. It is a worthy worthy work.

Then lastly, sixthly, it is a demanding calling. And that is implied in the word "work." It is a demanding calling. If you're looking for leisure, if you're looking for an easy time, you will not find it in the true exercise of the ministry. You can find it by sort of getting in and just kind of laying low, but you'll not fulfill the ministry. It is a demanding calling. The word "work" implies that. It implies energy and expending of energy and effort and zeal and commitment. And the word here has the idea not of a onetime task or a onetime deed but of a life work. It is a demanding occupation. I would like to translate it. It is a demanding lifelong task. When Paul uses the same word in 2 Timothy 4:5 and says to Timothy, "Do the work of an evangelist," he's not saying do it today and tomorrow, he's saying do that lifelong work of an evangelist. You are one, do that work. And we are to esteem, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, those over us in the Lord for their work, for their occupation, for the thing they do. The work of the ministry is a demanding thing. The work is never done. You don't turn it off at five o'clock, let me tell you, folks. It never goes away...never ever goes away.

And there's no assembly line that stops and you can walk away. It just never ever ever goes away. It is a demanding calling. And when you look at your own heart and ask yourself if you're called, realize that. You're talking about a lifelong occupation. And Paul knew that, he suffered so greatly for that work.

Well, these are the kind of people the church needs who are called because they understand that this is the kind of thing that it is...a demanding calling and yet a worthy one, a lofty one, a compelling one, a calling that is rising from deep within the heart of a person who understands its importance, understands that God is driving them to that. This is where church leadership has to begin. It starts with a calling. The church then listens to the person feeling compelled and examines their life by the standards of verses 2 through 7 and we'll get into those in our next study. Let's bow together in

prayer.

We love You, Father, and we thank You so much for the privilege of serving in Your church. We do not understand why You've called those of us You have called to this, nor why You have so singularly blessed us, but we thank You. And we know we're not here because of our great talent or great worthiness, for quite the contrary is true. We're here by Your sovereign grace and thankful and desirous, Lord, to be faithful to that calling to which You've called us. Thank You for the leadership of this church, for ever godly man, for every young man who now compelled in his heart pursues and reaches out to grasp the pastorate, the ministry of the church, the ministry of the Kingdom. Bless them. Keep them pure and holy and clean. Keep the fire burning and lead them to that perfect place of ministry fulfillment.

Father, I pray for churches around this nation, around this city, everywhere that they might have men who are there because they are driven by the compelling moving of the Spirit of God in their hearts to minister. Many were single minded who understand the devotion and dedication to the work, men who do not desire the title but desire the work, who do not desire the office but desire the work, who do not desire the security but desire the work itself because they are compelled by love for the Savior and concern for His Kingdom and for the lost. Give us those kind of men and may we support them and love them and pray for them and follow their leadership that You might be exalted in Your church and we'll thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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