

Appoint Elders

Titus 1:5-9

October 2, 2022

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⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. (ESV)

Do you know that there is a church built in the honor of Titus in the island of Crete? That church is called The Church of Agios Titus (or St Titus). It's fascinating to see this letter from early first century and connect with a historical building in present day Crete. It is said that this church was built in the 10th century.

Just as Timothy was a disciple of Paul, Titus was another disciple of Paul. He is also known to have been the first bishop of Crete. And these letters to Timothy and Titus have been considered the standard pastoral letters since the first century.

Here in our passage, Paul directs Titus to put into order what has been *lacking* in Crete. You see this verse 5 “*This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order*”. During Paul's missionary journeys, the Gospel had taken fruit. Believers were gathering and worshipping together. And yet something was of order. What was *lacking*? Church *leadership* was lacking. False teachers were promoting *error* and upsetting whole families. They were greedy. You see that in verses 10 and 11. Mature leadership was needed. The shepherding of the people of God needs guardians, custodians, caretakers or stewards. The Bible calls these stewards *elders*.

So Paul's directive to Titus is very strategic. Just like Timothy, Paul disciplined Titus. Paul became his spiritual father. Paul took Titus to Crete and left him there to establish the church. And here in verse five, Paul gives Titus his ministry directive – “*appoint elders in every town*”.

Titus has a huge task ahead of him. He needs to find qualified men and appoint them as elders not in one church but in every town.

Now, for the sake of time, I want to go straight to what Titus needs to look for in appointing men as elders. And in verses *six* through *nine*, you'll see a lot of detail that Titus would have gone through for

appointing elders. We have gone through some of them in 1 Timothy 3. So for next the twenty minutes or so, I want to share a few key highlights and observations about elders.

Observation # one:

Who are elders?

Verse seven: “⁷For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach”

Elders are God's stewards. The literal translation of the word *steward* is house-manager. The word steward is from the Greek word *oikonomos*. Oikos simply means a house. And we have seen this in 1 Timothy where Paul writes his letter so that the church people in Ephesus would know how to conduct themselves in the household of God. Household or house is connected to the word *steward*. In the first century, stewards were those individuals who had been entrusted by the owner of the house to manage his affairs. Stewards were also people who managed a farm or estate on behalf of the landlord or people who took care of the financial matters of the city. When Paul says elders are God's stewards, these men are called to serve as custodians of the household of God. There are to be humble servants (slaves) of the Lord Jesus Christ not lords and not lording over anyone.

1. Jesus talked about *stewardship* in Luke 12. “*Who then is the faithful and wise manager (steward), whom his master will set over his household*” (Luke 12:42). Jesus appointed Peter to be one of his first stewards. God requires stewards to be faithful. “*it is required of stewards that they be found faithful*” (1 Corinthians 4:2). Faithfulness begins with little things first. Jesus said “*One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much*” (Luke 16:10).
2. The elder or steward is known to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. And that faithfulness is seen in his love for the Lord Jesus Christ more than anything else. After Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples went fishing but Jesus stood on the beach. And when Peter ran to Jesus, Jesus is rather direct in his question. Jesus asks Peter, “*Simon, do you love me more than these?*”. This man's first love *must* be Jesus. Jesus is very emphatic in his definition of who is his disciple. “*Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them,* ²⁶ “*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.* ²⁷ *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*” (Luke 14:25-27). What does Jesus mean? Jesus means that your love for family, friends or anything else must pale in comparison in your love for Jesus Christ. This man ought to be an exemplary disciple. Charles Spurgeon says this it way about an elder. That man needs to be bathed in the love of God.
3. While all elders are stewards, all believers may not be elders but all believers are *stewards* in some way shape or form. Peter writes to churches this way. “¹⁰ *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied (multi-faceted) grace:* ¹¹ *whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God*

supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” 1 Peter 4:10-11. You as a believer are a steward of something - a gift to serve, a gift to encourage, a gift to intercede in prayer, a gift to give or a gift to witness to others. Whatever your gift is, you must steward that gift.

Observation # two:

The overarching qualification for a man to be an elder is to be a man *without reproach*. This is a man of good reputation. He is that kind of man that even when an accusation is made, that accusation will not stick. This man ought to be a *one-woman* man and a *family* man if he is married and has children. The man ought to lead his family and children first before he stewards the church. And the proof that he is leading the family well is the conduct of his children. The NASB says the children “*who believe, not accused of indecent behavior or rebellion*”. The children are not known for wild and rebellious behavior. Obviously, this does not apply to single men.

In verse 7, Paul tells Titus how to filter out those not fit to serve as elders. Those who are look down on others, those who are arrogant, those who are prone to anger, drunkards, vengeful, violent or people greedy for gain are to be filtered out. The word *violent* implies someone who is ready to strike. And if the man thinks being an elder is a novelty, a place to seek respect, a place of entitlement that would not be a good fit either. If these negative qualities are consistent in the man seeking to be an elder, they pre-qualify them for disqualification.

Observation # three:

In verse 8, Paul lists the positive qualities to look for. Every believer should pursue these qualities but elders **must** possess these on an ongoing basis. Let me read verses 7 and 8.

⁷ *For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,* ⁸ **but** *hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.*

We have covered these in 1 Timothy but I want to highlight one quality. The elder must be a “*lover of good*”. This is a unique quality. Elders are not to just like the idea of good. There are to be *lovers of good*. You hear about people who love all kinds of fancy things in this world some legitimate some illegitimate but what a quality to pursue as followers of Jesus. You are to be lovers of good. And that “good” is found in God alone. “*Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God*” 3 John 1:11. No one is good except God alone. Lovers of good are lovers of God.

Observation #four:

The elder must hold *firm* to the trustworthy word. Verse 9.

⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

The elder must have a positive bias to the word of God. This is the teaching of the Christ and the apostles. This phrase “hold firm” is also translated as to having a *strong attachment*, being *constantly devoted* to the faithful word. Paul says that the man must hold the word so firmly for two reasons. We saw this in 1 Timothy. *First*, to promote sound doctrine, good healthy teaching. *Second*, to refute to correct false teaching.

In other words, the elder must be able to handle the Scriptures with skill and competence.

It is going to be an immense effort to be able to do both. I love what Martyn Lloyd-Jones says. He was a physician who became a pastor. He offers some really good wisdom for the church.

“You are entitled to look for an unusual degree of spirituality, and this must come first because of the nature of the task. In addition, you are entitled to look for a degree of assurance with his knowledge of the Truth and his relationship to it. It is surely clear that if he is a man who is always struggling with problems and difficulties and perplexities himself, and trying to discover the truth, or if he is so uncertain that he is always influenced by the last book he reads, and is ‘carried about by every wind of doctrine’ and every new theological fashion, it is clear that he is ipso facto a man who is not called to the ministry”. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

Last but not the least – promoting good doctrine is easier than correcting. So how is the elder to refute error? In *patience* and *gentleness*. Paul writes in Timothy “*And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,* ²⁵ *correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,* (2 Timothy 2: 24-25)

To recap what we saw, elders are God’s *stewards*, servants. They are to be without reproach. They are to *exemplify* godly qualities. They are to hold *firmly* to the faithful word of God. The church is *blessed* when we have such men serve the church.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **Appoint elders.** Titus 1:5-9

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Why does Paul direct Titus to *appoint* elders? Verse 5, 10, 11

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Do you believe that your relationship to God's trustworthy Word must be *firm* as Paul directed Titus? Why or why not? 1 Timothy 1:19, 2 Timothy 2: 1:13, 3:14, Titus 2:1, Ephesians 2:14
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: Do you see a need to hold firmly to the "trustworthy word as taught"? Matthew 4:4