

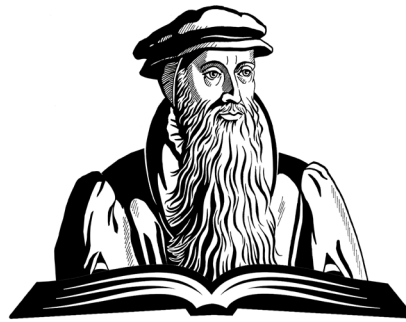
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

Biblical Eldership

by Rev. Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Lecture #4

More Qualifications



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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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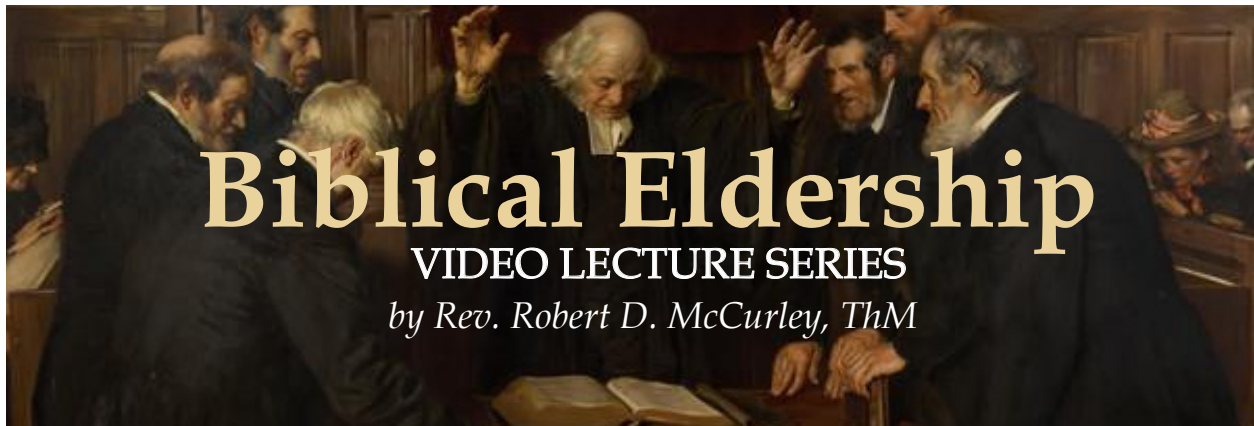
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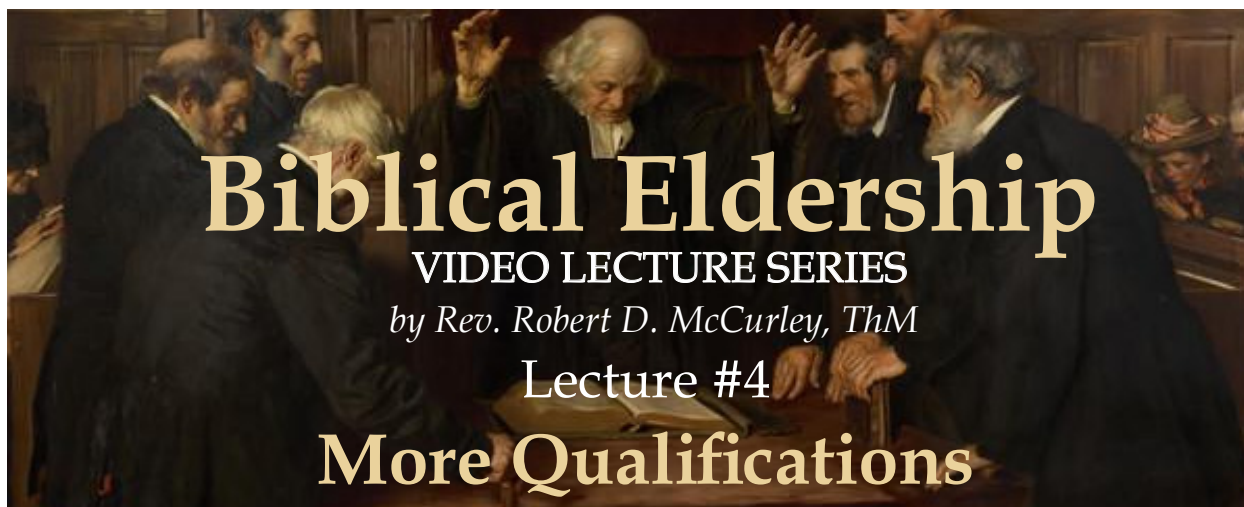
Rev. Robert D. McCurley, ThM, is minister of the gospel at Greenville Presbyterian Church, in Taylors, South Carolina, USA, a congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), Presbytery of the United States.

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Cover image: "The Ordination of Elders in a Scottish Kirk," 1891, John Henry Lorimer



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More Qualifications

We all recognize the important relationship between responsibilities and qualifications. In order to assume responsibility for a task or role, we must be qualified to do so, otherwise the outcome could be disastrous. I have no training in civil engineering. If I were assigned responsibility to design a skyscraper, it would be ridiculous, because I am not qualified for such tasks. Well, in this module, or course, we're considering what the Bible teaches about the New Testament office of Ruling Elder. God specified in his Word certain criteria that must be met, in order for a man to serve as Elder in Christ's church. In this lecture, we continue to explore those qualifications, which are recorded in 1 Timothy 3, and also in Titus chapter 1.

So first of all, biblical criteria. Before we return to our consideration of 1 Timothy 3, we should step back, and place this teaching within the broader context of the calling and qualifications of Elders. While some of 1 Timothy 3 touches on matters of gifts—for example, Elders must be apt to teach—it primarily focuses on the graces of an Elder—his character, life, godliness, maturity, and experience. The overarching qualifications can be really organized under three general heads.

So first of all, we have the Elder's graces. An Elder must be godly, and mature in his life and character, and this, of course, is the focus of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Secondly, we have the Elder's doctrine. He must know, believe, hold fast, and defend the apostolic doctrine of the Scriptures. We'll be taking up this topic in the next lecture—the fifth lecture. Thirdly, we have the Elder's gifts. So he must also be equipped by God with the spiritual gifts or abilities necessary for the office of Elder. This includes skills with people: leadership, communication, decision-making, and many other related matters. This aspect will be the focus of really the remainder of the course, lectures 6 and following. So when we use the word “qualification” in both the previous lecture and this one, we're intending the qualifications of life and character as specified in 1 Timothy 3. So now we will resume our consideration of this passage. We left off with being apt to teach, and so let's consider some of the further qualifications that are given.

Next in that passage, we're told that the Elder is not to be “given to wine” (verse 3). This could be translated “not be given to *much* wine.” So a man who is given to much wine drinks too much wine. In the words of Proverbs 23, verse 30, he tarries long at the wine. That includes a man who has occasional bouts of excessive drinking, as well as the man who regularly drinks too much alcohol. In that sense, he is enslaved to drinking. Such a person is not qualified to be an Elder in the church. Paul does not say, in 1 Timothy 3, verse 3, that an Elder must not drink any wine.

Those who require Elders to abstain from drinking any wine or alcohol on the basis of this verse, have actually twisted the qualifications to say something that it does not. We know from the rest of Scripture that God gives us wine, which makes glad the heart of man—Psalm 104, verses 14 and 15. Jesus used wine as one of the elements of the Lord’s Supper, and we are to continue using wine in the Lord’s Supper until Jesus returns. But a little later in 1 Timothy—the same book—Paul tells Timothy, “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake, and for your oft infirmities”—chapter 25, verse 23. The Scripture expresses the covenant blessing of God in this way. It speaks about honoring the Lord with all of our possessions, and with the first fruits of our increase, so that our barns will be filled with plenty, and our vats will overflow with new wine—Proverbs 3, verses 9 to 10. So wine is one of God’s good gifts, and it is to be used for the glory of God. In this verse, the Lord of the church disqualifies from the office of Elder anyone who is given to *much* wine, that means drinking excessively—being a drunkard. Because Scripture condemns drunkenness, saying that no drunkard will inherit the kingdom of God—1 Corinthians 6, verses 9 and 10. And so in general, an Elder must not let wine or alcohol govern him, but must be able to use wine wisely—in moderation for the glory of God. And so, although wine is specifically mentioned in the text, the principle here applies, of course, really to any food or drink which can have mastery over a man, especially those sorts of things that would impair a man’s judgment, and his ability to control himself and his speech. So addiction to wine disqualifies a man from office. A man who becomes drunk fails to meet this qualification. And really, no believer, but especially no Elder, because he is to be an example, should be drunk with wine. Rather, as we are told elsewhere in Scripture, Christians should be filled with the Holy Spirit. And so, an Elder is one who uses his abilities to rule wisely before the Lord, to the glory of God.

The next qualification that’s given is that he is to be “no striker,” the passage says. So the Greek word means “a violent man.” We have the same word in Titus 1, verse 7. Such is a man who strikes or smites another person. Well, this is clearly referring to men who strike others out of anger. They’re not qualified, such men, to hold office as an overseer in the church. Neither anger nor violence should characterize an Elder. He’s not to be one who strikes his family or people outside the family. The only exception, of course, which the Bible specifically permits would be things like lawful self defence, or it would include punishment by civil magistrates, and discipline by parents. But God forbids men, out of anger and fits of rage, to strike out against other people in an argument, or in a fight. The Lord abhors this violence. An Elder is to have control, self-control over his mind, and emotions, and his body, so that he is not given to these fits of swift anger. It means that he should be gentle, and peaceable, and able to say the things that need to be said without breaking out in violence. So we recognize that this is a qualification. A man who is physically abusive to other people is disqualified from the office of Elder. This is true with regards to both his mouth as well as his tongue. He needs to be controlling himself and his emotions.

The next qualification that is given to us is that an Elder is not to be “greedy of filthy lucre.” So in the Greek language, Paul uses a compound adjective composed of two words for “shameful gain.” So he’s not to be given to shameful gain. That’s anything that a man gets by dishonest means, or which is itself shameful or wicked. Peter says the same thing when he’s addressing the Elders in 1 Peter 5, verse 2. He exhorts the Elders to beware of dishonest gain. He’s saying that a man’s motivation to serve as an Elder should not be to achieve dishonest gain. He should not seek to exalt himself by using his position among the flock of God. He should not try to garner to himself power and control or authority. His desire should not be to puff himself up with pride or prestige, but his motivation should rather be for the benefit and edification of the people. So a man’s motivation

should be driven by an eagerness to serve Jesus Christ and to further his kingdom. And this is applied both to money and material goods, as well as things that are related to them. A man who just wants wealth should not be an Elder. It disqualifies him if his goal is to use his office as Elder as a means to get money, or power, or control, rather than to glorify God and to edify his church.

The eleventh qualification—combining the ones that we heard in the last lecture, and the ones in this lecture—the eleventh qualification is that an Elder must be patient. That means gentle, or yielding, or kind. Paul describes gentleness in reference to our Lord Jesus Christ, in 2 Corinthians 10, verse 1, and he pleads with the Christians in Corinth “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” James, as well, tells us that “the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable” (James 3:17). It’s a gentle wisdom. Gentleness, of course, should characterize every Christian. Paul speaks, in Philippians 4, and he says, “Let your gentleness be known to all men.” But he singles out gentleness, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as a necessary quality for an Elder. So in contrast to what we heard in the previous couple of qualifications, in contrast to being violent, or in contrast to seeking after shameful gain, an Elder is the opposite. He is to be gentle, not abrasive, not caustic, not oppressive. If you look at 1 Peter, chapter 2, verse 18, Peter sets a contrast between those who are gentle, and those who are harsh. A man who makes others endure grief unnecessarily lacks this important qualification for the office of Elder—influence how he treats the flock of God. He needs to be forbearing, and patient in his spirit toward all, especially in the midst of difficulties, and conflicts, and disputes, and opposition. There needs to be a maturity that can avoid strife, rather than fueling it. A man, after all, can be very jealous for the truth of God, but end up offending people by his manner, being caustic and harsh. Or, they may lack a forbearing spirit, and easily get offended by what others say or do. And a gentle man, a qualified Elder is not going to be easily provoked; he’s not going to be thrown off course by things that others say. And in the midst of difficult circumstances, that gentleness will manifest itself. And so the Lord provides us with this important qualification. A man who loses his forbearing spirit and gentle manner when there is conflict and controversy ought not to be an overseer or Elder.

The next qualification is that an Elder is not to be “a brawler.” So this is the fourth negative requirement in verse 3, if you’re following along. So it follows the positive requirement that an overseer or Elder be gentle. There are actually three closely-related requirements in this verse, which all have to do with a man’s disposition. And the particularity in this area shows the importance that God places on the necessity of an Elder having a right attitude, a right disposition. So this could be translated, “not quarrelsome,” it means, “not given to disputes or quarrels or strife.” It means that one does not have a sinful hatred toward other people for any reason, and one does not speak evil of others or hold grudges against them. Such a man is not inflated in his own ego and pride, thinking that he’s better than others. All of these sinful things show that a man has a quarrelsome spirit. A man who lacks this qualification will be regularly finding fault with all sorts of people, continually picking apart what they say and do, and will always have some contention with someone. So he’ll find it hard to get along with his fellow Elders, and he’ll find it hard to relate to many of the people in the congregation. He’ll have many grievances and quarrels. He’ll always be finding something that’s not right. Well, such a disposition not only is miserable, it’s also very troublesome with regards to the execution of duties as an Elder. So, rather than being always disgruntled, an Elder should be peaceable, and conciliatory, and he should be esteeming others higher than himself, and he should be forbearing. It’s typical for all of us who want to find something wrong in someone else. But a man who is truly qualified for the office of Elder has to overcome those sinful tendencies by the grace of God, and unless he does so, he shouldn’t bear

office in the church. Now, some might be thinking to themselves, Well, what does this mean? It does not mean that an Elder ought to ignore sin or cover over every sin, claiming that he's avoiding all contention. No, there's place and indeed a duty to address sin. We'll come to that in a future lecture. But his disposition should be one that is winsome.

The next qualification is that an Elder is not to be covetous. We're still in verse 3. And a literal translation of this word is "not loving silver." "Not covetous" means not loving silver. Since silver was commonly used as money in Paul's day, we don't restrict the word to its literal meaning, but it means "not loving money." Loving money means pursuing it, and serving it, and placing one's confidence in it, and loving it. To think that life consists in the abundance of possessions and wealth is to love money. To live as if money was, in fact, the most important thing in life is to love money. Paul warned Timothy that those who are in heavy pursuit of riches are going to fall into temptation and a snare. He tells us that "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). And so, loving money and pleasure, all of these things compete with loving God. And loving God is the first and great commandment, as Jesus tells us in Matthew 22, verse 37 and following. There are those who are unstable, and they twist the Scriptures, and they'll say that it is wrong for Christians to have money at all, or to have more than the bare necessities of life. But the Scriptures don't teach that at all. They teach that a good increase and wealth are blessings from the Lord, with we honor him. We have that in Deuteronomy 8, and Deuteronomy 28, and Proverbs 3. The love of money is not the same as people having a certain amount of wealth under the blessing of God. The point with regards to Elders is that they must love God above everything else. Why? Because you can't serve both God and mammon. You'll either love the one and hate the other, or vice versa. We have to love God above all else, and the wealth he gives us we use for his kingdom and glory.

Well, the fourteenth qualification, "one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity." And so, here the Lord tells us that there's a contrast in comparison. If a man doesn't rule well in his own house, how will he ever rule well in God's house, in the church of God? This is verses 4 and 5. And this is the first of three lengthy requirements which conclude this list of qualifications. While most of the requirements concern a man's character, this is one of the few that require certain abilities. You'll know that one of the main responsibilities of an Elder is to take care of the church of God. We'll address that under a future lecture regarding shepherding. In order to be qualified to take care of the church, a man has to first know how to rule his own household. And really, an Elder has to first be able to rule himself well. That's part of what the previous qualifications were addressing. That's the foundation for good government—self government. A man who doesn't rule himself well, but seeks to rule others, or expects them to come under his government, is a hypocrite. But it goes on to say that an Elder must rule his wife and children well, having them in subjection, and obedience, and submission, according to the law of God. In other words, there must be reverence, there must be honor, respect, good order in the home. An Elder must govern really all that belongs to his household. I mean, this could include servants, and employees, and property, and his business affairs, and so on. He has to demonstrate that he has the ability to run his own affairs properly—that he has good judgment and discipline. Because if this is deficient, a man will not be able to take care of the church of God. He'll lack the ability, and he'll lack the respect and authority that are necessary. So the argument is from the lesser to the greater—from the lesser responsibility to the greater responsibility. If a man is faithful with a few things, he'll be put in charge of greater things. Think back to the parable that Jesus gives, in Matthew 25, verses 14 to 30. Before a man can be trusted to care for the church of God, he has to rule his own house well—himself, his family, his daily affairs, and so on. If his children are

unfaithful, or insubordinate, or lead scandalous lives within his home, or if his wife is rebellious, then he's not suited to be able to govern the church of God. All of this demonstrates experience, doesn't it? That a man has been tested, and demonstrated through experience his ability to govern other souls.

Now these passages don't speak about children that are outside of his home. "As for me and my house, we shall serve the LORD"—Joshua 24:15. And so it's not speaking of children who have grown up, and got married, and have their own families. That's not under the oversight, the authority, the governance of a man in his own home. Nor is the passage requiring, of course, that all of his children be converted. That's something that only a sovereign God can do. But whether converted or not, they're to be kept in good order, and in submission to their father, and submission to the standards of God's own law.

The next qualification is that an Elder is not to be "a novice." He is not to be—literally, the word means "newly planted." So you can have people who are newly planted in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. They're newly converted. They're new Christians, if you will. Well, Paul says that this is also a qualification. If a new convert were to be made an Elder, he would too easily become puffed up. He'd become proud, conceited, as Paul says. You could say that his pride would blind him to the truth, and give him poor judgment. A further indication of the meaning of this word is given in that consequence, one may "fall into the condemnation of the devil"—in verse 6. The new Christian who suddenly received the responsibility of watching over the congregation, teaching, and ruling in the church could easily become proud, and easily slip into false self-confidence. It takes God's grace—it takes the help of the Holy Spirit, with the Word of God, to sanctify a sinner. And so humility, and wisdom, and self control, and all of these things that an Elder needs—these things don't just come overnight. They're a part of growth and maturity. It takes time to learn and practice these things, to mortify, to kill the deeds of the flesh, and to grow in the fruit of the Holy Spirit. And so, Scripture teaches that God sends us trials; he sends us chastening, in order to work these things in his people. But a new convert doesn't have all that experience. They have to move from the milk of the Word, to solid food, or the meat of the Word—we see in Hebrews, chapter 5 at the end. He needs to be a mature Christian before he can be an Elder in the church. And so we recognize that this is the danger. In 2 Peter 2, verse 4, God speaks about how God cast the angels who sinned down into hell, delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for the judgment. God condemned the devil to everlasting punishment. Paul is saying that pride leads to destruction. This isn't the same as speaking about a man's age. Because you can have an old man who is newly converted, and a relatively younger man can have actually have many years of maturity in the Christian life. Whether young or old, one who is a new Christian should not be an Elder. A man's maturity as a Christian is important for the office of Elder, more important than his age in years. And even understanding human abilities, and learning—these things are not sufficient of themselves to qualify a person who is a novice, who is newly converted, in the office of Elder. It would be a disaster, as we've seen, leading to pride, and leading ultimately to the condemnation of the devil. And it takes time before a younger congregation may have men that are qualified to be Elders. And we need time also to see some of that maturity in the faith before they're called to be Elders or ministers of the Word of God.

Well, the sixteenth qualification is that "he must have a good report of them that are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (verse 7). So Paul begins here a new sentence, but he's connecting it closely to the preceding verses, in order to make crystal clear that this is also a necessary qualification for being an Elder. A man who is qualified as an Elder has to live in such

a way that even unbelievers, so even those outside the church, give a good testimony concerning him. They may not share his faith, but they should be forced to acknowledge that he is an upright and wise man, that he behaves himself honorably, that he's innocent of scandal in daily life, and so on. In other words, an Elder can't be a hypocrite, who does one thing and says another thing; or speaks one way around Christians, but doesn't walk worthy of that calling in his daily affairs. After all, an Elder often spends many hours at work with unbelievers. And so their assessment of him is important. They may hate Christ, and they may hate his Christianity, but they shouldn't be able to prove any just charge against him. His character is to be above reproach. You'll remember Paul's language, in Colossians 4:5, when he talks about us walking in wisdom towards those that are outside. Well, if an Elder doesn't have a good testimony among unbelievers who know him, he's in danger of falling into reproach and the snare of the devil. This is the reproach for misconduct. Unbelievers can heap insults and disgrace upon a man who behaves improperly. And that, in turn, has an impact upon the church itself, because they're not just reviling the man, they're also going to end up blaspheming Christ, and disregarding his church as a result. And unbelievers are often looking for an occasion to mock Christ and his church. And so we have to beware of this, of falling into the snare or trap of the devil, falling into these sorts of serious sins. And so there's many other things that could be said with regards to this business of the snare of the devil. A man without a good testimony from those outside has a divided heart. He's not serving the Lord with his whole soul, and the church shouldn't trust him to lead and shepherd the sheep as a consequence. We need men who are faithful. We need men who are sincere. We need men who set their hearts on the honor of Christ, both secretly and publically, both in the church, and in the world. We need men who will stand for and defend the truth as it is in the Holy Scriptures, and stand against those who oppose the truth. So here, hypocrisy is something that must be avoided. A man who acts at work and in his business dealings, all that he does there is important—it's an important indication of who he is, and it's a qualification for his office. And so, the Lord says, let this kind of man be beyond reproach, that he is not in the danger of being entrapped.

Well, this has been a long list of qualifications. And in this lecture, we've completed our consideration of 1 Timothy 3 on the qualifications and godly character in the life of an Elder. In the next lecture, we we'll turn our attention to the Elder's doctrine, as we will see what he believes and how he holds the truth is also an indispensable part of his office.