

Humility and unity as we work through elder recommendations

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Brothers,

Over the past couple of days I’ve been reflecting on Christian humility as we continue the elder recommendation process. It seems like there are two distinct areas we may need to navigate with any candidate:

1. **Character / relationships**

We need to work through any character concerns or relationship tensions that surface during the process.

2. **Qualifications / interpretation and shepherding**

We also need to be sensitive to where people are in their understanding of the qualifications in 1 Timothy and Titus. In particular, we need to keep in mind both:

- **What Scripture allows** (our doctrinal conviction), and
- **How we shepherd the church toward unity** as we apply those convictions (timing, prudence, and “above reproach” in the life of this congregation).

As it relates to divorce and eldership, we have agreed from our study that Scripture does not automatically disqualify a divorced man from serving as an elder (study materials here: <https://www.shepherd.mx.mxcoc.xyz/OneWife/index.html> and our Elder summary [here](#)). Even with that conviction, I believe we should proceed with humility and patience as we listen, teach, and shepherd the body through questions and concerns.

One quote that has been on my mind (often attributed to Augustine) is:
“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

We need to be clear and unwavering about the *essentials* of the gospel (what would we require of someone wanting to be baptized). Beyond that, we should extend liberty and charity as we work through secondary matters and applications - especially when we’re dealing with tender consciences, past hurts, or misunderstandings. That doesn’t mean we avoid teaching or leading, but that we do so with love and patience.

Two passages that are shaping my posture here:

- **1 Corinthians 9** — Paul describes his “rights,” yet lays them down for the sake of others and the gospel.
- **Philippians 2:1–11** — Christ’s humility is held up as our model.

I’m attaching a document I a helpful framework for how we might handle concerns (including situations where only a few individuals raise issues) in a way that is both biblical and genuinely shepherding.

Please take a look and share any edits/corrections to my thinking. Most of all, I’m praying that God will help us maintain unity, speak the truth in love, and move forward wisely.

— Bret

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Please keep praying for Eric, Steve H., and Keaton. May God be with us in the meetings tonight and on December 31.



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Contents

Is it important that the church body recognize and trust a man who is being asked to serve as an elder?..... 1

What if only two or three people have issues?2

How should we decide which hill we want to die on (which principle is worth sticking to even if some may leave) 3

Is it important that the church body recognize and trust a man who is being asked to serve as an elder?

It matters a lot that the **church body can joyfully recognize and trust** a man who is being asked to serve as an elder—even if the New Testament doesn’t lay out a single mandated “voting” procedure.

Here’s the tension to hold together:

- **Elders are appointed/recognized based on qualifications**, not popularity. The lists in **1 Timothy 3:1–7** and **Titus 1:5–9** assume a man’s life is already visible and tested in the congregation. A key piece is **reputation** (“well thought of,” including by outsiders—**1 Tim 3:7**), which implies congregational awareness.
- **Congregational involvement is a biblical pattern**, even when leaders do the appointing. A good parallel is **Acts 6:3**, where the church is told to select men “from among you” who meet character requirements, and then the apostles appoint them. It’s not the same role as elders, but it shows the wisdom of the body’s recognition.
- **Practical shepherding requires trust**. Elders lead, teach, and sometimes correct (e.g., **Hebrews 13:17**, **1 Peter 5:1–3**). If a significant portion of the church cannot affirm a candidate’s character or reputation, you may be “appointing” someone who can’t actually shepherd effectively because the flock won’t follow.

A wise, biblical way to say it is:

- The church doesn’t “create” an elder by approval, but the church **does need to be able to genuinely recognize him as qualified and follow his shepherding**, or you’re inviting division.

Common healthy practice:

- elders/candidates are recommended → congregation is informed and given time to raise **biblical, specific concerns tied to qualifications** → concerns are investigated → if unresolved/serious, wait; if resolved, proceed with appointment in unity and prayer.

What if only two or three people have issues?

Two or three people having issues doesn't automatically mean you should stop the process—but it also doesn't mean you can ignore them. The key question is: **are their concerns about biblical qualifications, or about preference/style/past hurts?**

1) If the issues are “preference” issues

Examples: “I don't like his personality,” “he's not my kind of leader,” “I wanted someone else,” “he's too young/old,” “he teaches differently than I would.”

- Those aren't qualification arguments.
- In that case, it's usually wise to **listen, clarify expectations, and proceed**, while coaching those members toward unity.

2) If the issues are about qualifications (even if it's only 2–3 people)

Examples: credible concerns about:

- character/marriage/family management (1 Tim 3; Titus 1)
- honesty, temper, divisiveness, addiction, greed
- being “above reproach” / reputation / patterns of behavior
- doctrinal reliability and ability to teach

Then **the number of people is less important than the credibility of the concern.**

A helpful biblical guardrail is **1 Timothy 5:19**: don't accept an accusation against an elder except on the basis of “two or three witnesses.” That's not a “majority vote” standard—it's a *seriousness/verification* standard. So if **two or three independent people** are raising the *same* concrete concern, you should take it seriously and **check it carefully**.

3) A wise way to handle “2–3 objectors”

- **Meet with them individually** (not as a group first). Ask: “*What specific qualification are you concerned about? What facts have you personally observed (not hearsay)? What would you need to see clarified or reconciled?*”
- **Separate facts from feelings.** Feelings matter pastorally, but facts determine whether a man is disqualified.
- **Give the candidate a fair chance to respond** (without turning it into a trial).
- **Decide and communicate clearly:**
 - If concerns are **unsubstantiated / preference-based** → “We listened, investigated, and we believe he is qualified.”
 - If concerns are **credible but resolvable** → pause and pursue reconciliation/clarity.
 - If concerns reveal a **disqualifying pattern** → don't proceed (even if only 2–3 saw it).

4) Unity doesn't mean “everyone is thrilled”

It's normal that not everyone will be equally enthusiastic. What you're aiming for is:

- the church can say, “**We see the man's life; we recognize his qualification; we can follow his shepherding.**”

If you can get there after careful listening and fair investigation, you can move forward even if a couple people still “don't like it.”

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How should we decide which hill we want to die on (which principle is worth sticking to even if some may leave)

Here's a framework that helps elders decide "which hill" is actually in front of you.

1) Separate two questions that often get blended

A. Exegesis / conviction: What do we believe "husband of one wife / one-woman man" (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6) requires?

B. Shepherding / prudence: Even if we believe he is biblically eligible, is he "above reproach" *in this congregation* (1 Tim 3:2,7; Titus 1:7) such that appointing him will build up rather than fracture?

A church can be **right on A** and still make an unwise move on **B** (or vice-versa).

2) Decide what kind of issue it is for *your* eldership

There are three "buckets":

Bucket 1 — Clear disqualification

If the candidate's divorce/remarriage situation involves ongoing, unresolved sin, patterns of unfaithfulness, deception, or a current marriage that is unstable/unreconciled, that's not "a debate topic"—that's a qualifications issue (character, reputation, above reproach).

Bucket 2 — Biblically permissible, but contested

The Elders believe "one-woman man" speaks to present faithfulness/devotion, not "never divorced," but some members believe divorce automatically excludes a man from eldership.

If you treat this as merely "a few complainers," you may win a technical argument and lose a portion of the flock. If you treat it as a "minority veto," you may end up letting the most rigid conscience set policy for everyone.

Bucket 3 — Preference / personality

If the objection is essentially, "I don't like him," that's different. But since they're appealing to Scripture, take them seriously and handle it carefully.

3) Use "above reproach" as the bridge between conviction and timing

"Above reproach" doesn't mean "no one can criticize." It *does* mean a man's life and past are sufficiently clear, addressed, and understood that he can lead without constant suspicion.

So the key diagnostic isn't "How many object?" but:

- Are their concerns **specific, biblical, and informed**?
- Are they **teachable** (willing to study and hear the elders' reasoning)?
- Would appointing him now likely create **long-term distrust** that harms shepherding?

If appointing him will predictably create a multi-year division where half the church questions the eldership's judgment, that's a real shepherding concern even if you think you're right exegetically.

4) Don't make it a surprise vote; make it a discipleship process

A wise path that keeps both truth and unity in view:

1. **Write down the elders' scriptural reasoning** (short, clear, not combative).
2. **Invite members with concerns to meet** and require that concerns be tied to qualifications (not hearsay).
3. **Teach the congregation** (or at least provide a teaching document) on:
 - elder qualifications (1 Tim 3; Titus 1)
 - divorce/remarriage texts (Matt 19; Mark 10; Luke 16; 1 Cor 7) *with humility about interpretive differences*

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4. **Give time** (weeks/months) for questions and processing.
5. Then decide whether:
 - you proceed now,
 - you proceed later (after teaching and healing),
 - or you don't proceed (because the situation truly fails "above reproach" here).

This approach avoids "we're going to do it and whoever leaves leaves," *and* avoids letting fear drive you.

5) How to decide what "hill" is worth dying on

A helpful way to phrase it is:

- **We will "die" on obeying Scripture and applying qualifications honestly.**
- **We will not "die" on speed, optics, or winning an argument.**
- If the elders are convinced the man is qualified, the "hill" may not be *the interpretation itself* as much as **whether the church can be shepherded through that interpretation without tearing the body.**

Sometimes the most faithful decision is: "*We're not changing our conviction, but we're also not forcing this appointment right now; we're going to teach, listen, and shepherd.*" That's not compromise and it can be wisdom.

6) Practical wording to keep it from becoming a war

You can say something like:

"We understand faithful Christians read 'one-woman man' differently. We've studied it carefully and believe it refers to a man's present faithfulness and devotion to his wife. We also take seriously the call for elders to be 'above reproach.' We want to shepherd the church through this thoughtfully — listening to concerns tied to Scripture, answering questions, and moving forward only in a way that strengthens unity and trust."