

Text: Titus 1:5-9

Title: Qualified Elders

Truth: God has specific requirements for pastors.

Date/Location: June 6, 2021 at FBC

I. Background on Crete and the State of the Church There

- A. The island of Crete. Crete is the most populated island of Greece, forming the southern boundary of the Aegean Sea. It is 3260 square miles, or equivalent to a rectangular area of 81 miles by 40 miles. To give you a sense of this, that would be like an area of southeast Michigan covering the entire Michigan-Ohio border north to Detroit-Ann Arbor-Jackson-Albion. That entire area including all its cities and villages and rural sections would need churches and pastors to serve the communities. However, the island was longer and narrower than our hypothetical rectangle. It was 160 miles wide by 35 miles at its widest north-south. This is about how wide the state of Michigan is at its Ohio/Indiana borders. At the time of the writing of Titus, the island was under Roman rule.
- B. Churches in the cities were not fully operational. They were not “in order” but rather are “lacking” in some areas. Evidently, the Apostle Paul, after his first imprisonment in Rome, had some time to minister on the island, but had to leave somewhat prematurely. The most important of those areas is that the churches do not have **elders** installed. In addition, they were not well-established in **sound Christian teaching** or what is called *doctrine*. Churches need pastors so they can have full-time resident teachers of healthy doctrine. This is crucial in every generation. You cannot long have a church without pastor or right doctrine. Such a situation is a church emergency. Without pastors and sound teaching, the church is out of order and needs to be put into order.
- C. Elders = pastors = overseers. The more commonly-known word for *overseer* is *bishop*. A *pastor* is a *shepherd*. One of a pastor’s functions is to feed the flock by preaching and teaching the Word of God. He is also tasked with leading, guarding and guiding the flock of God’s people. The relevant passages in the Bible

demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that the various titles all point to the same office. The different terms refer to various aspects of the ministry of pastor—spiritual maturity, spiritual care, and spiritual oversight or leadership. Man-made hierarchical distinctions such as elders which are different than pastors, which are different than bishops, cardinals, popes, priests, etc. are just that—man-made and not found in Scripture.

To show that the words are synonyms, compare *elders* in Titus 1:5 with *overseer/bishop* in Titus 1:7 and 1 Timothy 3:1. Compare *elders* in Acts 20:17 with *overseers* and *feed/shepherd* in Acts 20:28. And finally, compare *elder* and *shepherd* in 1 Peter 5:1-2.

- D. Titus was to appoint such mature Christian men to shepherd the churches. But are not pastors the highest human authority in the church? Indeed, there is a sense in which that is true. According to the Bible, there are no higher prelates in the church. So how does a person like Titus go to various cities “appointing elders” over churches? Who gave him that authority? Who put him in charge?

The answer is that he was a personal representative of the Apostle Paul, who was himself a personal representative of Jesus Christ. Titus was not a pastor, but rather an apostolic representative. God was using Paul, and in turn Titus, to “kick start” the churches in Crete. The problem for an area without any established church is like a chicken-and-egg problem: what comes first, the pastor or the church? Well, actually the missionary comes first!

To break through the chicken-and-egg problem, you simply need start the work and get it going. Once it gets moving, then it can assume normal operational status, which includes things like the church being responsible to select its elders and deacons, and for those leaders to keep the church moving in the right direction.

II. Overall Requirement of Elders: Blameless, Above Reproach

- A. Above reproach. This is stated twice: verse 6 and 7. It means to be blameless or irreproachable. This means that one is not credibly accused of doing anything wrong. Someone who has been arraigned before a judge (and found guilty) would be one who has reproach. An adulterer has reproach (Prov. 6:32-33). From a

positive viewpoint, it means to be held in high respect. It is a word that should describe the trajectory of Christians generally because that is where they are headed in the end (1 Cor. 1:8 and Col. 1:22). It especially applies to Christian pastors and deacons (1 Tim. 3:10). Verse 7 reiterates that it is *necessary* for him to be this way. Why?

- B. He is a steward of God. He is responsible because God has entrusted him with the care, protection, and management of the church. That is a big responsibility that transcends mere earthly matters. Christians generally are also called stewards of God—in their respective areas of giftedness (1 Peter 4:10) and generally in life (Luke 12:42).
- C. This is expanded in two directions: the negative, and the positive. We visit those two categories in turn below. I do not follow the precise order of the text in order to help us organize the meaning in our minds.

III. Negative Qualifications of Elders

- A. Children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. This obviously applies to the father as well, though some translations make it explicit that it applies to the pastor, *not* his children. I take it that the children are to be—at least—good citizens. They have been brought up right. They may have some bumps along the way, but the general rule is that dad leads his home well enough that the children have been trained properly. *Dissipation* is debauchery. It means reckless abandon, immoral behavior, prodigal-ness. *Insubordination* refers to rebellious, unruly, not subject to authority (see v. 10 for another use).
- B. Not self-willed, arrogant, stubborn. A selfish person is bent on pleasing himself and is therefore not qualified to be a minister of the gospel. He cannot represent the Christ who was preeminently unselfish.
- C. Not quick-tempered. This refers to a person who is not inclined to be angry. Anger is a last resort, not a first stop.
- D. Not given to wine, drunkard. *For sure* this means anyone addicted to wine or a drunkard is not even close to qualified. Coupled with passages like Leviticus 10:9, I counsel all elders and potential elders

to recognize the dangers of alcohol and stay away from it entirely. You cannot afford to have your mind clouded by substances, and alcohol begins to do that on the first drink.

- E. Not violent. Not a bully. This seems obvious, but sometimes power over people goes to the head and a pastor thinks he can get away with churlish or boorish behavior.
- F. Not greedy for money. This is shameless greed or desire for dishonest gain. Such people cannot administer the church because it collects money, and disburses those funds for ministry. A greedy person inevitably is going to twist that function to line their own pocket.

IV. Positive Qualifications of Elders

- A. Husband of one wife. The language makes it obvious that a male is required to fill the job of pastor. A woman cannot be the husband of one female. Furthermore, the man must be a faithful man, a man who made a wise choice of a spouse, a man who has not divorced or been involved in adultery. In short, he is a one-woman man (literal translation). If he has not had the opportunity yet to marry, I do not believe this totally disqualifies him. It should cause a church to investigate further as to why he is not married, because he may have some flaw in character, some wrong priority, some perversion in his heart that would disqualify him. Perhaps he has a problem with sexual temptations or is unable to live closely with another person. Those would be disqualifying.
- B. Faithful children. The huge debate here is whether the children need to be believers or just faithful in the sense of good and orderly. I take the latter. The Bible is convincing to me that a pastor cannot guarantee the salvation of anyone, including his own children, this cannot mean that a pastor must have all believers for kids, including when they leave the home and display the fruit of their own hearts. What if some of his children are believers and some are not? Is this certainly the pastor's fault, or the child's?
- C. Hospitable. All Christians are to be hospitable, kind to strangers, sharing in the blessings God has given them (1 Peter 4:9). This is especially to be true of pastors (1 Tim. 3:2).

- D. Lover of good. He does not laugh at or show affinity for evil things.
- E. Self-controlled, sober-minded. He is prudent, thoughtful, behaves in moderation. He is not given to conspiracy thinking, or bouncing from one thing to another, or unstable, or impetuous. He thinks through issues carefully.
- F. Upright, just. He is of the highest standard of righteousness. He is a fair kind of person. By the way, is this person perfect? Not hardly. Will he never fail in any of these areas? That is impossible. But the *general pattern* of his life follows Biblical morality.
- G. Holy. He is pious, full of good works, pleasing to God. He has left behind his life of sin prior to salvation.
- H. Disciplined, self-controlled, sensible, prudent, moderate. Not only is the body under control, but the emotions and impulses and desires are disciplined. This is so important for us all. Titus 2:2 says older men are to be this way, and 2:5 that younger women are to be like this. Obviously then the principle applies to everyone.
- I. Holding fast the faithful word. This means he has a devoted attachment and strong interest in the apostles' teaching. Today, that is exactly equal to having a strong attachment to the Bible. A man who is indifferent to the body of Christian truth is not fit to minister for God. The truth comes from *God*, and is not an optional "feature" of the faith that you can take or leave. If someone says, "meh" about sound teaching, as if there are more important things, then he is disqualified.

"As he has been taught" reflects that the teaching is passed down from one generation to the next.

This in turn has two purposes:

1. To deliver sound teaching. Pastors are to be faithful recipients of the message who will accurately convey it to the following generation (2 Timothy 2:2). We are not called to invent new material along the way or "innovate" the Christian faith because it does not require any improvements. Pastors are not motivational speakers. They are not story-tellers. They are preachers of the Divine Word.

For a church member, this means that you will humbly seek this kind of pastor to lead your church, and you will take heed when he is doing what God has assigned him to do. You will not give in to the temptation of itchy ears to hear mere inspirational talks, highly repetitive types of simplistic sermons, book reviews, movie reviews, or other fluff.

The sound teaching is intended to instruct God’s people. In addition to exhorting them to keep on the right path, Scriptural truth reproves our sin, corrects us, and teaches us how to stay on the right path (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

2. To convict those who speak against sound teaching. Conviction has several nuances that can fit into this context. (a) It can mean to expose the truth about something; (b) It often means to cause someone to see that they are wrong and need to change; and (c) It can mean to disapprove or correct a wrong action or belief. The first and third are certainly the job of every pastor while we do so with the manner and hope that the offenders will be brought to repentance.

The pastor uses the same tool—sound doctrine—both to instruct the church and to convict those who are wrong. You do *not* abandon Bible teaching to correct un-biblical teaching!

Conclusion

Paul gave Titus a very clear job description—to set the churches of Crete in order. They needed good pastors who were devoted to healthy teaching that comes directly from the Bible. And that is what is needed by every church, and every Christian, in every generation. We never “get over” these requirements for pastors or the teaching/exhorting/convicting type of ministry.

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