

May 28 , 2006 i "What Are Elders"

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1 Timothy, you want to do that? Okay, good. I never know what I'm going to do when somebody says "no." Now, let me just tell you this. If you're a guest with us here tonight, tonight's a little bit weird because we've got to do some housekeeping tonight, we've got to do some teaching rather than preaching, which means there's not a lot of application tonight as much as there is information. Five weeks ago, I put in front of you five men as elder candidates. And here's the problem with eldership. If you're a church like ours that's filled with people who don't know Jesus but they're just kind of trying to learn about Him, then you don't really have any idea when it comes to the idea of church eldership. In fact, if you ask people about church eldership who have no history in church, they think it's some kind of Jedi counsel or something. Or better yet, I asked Mace, one of my neighbors yesterday as we were working on our lawns, "What do you think of when I say, 'church elder?'" And he was like, "You mean the Mormons?" I'm like, "No, I don't. I don't mean like that at all." And so, for people who haven't grown up in church or even historically Baptist...and my belief system is always that you can make fun of your own kind. And so the funny thing about the Baptists is they're such defenders of the truth, and they can completely ignore the call to eldership. They're like, "No, we have elders. We call them deacons." "Well, what do you call your deacons?" "Huh?" It's like they completely ignore the 1 Timothy passage and what it says. Anyway, I can make fun of them because I am one. You talk to church people, and there's just as much confusion as there is among people who aren't church folk. And so, in fact, church people seem to have even more elder baggage than lost folk, because they'll come in and they'll have a story about how these power-mongering men split the church or how they abused their authority. And so, here's what I want to do tonight, and my purpose is two fold. I want to teach on what eldership is, and I want to teach on what the qualifications are to be and elder.

Now, before I can talk to you about elders, I have to talk to you about the church, because you can't explain to somebody what a driver is if they don't know what a car is. And so, I need to spend some time talking about the church. Now, before all is said and done tonight, I am going to show you anywhere between 40 and 60 passages in Scripture although I want you to stay in 1 Timothy. And I'm going to be throwing up passages behind me so that if you're interested in this stuff and you just like to argue or just like to know, you can see the text that I'm not just pulling this out of thin air but these are out of the Scriptures. So, in order for us to get to eldership, let us talk about the church. The church in Scripture, there are all these metaphors that exist to describe her and to talk about what she is. Let me give you a couple of them. One of the most popular ones is that the church is the bride of Christ. Now, let me tell you why I think this is so interesting. Notice that He doesn't say that the church is the wife of Christ, but the bride. Anyone know why? If you're a husband, do not answer this right now. It would be horribly detrimental for you. Intrinsic within marriage is difficulty, alright. When you put two sinful human beings in a house together where they can be kind of stripped of the mask and pretense, difficulty is bound to arise. Correct? Know why it's so quite in here? Because most of you are single. The only people who don't believe this are engaged or they're newlyweds. And every time you say this, there's some couple just back from their honeymoon who's like, "Not us, baby. Not us. I can't even fathom it." Alright. Well, I'll see you in my office in about six months. So, marriage carries with it difficulty. Because you put to sinners in a room together and there's going to be conflict. MTV has made billions of dollars off this idea. Alright, put sinners together, film it. It's the same principle. You put two sinful people together and there is difficulty. But on the wedding day, on the day of the

bride there is no difficulty. There is nothing but a deep abounding love and hope. Right? Like the doors swing open, the girl walks in, all white, decked out, beautiful, the dude's as good looking as he's ever going to get, she's walking down the aisle and start talking to that husband, "Is there a more beautiful woman in the world?"

"No, there is not."

"Would you like to hang out with your friends?"

"No, I would not."

"Is there anything that could come between you?"

"No, there is not."

I mean, nobody's on their wedding day exchanging vows going, "I don't even like this dude. What? Rich or poor? Okay..." No, the bride element is that Christ has deep, rich, abounding affections for the church. It's this bride idea, "Is there anything that's insurmountable?"

"No, there's not."

"Is there anyone more beautiful?"

"No, there's not."

"Would you rather be with another?"

"No, I would not."

The bride of Jesus, the bride of Christ. He is deeply in love with the church.

Alright, so we're called the bride of Christ, but we're also called the body of Christ. This gives me another opportunity to rant on what has historically, and specifically in the last 50 years, been the ideology of many churches that lost people carry a virus that if we get around them or get too close to them, we'll get it on us. So, if we bump into them at Starbucks, we'll go, "Aw, I got fornication on me. Get it off! Get it off of me! Do you have one of those wipe things?" And it's this idea that if we get too close to sinners, we'll become like them, which is death to the church. Alright, you are the body of Christ. You are the feet and the hands and the voice and the presence of Jesus Christ on the earth. Our goal is not to protect a moral standard. Now, you've got to get this because one of the most devastating things that have occurred to us is that we've become a voting block. We are not the guardians of a moral standard. We are the hands and feet of Christ that do not legislate morality; we let the gospel do that. And it gets really confusing when our goal is to legislate morality. It doesn't work. You are Christ incarnate. You are the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. And for the record, the most common accusation that was made against Jesus was that He was the friend of sinners. You are the body of Jesus Christ.

We are the bride of Christ, we are the body of Christ, we are the dwelling place of God. When I was a kid, the rules for going to church were that you had to dress up and, for some reason, you couldn't wear a hat. Like, for some reason, Christ got infuriated if you wore a ball cap into the deal. Like, not only must you be destroyed, but your family and your pets and all that you own burned, alright. Like, you wore a hat into church and it went Old Testament. I mean, it went outright Old Testament. Like, for some reason the hat was disrespectful. Now, I get the heart behind the idea. I get the heart that God is due reverence, but with the idea is when you begin to equate reverence and clothes. That's where you get off. And I would say that our generation is no better, because what we do is we have ridden the pendulum to the other side, and we equate suits with death. And that's just as stupid. It is. "This place is dead, man. They sing hymns, they wear suits." What? You've become what you hate. Guess what. You get to be the next generation that believes such stupid stuff. Dress doesn't make the man, the heart makes the man. One of these days, I'm just going to suit it, alright. I mean, I gotta go buy one,

but I'm gonna front it for you just to prove my point here. Now, the reason being is somewhere along the way, like we call this place the sanctuary or or the worship center, the center of worship. In reality, it's brick and sheet rock. This place is no more holy than your car. It's just not. What makes it holy is that a group of men and women who know Christ come together and celebrate Him. That's what makes it holy. And that could occur in my living room or a bar. Now, we bought the Broken Spoke Bar for our church plant in Frisco. We purchased it, rebuilt it and restructured it. It was an old bar, now it's a church. It's not like God's going, "I can't bless this place. Miller Lite was once consumed on these premises. I cannot do that. I'm sorry. I don't do that." Okay, so places aren't holy, people are. The funny thing is that we're having to fight this battle again when Jesus completely handled this at the well. He comes across this Samaritan woman, and she goes, "How am I supposed to follow you? You Jews say we're supposed to worship on that mountain. My forefathers say I'm supposed to worship in this temple. Where am I supposed to worship?" And what does Jesus say? It's not about buildings, it's about your heart. People are the dwelling place of God, not places.

I'm not going to cover all of these, I will mention all of them. The church is the pillar and support of truth. The church is here to display the glory of God. The church is here to display the wisdom of God. I love that one. I know, in working with churches, it feels like we're failing on that, but the church, when it's healthy, exists to display the wisdom of God. That means that when I care more about you than me, when I'm connected in in such a way with the body of Christ that when you mourn, I mourn and when you rejoice, I rejoice. When that happens, the world sees the manifold wisdom of God. That's why we gotta fight for that, labor for that and battle for that. It shows the authority and power of Jesus. Let me clarify here because I don't know what's happening lately, I don't know what books we're reading out there, but I've had young men just kind of approach me about dominion theology, about how the world's been given to us, so we should just take it. And you know, usually those dudes are living with their mom. And I always just want to go, "Get dominion over your bedroom and then we'll worry about the world. But that's neither here nor there.

Let me try to explain this authority and power of Christ to you and how it works within the confines of the church. At the 11:00AM service, Jeff and Cheryl Scruggs were here, and they were sitting about four rows back on my right. About 12 years ago, Cheryl was in the middle of an affair, and Jeff found out about it and divorced her. After the divorce, she was still seeing this man, he was just devastated and heart broken and Cheryl got saved. Cheryl came to know Christ and immediately started to try to reconcile the marriage. She said, "Hey, I made a mistake. I think Christ can bring us back together. I think He can heal us." And Jeff was like, "Get out of my face, woman. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. I'm not interested." And for seven years, Cheryl said, "How about now? How about now? How about now? No? How about now? No? What about now? You going to give me a second shot now? How about now?" In the process of those seven year, Jeff comes to know Jesus Christ. One day, he gets to be too tired to outrun God, which happens to all of us, and they remarry. They remarry and they have this really unbelievable marriage and they have this really unbelievable ministry right now of hurting couples. That's the authority and power of Jesus Christ working in His bride. That's it. That's the authority and power. So people go, "I could never do that." "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Let me show you the authority and power of Jesus Christ."

"I could never forgive."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Someone did. Someone did by the power of Christ. Maybe we should submit to Him."

Alright, so the church is the presence of the authority and power of Jesus Christ. Now, this is what the church is, now let's talk about who the church is.

There's four groups that could be addressed when it says church. The first one is the Church Universal. The Church Universal is all believers everywhere. Like, you and I, we are a part of....this is why I love the church, and this is one of the reasons why it was so inviting to me early on, although I wasn't raised in a church home. What I loved about it was you could look around and see that this wasn't just an upper middle class, white religion. There were people who were very educated and people who couldn't spell at all. There were people who were very poor and people who were very rich. There were Africans, and Chinese, and the Vietnamese, and it was like, all across the world, we're part of this gigantic body of men and women who profess Jesus Christ. And the Scriptures, they address the Church Universal. And we are a passionate believer in the Church Universal. In fact, 10% of our annual budget goes to the Church Universal. We have a team in Romania right now pulling and cleaning teeth. We have a team that just left for Guatemala. We have a team that next week is going to Yucatan. Me and my family get on a plane to Asia all to minister to the body at large and to see men and women come to know the Lord. It is the Church Universal.

Now, the second group of people is the church in a given area. So, a lot of times in Scripture, you'll find the Scriptures saying basically this, "To the church in D/FW, I write....." Okay? And so, sometimes when you see the word "church" in Scripture, it's not only talking to the church universal, but it's also talking to the church in the area. So, here at the Village, we're passionate believers about the church in the area, in that we have planted churches in the area: one in Frisco, one in Keller, we're on a time line for a year and a half to two years from not to launch one in Denton. We just are believers in planting churches. On top of that, we want to partner with churches in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area. You saw a video earlier tonight. We are headed to inner-city Dallas to give back to the city what we took when we all jetted out to the suburbs. We have a responsibility there, and so we're going back in. Then we're going to paint and we're going to build and we're going to train and we're going to give back. We're going to give back. Why? Because they're our brothers and sisters. And you don't ignore your brothers and sisters. You don't do it, so we're going back down. Stop at the "Transform" table. Fill it out, sign up, let's get down there.

Now, not only will it address the church universal and the church in an area, but it also addresses, in the Scriptures, the church of a certain city. So, "To the church at Flower Mound, I write..." Okay? And so, we've worked very hard at trying to....this one's not easy, alright...to build relationships with churches in this city. From the moment I got here, I've been trying to take pastors to lunch, because we've been put here by God to reach people. And the funny thing about all the political squabbling and people argument that goes on about "how you're stealing our people..." You wanna know what's so ridiculous about that? Did you know that Flower Mound, Lewisville and Highland Village is 60% unreached? Which means that 60% of our area has no church home and does not know Jesus Christ. And so we're complaining and squabbling with each other? Pretty dumb. So, we've tried really hard. In fact, a couple nights ago, Lauren and I went out with Tim Stevenson and his wife, Deb, from Crossroads Bible and had a great time with them. We've become close friends with Kevin Evans over at Valley Creek. We are getting together and praying and talking and longing for the kingdom of God in this city. Alright, the church in the city.

Then the last one, is a local congregation. Now, God's plan for maturity and God's plan for growth revolves around the local context, the church as a congregation, a local body. Now, the reason being is that by being known and by being connected, your flaws will be tilled to the surface and you will have to deal with them. To stick with the same kind of illustration that we've been using, the reason marriage is so difficult is that you get found out. I mean, all your covering, all your mask wearing and all your pretending, it becomes impossible to do that anymore. And the funny thing is, in the limited counseling I've done with men, usually men who are furious with their wives are furious with their wives because their wives know who they are. And so, they say really dumb things in my office. They'd be like, "Oh, she always complains about how lazy I am. I just want to watch the game." "What?" "Well, she's always saying I don't do anything. I'm just trying to take a nap." Okay, I'm going to play this back for you and see if you can catch it. Seven years, I've been married seven years, and I love my wife very much. And we have a great marriage, but we had some bumps, man. We've had some impasse. We've had those moments where we're like, "I'm not giving and you aren't either. What do we do? What do we do here?" The funny thing is, in those moments, things that you wouldn't even guess about yourself get revealed. I'm selfish. I'm impatient. Those things get stirred to the surface. And guess what, you gotta deal with them. It's why I always press single guys and single girls, the worst thing you can do is live alone. Get roommates. If you're going to get married, get roommates. Because living together is where junk comes out. If you're an absolute slob, then your roommate is probably going to be the one that's like, "Yo, man. Why is there a tuna sandwich in the bathroom? This happens again and I'm punching you in the throat, man. I'm just telling you. Don't do that again. Why are you eating in the bathroom, man?" Let me just be really completely honest with you on this point, and then we'll move on. God's heart and His plan and His desire is not numeric. God never rejoices over a massive amount of people coming together and swimming in an inch and a half of water. Are you tracking with me? God does not look down from the heavens at two, three, six, seven thousand people coming together on a Sunday morning, not connected, not growing, not digging into the Scriptures, and go, "Oh, this is what I envisioned when I died for these people." Right now, it's great that my daughter loves the kiddie pool. She'll get in that thing and splash around and it's cute and everything's fine with it. By the time that she's 20, she probably should be in the big pool. I mean, if she's still dancing around in the kiddie pool, we got issues. Don't we? We do. And you can giggle, but I hoping you're following my point here. Because we've got far too many people who have been in the water 20 years still wearing floaties. God's never impressed by numerics, not when numbers are parallel with lack of depth. It's the reason why I just pound on you, "Get committed." You don't have to be committed here. Listen, we're not for everybody. That's why I love Crossroads and Valley Creek and knowing who they are. Because it gives me the opportunity when people are like, "I don't like your music here." Well, that's awesome. If you can't live with it, there are two other places that do music that's a little bit different than ours. Go there. They're still the body of Christ, still the church, just not us. That's fine. Go. Be blessed. I'll call them and tell them you are awesome and you're coming. And you're coming, they have to put you to work. But you've got to be connected somewhere, because that's how you mature. That's how you grow into the fullness of Christ. Now, this is who the church is, what the church is.

Now, what we know in the New Testament is that every one of these churches, every church that we have in the New Testament has a group of elders. Watch this, I'm going to go through these very quickly. All the churches that Paul founded had elders, that's Acts 14. If you know a lot about New Testament Christianity, that's a lot of churches. Jerusalem had elders, Ephesus had elders, Crete had

elders, all the in the dispersion of the Roman Empire had elders. Now, I don't know what you know about history but Rome is large, very large and very powerful. All the churches in Rome had elders, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, they all have elders. Now, the role of elders in all of those churches and in all churches today, according to the Scriptures, are two fold: Job number one, they govern. They sit on top of the church. That's where we get "overseer." They sit on top of the church and gauge the overall health of the church. So their job is to be on top of the church looking down upon the church and saying, "We need to get better at this. We've got to grow in this. This is a threat to our unity. This is a threat to our mission." And they stay on top of the church not in a condescending way, you'll find that out here in a minute when we get to qualifications, but they sit on top of it and they protect the mission, they protect the unity and they oversee the daily life of the church.

Now, let me be really honest with you because this is where fights happen. How this governing works itself out is not found in Scripture. They're commanded to govern, but how the church is to be governed is not found anywhere. So, that I know of, there are at least ten different models of how elders govern. Some of them have an open number of elders, which means they can have up to fifty or sixty or seventy elders. Some have a closed group of just like eight to ten to twelve, twelve's always a wildly popular number. Some say nobody on staff can be an elder. Others say only executive staff can be elders. Some, like us, are a hybrid of those two. There's just all these different rules. In fact, some will say two family members cannot be on the elder board because they might try to form a coup. Here's what I always tell you, if you want to do church, if you want to kind of study the history of the church, you're going to and nobody will tell you the history, all you have to do is look at what the rules are on what eldership. If you're like, "How does a man become an elder? How do elders operate?" And if they hand you like the Dead Sea Scrolls, like 400 pages of what has to happen, you're looking at a place that historically has had a lot of conflict. Because a lot of those rules are birthed out of burns. So the reason why two family members can't be on the elder board is because one time, two family members were on the elder board and caused a lot of trouble for the church. I mean, if there's a long, long list, chances are the place was pretty bloody historically.

So they govern. They sit on top. How this works itself out is up to the individual church. They gotta pull us up, they gotta pray it through, they gotta say, "How can we do this best? Who can lead us best? How do we...?" They've got to do it. And even in this area, I know exactly how Denton Bible does its eldership, it is nowhere near how we do it. I know how Valley Creek does it, it is nowhere near how we do it. I know how Crossroads does it, we've got some things similar, but we're still different. And listen, that's okay. The problem is when people start thinking that their way is "the way" instead of "a way". And by the way, that law pretty much sits on top of all of church. Whenever your way becomes "the way" instead of "a way," you're off. The New Testament is so silent on a lot of these things because the New Testament is a missionary handbook. It fits into any culture anywhere in the world. Where the Old Testament was so stringent on what worship looked like and when you blew the shofar and how you did this and what you were supposed to wear, and then the New Testament almost goes silent. It's because it was going to fit into every culture in the world.

Okay now, their second job is they are teachers. They govern, they oversee, they set the direction and mission of the church and then they teach. A man who cannot teach the Scriptures is not allowed to be an elder. This doesn't mean that they can do what preachers do. This doesn't mean that they can stand up and preach to a crowd of 700, 800, 1000 or 2000. They just have to be able to teach. Which means

if you walked up to one of them and said, “Hey, why do you guys believe what you believe about the role of women?,” they could say, “Do you have your Bible? Let me show you.” If you came up to them and said, “What does the church believe about sovereignty?,” they would go, “Well, do you have your Bible and seven hours? Okay, well sit down. We'll start here. Psalm 115:3, let's start there...” “What does your church believe about the end times?” “Well, do you have your Bible?” And if they can't do that, then they're not qualified. Why? Because there's a way that seems right to man, and in the end, everyone dies. So a man is not allowed to lead by his gut or his feeling; he must lead by the truth of Scripture. If he doesn't know the Scriptures, he is not ready. It's not that he's a bad guy; he's just not ready. There must be a devotion to the Word of God and an ability to systematically teach it in order for a man to be an elder.

Now, you can see that this position has an unbelievable amount of power. I mean you sit above the church and say, “We've got to get better in this...we're going this way...we're moving this way...this is what we're supposed to do...this is what we've got to do,” and then you get to teach the Scriptures. So you can see that this is an unbelievably powerful position in the local church. So, the Bible has an unbelievable amount of qualifications on what has to be present if a man's going to be an elder. Like, we're just going to be in 1 Timothy, and we're not going to get the chance to even get to Titus, but in 1 Timothy, you're going to find, in seven verses, sixteen qualifications for a man to be an elder. Now once again, this does not mean that a man is bad if he doesn't meet up with this list; it just means that he's not ready. Now, let me say this, and we'll get into the qualifications. If you're in here and you're going, “Why do you just keep saying man? Are women not allowed to be elders?” The answer is no, they're not. And here's what I would tell you. If you want to understand this, I don't have time to teach it tonight, you can get a CD from our resource room or online called “The Role of Women,” which is an hour and fifty minute on God's call on woman in the church. It is not restrictive at all. God's heart for women in the church is huge. So, get that and listen to it if this is something you want to know about. It is a very freeing, freeing truth that God has called women to serve Him and how He's done that. So, I don't have time to do that tonight, but get it if you're interested in that.

Let's get into the qualifications of an elder. 1 Timothy 3, we'll start in verse 1. Don't panic, because we're going to fly through this. *“It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.”* So here's the first qualification. The first qualification is that he has to want to do it. And let me talk to you young men. A desire for leadership in the church is not sinful. I mean, we just meet guys all the time that feel like they have to apologize for longing and desiring to serve the church. No, it's actually a qualification. You have to have it to get the job. I mean, you don't drag a guy, kicking and screaming, into governing. Let me try to unpack it this way. When I got saved, when Christ found me (He found me, I sure wasn't looking for Him), when Christ became real in my heart, I had this unbelievable, insatiable thirst for Him. So, I mean I'm just reading everything I can get my hands on. I devoured every Max Lucado book in like a day and a half. That was a long time ago, there was only two of them. I read his books and studied the Scriptures, I just wanted to teach. And I would teach anyone who would listen. I mean, anyone at my first gig ever when I was a recreation coordinator for vacation Bible school at First Baptist Church, Texas City. And then from there, I started teaching 4th grade Sunday School. From there, I started teaching children's church, which is a tough gig. I'd be standing up there, trying to teach them the holes in dispensational theology, and they just had a hard time tracking with me. It's like, “You guys are lazy. You read Grudem's “Systematic Theology” and come back next week.” It was 1st through 5th graders, there were all these

distractions, I'd work all week long, I'd think I had this perfect lesson, I'd be right in the middle of spilling my guts and a kid will be like, "What's that thing in your throat?" "It's my Adam's apple you little punk. What's that thing in your eye? <POW!!!>" Here was the thing, there was something hurting in me, and I don't know how to explain it. Guys who feel called to preach and teach, they know exactly what I'm talking about. There was this haunting, burning thing in me that I had to teach. I had to teach, and I would teach anyone who would listen. Now, I know I am young for what I do, but I can tell you, for the last thirteen years, I have taught anyone who would let me. And listen, I know we got a lot of seminary guys that come here. Let me tell you my problem, historically, with a lot of seminary guys. They think they're due the big stage. And if you don't offer them the big kind of beautiful piece, they're unwilling to teach. I question your call to teach. I think that maybe it's about you and not the call. Because when the call is put into your heart, you'll teach anyone who'll listen. You'll teach second graders, you'll teach third graders, you'll teach anyone you can. You just got to teach or you die. Okay listen, it's not sinful to want to lead. You don't need to repent of that aspiration.

Okay, let's keep reading. Verse 2, "*An overseer, then, must be above reproach,...*" Okay, they have to aspire, and they have to be above reproach, which means that they have wrestled and conquered blatant, overt, public sinful behavior. I'll give you the example. We put five guys up on stage thirty days ago and said, "If you know any sin in their lives, write us." We didn't get anything. You wanna know why? Because those five guys have conquered, they're not perfect, they've just conquered those. Okay, the power of Christ, the grace of Christ moving freely in their heart have conquered those sins in them. If you're still wrestling, you're just not ready for this office. It's okay, keep wrestling. They wrestled too. No man gets to that point clean. No man is just born like that. Okay, so he has to be above reproach.

He is "*...the husband of one wife,...*" Or a better way to translate this is "a one woman kind of man." Now, this has causes monumental problems throughout history, but I can tell you this. Paul Matthies who is an elder candidate, he is single. We did get an e-mail in going, "I thought a single man couldn't be an elder." Well, it's very difficult to interpret this text that way when the man who wrote it was the Apostle Paul who just happened to be single. Not only was he single, but he said...and by the way, I know that this crowd is heavily single, and so, you'll know this text probably better than you know any other Scripture...He said actually, that it's better for a man to be single, and the only reason that he should get married is if he burns with passion. So, at every service, that voice has been heavily male, and I would stress that they probably know very little of the rest of Scripture. But they know that they have not been called to remain single. In fact, in circles, and I was one time in those circles, it's called "the gift." And you'll hear them go, "I have not been given the gift." And so, the guy who writes this is saying, "Listen, being single is a desired way to live your life because you can do more for the kingdom." So then, to take this and go, "Oh, a man has to be married," that's not what's going on here. He's talking about the devotion to the one wife.

Let's keep reading, he must be, temperate. This simply means that they have control of their stomach. This means that they can have a glass of wine at dinner and not end up dancing on the table later in the night. They are not gluttons. They are not mastered by their stomach. They're temperate. They have self-control.

This next part is pretty big, they are prudent and respectful. What's going on here is they have a keen

self-awareness, which means that if you walked up to them and said, "Tell me what your strengths are" and they listed their strengths to you, you would say, "That's right." And then if you said, "Tell me your weaknesses" and they told you their weaknesses, you would go, "Yeah, that's right." The elder boardroom is not a place for self-discovery. I was walking with a buddy one time in college and I was like, "What's the Lord doing in your life?" And he's like, "You know, He's just really been making me humble. I mean, I'm just really getting humble." And I just began to think, "Can you brag about humility?" Have you ever met the guy like that? You know like, "I was looking around at church and I saw all those people, and I was thinking, 'If they were humble like I was...we could reach this country for Christ.'" Okay, there's a disjoint there with how he views himself and how the rest of us view him. If you got a guy going on and on about how humble he is, the whole table's looking at each other, having a conversation with their eyes. Like, "Can you believe him? Slap him. Who invited him?" I mean, that's all going on visually at the dinner party. It's a disjoint between how they see themselves and how the world sees them. They can't be that way; you have to know who you are, and I would say who you are in Christ. If you miss that piece, you don't belong in the room.

Alright, they are hospitable. This simply means that they do not view those outside of Christ as our enemy. Hospitality and the gift of hospitality is not baking muffins for small group. Hospitality is opening your home to what the Scriptures call strangers, to the lost, the different, the down and out. Hospitality, an elder must realize that those outside of the kingdom of God are not our enemy, but those we should love. If they don't get that, they're not ready.

They should be "*able to teach.*" We already did that; I'm not going to spend a lot of time on that. "*Not addicted to wine.*" We don't need to spend a lot of time there.

Now, these next three go together, and I'm going to give you a passion of mine, and I'm going to tell you why I believe churches get in a lot of trouble in the elder system. They cannot be pugnacious, but gentle and peaceable. Let me give you a passion of mine and where I think churches go wrong. A man with sound doctrine and no compassion can never be allowed in the elder room. A man with sound biblical doctrine but no grace and love for people can never be allowed to elder. Truth is not a club, it's a mirror. Are you tracking with me on that? Truth is not a club to be wielded for battle, it is a mirror to show people their lives. And men who find their value in their own knowledge of theology and lack love, compassion and grace can never be given authority and power. If I have a say here, I won't even let them teach. I don't care if they have it memorized. I don't care if I agree with them wholeheartedly. If you lack grace, you lack all there is, even if I agree with you. You gotta be careful of this, "We just speak the truth, and they can just take it or leave it." You gotta be careful of that. Christ seemed to be filled with grace, He seemed to be patient. Like do you remember when Nicodemus came to Him and snuck in the middle of the night, and he basically said, "Hey, me and the pharisees have been talking; we know you're God. How do we get into heaven?" And Jesus says, "A man has to be born again." Remember what Nicodemus said? "How's a man supposed to climb up into his mom's womb?" I mean, he's a Jew, they speak in pictures. He knows that's not what He meant literally. But does Jesus go, "You know what. I'm done with you. Get out of My house." No, He keeps trying to explain it to him despite the fact that Nicodemus is being a smart-aleck. It seems to be grace, it seems to be compassion, it seems to be patience. I'm a reformed brother, a five pointer. There are few other five pointers who I've met who I care for at all. In fact, I don't let them come to my house, because they want to beat people up. Unacceptable.

Alright, let's keep reading. Two more, "...*free from the love of money.*" That speaks for itself. Verse 4, "*He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),...*" This simply says this, "If you are not teaching the Scriptures at home, if you are not praying with your wife and children at home, if you are not ministering to your house, stay away from the bride of Christ. If you can't lead your own bride, leave mine alone." That's what Jesus just said. I can tell you that there is a ferocity among the elders, among the staff, specifically the younger ones, to protect our children. There was a great movie that came out years ago, I think it won Best Picture. It was called "Ferris Bueller's Day Off." And in "Ferris Bueller's Day Off," there was a sickly young lad named Cameron. Do you remember the movie? He wouldn't get out of bed, he thought he was dying, he took all the pills. They stole his dad's Ferrari, if you'll remember, and they drove out and played in Chicago, and then they got home and tried to take the mileage off the Ferrari and they couldn't do it. And in a scene that I thought was unbelievably profound, giggle if you want, is when they couldn't get the mileage off, Cameron snapped and he started kicking that Ferrari over and over again. Anybody remember what he said? "I hate this car. I hate this car. You love this car. I hate this car. It's about this car. You love this car. I hate this car." Do you ever wonder why so many pastors' kids freak out? I'm going to be really gentle here, because I have no idea what my daughter's going to do, and she seems to be shady right now. She does, man. She climbed out from under her bed two days ago. She had hid cookie dough that she stole out of the fridge under there. It's going to be a ride, man. Do you want to know how many pastor's kids freak out? Because somewhere along the line, the minister believes that his primary ministry is the church. I have begged sweet Christ and asked for wisdom that my daughter would not one day kick the side of a church building going, "I hate this place. I hate this place. You love this place. I hate this place." So, I've talked to the elders from day one. We came here eight months pregnant with Audrey. I, from day one, said, "If we grow to Saturday night services, I'll do them for you until my daughter starts school. The second my daughter starts school, I will not do Saturday night service even if it means we turn a thousand people away. Because you can give me Thursday, Friday off all you want, but my daughter's in school, that gives me not one day with my daughter and son. I'm not doing it. Solve the space issue before she starts kindergarten. You got two years. I'm just not going to do it." The elder must manage his household well. It does not mean that it's perfect, it just means that he's done all that Christ has asked to impart the truth to his family.

Alright, let's finish it up, "...*not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.*" This just means that if you put a young believer in that kind of power, their head might get swollen and they might begin to be proud or arrogant. I can tell you that there are two men up for candidacy this time that are in their 20's, but I will also tell you that we have watched them, over the last three years, serve in some unbelievable ways. Paul Matthies was hired on as a secretary, and for a year, worked as a secretary. From there he moved, honestly, he's had like eight different jobs here, none of which are really sexy jobs. They have set up chairs, they have cleaned kitchens, they have been paid next to nothing. Because I don't know if you knew this, but the word "intern" in Greek means "slave." At least someone told me that once. You know, they have worked hard and long. I would put their knowledge of Scripture and the things of God up against anybody else. They're young, but they're not newcomers. In fact, I did get one e-mail going, "These guys sure seem young." And I e-mailed the guy back saying, "Do you think I should be an elder?" "Oh yeah, pastor. You should absolutely be an elder. I can't imagine that you wouldn't be an elder here. You're the lead

pastor.” And so I just wrote him back, “Both of these young men have been Christians longer than me.”

Verse 7, “*And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church...*” So, you've got to be above reproach within the church, with Christian people, but you also have this idea that outside the church, they live a life that intrigues those outside of the kingdom of God. They don't look at him and go, “That guy's an elder in the church?!?” but that they go, “You know what, okay. I can see that.” He lives his life in such a way that he ascribes value and glory of Jesus Christ. He ascribes glory to Jesus Christ in the way he lives his life.

So this week, I sat down with the five guys who are up for eldership. This is how the process works. Thirty days ago, I set them up here and said, “Hey listen, if you of any sin in their life, let us know.” We haven't heard anything. So now, what happens is when I fly back and get in in July, we'll start two months of theological, philosophical training. If they survive the training, then in late August or early September, we will put them in front of you, pray over them and they will be full on elders. I sat down this week, and I started asking them about what they liked about this place and what they thought we needed to do better. This is five minutes of that talk.

What is your favorite aspect of the Village?

“My favorite aspect of the Village Church is probably the people. I'm always excited and moved by what God is doing here among us. And just to see how He has taken and really brought a people in where He's taking them excites me. I love walking through the sanctuary and walking through these halls and seeing the people and knowing stories, knowing what God is doing here and just being humbled and excited to be a part of that.”

“I think it's just the presence of God is here. All the changes that are happening, and I see it in people. And this church has gone through so much in the time frame that I've been here. And to see it come alive and people being healed and their lives are being transformed. It's just like night and day, and you just want to hold on to that.”

“So many times before, I've come out of services feeling like someone has put a nice yellow smiley sticker on my forehead as I walked out saying, “You're the best. Have a great day.” And I don't feel that way coming out of this service. There's just truth being spoken from the pulpit, and that's real important to me. It's a safe place for us to be real.”

“You know, the Village has such a welcoming spirit with the message of forgiveness and healing and grace, along with being able to teach the truth. And it's great to be able to see the people respond to that message. I think has a tendency to think that they have to perform to earn acceptance with God, and yet that's not the message at the Village.”

“Simply the way God is moving here. First of all, to break off the chains of legalism from the church, and I'm speaking personally here. Every time I'm here at worship, I'm reminded of John 15:15, where Jesus says, 'I no longer call you servants, but friends.' And I think for so long that so many of us in the church have tried to work for God, and we've forgotten what it means to just enjoy Him and be His

friend.”

What is your hope for the future at the Village?

“My hope for the future, and I've said this before, is that we would continue to be a safe place for prodigals and that we would be a safe place for prodigals to come home. I was one myself, and in reality, we all were. And that we would be a place that is welcoming to those who are hurting and welcoming to those who are outside the faith. And in the same light, that we would not become the older brother in that parable, that we would become the older brother who has this sense of entitlement that he deserves the party, that he deserves all the attention.”

“That the church stopped worrying about being good and went back to God. You know, there's a lot of good programs out there, except if the basis is not upon God's will for the church. And so, the building blocks build upon everything of what God's will has for the individual, for the home group and for the church. I just want us to stay focused on that.”

“I think our biggest thing that we need to do is be a community of real people that continue to chase after God's heart. And we need to be good stewards of all the opportunities, our money, our relationships. We need to use that to impact the kingdom.”

“You know, my main hope for the Village is that the Village will grow up and equip believers in Christ so that they'll really understand what it is to follow Christ and be able to experience the blessing of obedience.”

“My hope for us is that, you know, we are currently a place where so many hurting people come to experience healing. And we are so blessed to have people coming in our midst who say, “You know, I've been beat up by the world, I've been beat up by the church, and I'm here to be healed. And we've got to be a hospital for so many people. But my hope is that those people who are coming to be healed will one day become healers themselves. And that they will come, and they'll be refreshed, and their wounds will be bound, but then they'll go back out and fight the fight of faith.”

What are some things we can do better here at the Village?

“There are so many people here who desperately want to be connected deeper than they are. They're desperately seeking authentic relationships. They're desperately seeking community and depth. And we have a responsibility to make sure those pathways are as free from obstacles as possible.”

“Connecting through discipleship. We started through the home, but the discipleship factor is, I think, what we need to grow into, so that we can start bring up the next generation of leaders in the church.”

“With our space constraints it's really difficult to foster a community that is interwoven together. We're striving to do that with the zones, and that's exciting. And I think that that can become a real thing for each and every person. And then, I really want to see a bigger focus on the youth. I would really like to see that part of our church really grow and foster, because our youth are our generation tomorrow.”

“You know, I believe that there needs to be a greater emphasis on discipleship and mentoring and accountability here at the Village both for men and women. Jesus said, *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God”* And, you know, all believers, specifically the believers here at the Village need to learn how to get into God's word themselves and feed themselves, so then God can use His word to change their hearts.”

“My prayer is just that we would get better and better at sharing the gospel effectively, clearly and adequately with the world.”

I plan on giving my life to this place. I have no moves in my future. Outside of God speaking to me through an audible voice, through something burning and yet not being consumed, I am here. And the good thing is that I know that that's only happened once. And so, the odds are good. I plan on growing old here and if the Lord carries, dying here and being buried here. All that being said, my hope is that some of you young men in here would hear what's been spoken here today and a seed would be birthed in your heart to be this kind of man. To be the kind of man that is above reproach, knowledgeable of the Scriptures, the lover of one wife, managing your household well, teaching the Scriptures, that you, maybe twenty years from now are on this DVD and upon the interview you say, “You know, I remember when you did this deal back in '06, and I remember just my heart burning to be that kind of man as I grew older.” This is my hope.

Let's pray, “Father, I thank you for tonight. And I know it's kind of a weird one, there's no application, but I pray that, where there is application, we would hear it and we would believe in the deep places that we are Your bride. That You would help us comprehend that we are Your body. And so, Father, I pray that there would be a birthing in the souls of young men to want to be this, to want to get here, to want to work through our junk, to be these kind of men when all is said and done. Father, I thank You for tomorrow. There is something very holy about rest and about partying. I know You say in Leviticus 23 that those who do not party perish. And so, Father, I pray that tomorrow we might enjoy one another, and that we might enjoy a day off, and that we might enjoy friends and sun and all that You have given us. I pray that it wouldn't be wasted on us, but that we would realize that we are really partaking in the life that you create and sustain. And so, I pray that it would be filled with joy. And if we find our hearts in turmoil, I pray that maybe we would find peace. I love You, Father. I pray that if any of these young men on the screen behind me tonight are wolves in sheep's clothing, that You would out them, that You would out them and protect us. I thank You for men and women who stuck their head in here tonight, who maybe don't know you or who're just seeking you out. I pray that You spoke to them tonight or at least that they understand a little bit more who You are and what Your church is. And I pray more and more that You would stir their hearts towards You. We love You. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen.”