

THE FIRST STEP OUT OF THE NEST

Titus 1:5-9

There's a little Snoopy cartoon comic strip that I've never forgotten. Linus throws a stick for Snoopy and Snoopy's first instinct would've been to chase the stick but he's a smart dog and decided against it. Snoopy isn't your average dog. He realized how stupid it was to chase a stick. Linus says, "You won't do it huh?" and Snoopy says, "Nope! I want people to have more to say about me when I'm gone than, 'He was a good man. He chased sticks.'" Last week we looked at the introduction to Titus and Paul started off this book with some seriously big thoughts about God and His eternal program and how He is at work in this present age. And the reason for this incredible introduction is because Paul wants pastor Titus and the churches he's ministering to, to know the gravity of what's going on – **God has a program He is actively working out and He wants them in on it. He doesn't want them just chasing sticks!** There were a lot of sticks to chase on the island of Crete – all sorts of sticks. Straight sticks, crooked sticks, gold and silver sticks, sanded and polished sticks – but they're all sticks – temporal things that temporarily might be satisfying but ultimately would have no eternal worth. He doesn't want them chasing sticks. He wants them to get with the divine program and pursuing eternal riches by living sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age (2:12).

As we've studied the demographics of these churches, we've seen how they were pretty messy and carnal churches at this point. As far as their history, they probably got off to a start from the Cretans who were in Jerusalem during Pentecost when Peter preached and thousands were saved. After believing on Christ, they probably went home and told others, who told others, who told others, and before you know it, there were gatherings of believers all across the island in every city. However, because they were off the beaten path, **on an island in the middle of the Mediterranean**, they never really received the apostolic instruction or authority they needed to become effective and organized God-glorifying churches. **We've been thinking of them as fledgling churches who haven't left the nest yet.** They haven't been shown how to fly because they haven't received divine apostolic instruction. And so that's the reason for writing this letter. God and Paul want to see these churches become the God-glorifying churches they're supposed to be, "going places" for the Lord. And the first step Paul gives them if they're going to "go places" for the Lord, is **actually to appoint some faithful men who don't go anywhere** (not everyone receives a call to get up and go)! Let's read about it in verses Titus 1:5-9.

I. **THE FIRST STEP FORWARD: APPOINT ELDERS/OVERSEERS. (V. 5)**

This is **the primary reason** Paul left Titus in Crete because as goes the leadership, so goes the churches. Titus' task was to appoint some qualified elders to leadership who will oversee the spiritual health and direction of the congregation. If these local churches in Crete are going to "go somewhere" for the Lord, it needs a few faithful Christ-following men who actually "don't go anywhere". That's the first step forward.

A. **Set in order what remains.**

Paul tells Titus to "**set in order**" the things that remain unfinished. There are some areas in the churches that are **lacking** and are **in need of want** and not as they should be. The word for "set" in "set in order" is the Greek word *epidiorthos*. The "ortho" part of the word is at least familiar to us. We see it in words such as **orthopedic and orthodontist**. An **orthopedic surgeon** is someone who specializes in fixing the musculoskeletal parts of the body (framework) when there are issues with it – they treat injuries like broken bones and

joint problems – anything from arthritis to osteoporosis; they replace hips and doctor up sprained ankles. An **orthodontist** on the other hand, fixes up our pearly whites and gets them straightened out and set right when they're crooked.

And well, the local church is lot like the human body 1 Corinthians 12(12-26) says. There many members, but one body. Some member of the church are more like a foot, some like an eye, some like an ear – we can't all be the same part of the body and we weren't made to be. We all have different spiritual gifts and talents so we all have different functions and purposes. The ear hears, the eye sees. But each member is important and relies on the other members. But in Crete, the eyes weren't doing what eyes were supposed to do. They were out of place, like on the feet. What if your eyes were down low on your feet? That'd be pretty inconvenient, right? You would want to walk on your hands or something to get a better vantage point. What if your ears were under your arms in your armpit? You couldn't hear a thing! They'd be near useless! **That's what's going on in Crete.** They've got eyes and ears that aren't where they're supposed to be! They're out place and because of that, the body's **not functioning at full capacity because of it.** And so Titus is the orthopedic surgeon who Paul sent to do some surgery on these congregations. He wants the eyes and ears where they're supposed to be so they aren't handicapped.

B. Appoint qualified leadership.

The main way he was going to get things in order, the means by which he would accomplish such a task, is by **appointing** qualified leadership. **Elders would be appointed by other qualified leaders like Titus who are sensitive to the Holy Spirit's direction.** But the before we look at the qualifications, I want to look at the purpose of function of these leaders that the Bible calls elders or overseers that we see in **verse 9.**

II. THE FUNCTION OF AN ELDER/OVERSEER – WHAT HE DOES. (V. 9)

Now there's three main offices described in the NT for the local churches today. You've got **deacons, elders, and pastor-teachers.** If a church has deacons, they typically handle the material needs of the congregation and practical tasks that need done in the church. Elders are considered the spiritual shepherds of the congregation, exercising oversight. The pastor-teacher also is an equal elder on the board but is the main teaching pastor who is typically full time and fully supported. Elders are what are described here in Titus. The main quality that separates deacons from elders is the spiritual shepherding element of leading and being able to teach, though *it doesn't mean a deacon can't teach or preach or that an elder has to preach or teach if he is an elder and can't do anything practical.* I don't think the lines have to be that rigid. It just means he is able to refute and exhort if he has too. But the reason you don't see the mention of deacons here is because of the state of the churches, having to start from scratch. They need elders first who would in time appoint deacons if necessary.

The words **elder (presbyteros) and overseer (episkopos) are interchangeable terms, referring to the same office or position.** Elder refers to a **spiritual maturity** and not just an old age kind of maturity, though an elder should have some solid years under his belt (not a recent convert). An elder is someone who has been tested and proven. They have demonstrated faithfulness to the Lord through thick and thin. The Bible also refers to elders as **"spiritual shepherds"** who oversee the spiritual health and direction of the flock, **seeing that the flock is feeding on good solid truth and following the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Good shepherds always remember they are**

under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd. Peter was writing to the elders in 1 Peter 5 and says, “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, **shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight** not under compulsion, but voluntarily, **according to the will of God;** and not for sordid gain, but **with eagerness;** nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but **proving to be examples to the flock.**” As far as I know, that’s the best job description for an elder. Paul, speaking to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28 says, “**Be on guard** for yourselves and for all the flock, **among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,** to **shepherd the church** of God which He purchased with His own blood.” Elders are spiritual shepherds who lead and feed and protect the precious flock of Christ. The main way they do this is by protecting the truth, driving away wolves. In verse 9 we see they must **hold fast the faithful word.**

❖ **The elders’ main function is to hold fast (firm) to the Word of God.**

1. They exhort/teach in sound doctrine.
2. They refute those who contradict.

These are guys who should have a good grasp on the Word of God so they protect the flock from false teaching and practice **by protecting the truth!** Last week we saw how **our hope is centered on our faith which is centered on our knowledge of the truth.** So if you don’t protect the truth and true gospel, if you lose the truth, you’ll lose the faith and lose the confident hope. Elders protect the truth. They must protect THE GOSPEL.

❖ **Elders must protect the glorious gospel of God’s grace.**

The gospel that says **we are saved by grace, through faith, in Christ.** By grace (meaning it’s free), through faith (Meaning we’re trusting somethings), in Christ (because He’s the one who paid for our sins, was buried and rose again). Man’s a sinner – we all know that. He’s lies, he cheats, he steals. And that sin separates him from God because God is holy and perfect and righteous. Man can never be holy and perfect and righteous. And the wages of sin is death. But there is a remedy. The free gift is that we can have eternal life through faith in Christ. God sent forth His Son – God took on flesh to pay for man’s sin. God-Man, Jesus Christ, died and made complete restitution for men to be restored to a right relationship with God. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.” That’s the gospel. That’s what elders must protect – that we’re saved by grace, through faith, in Christ because of what He already did on the cross for us.

And we know from verses 10-11 that there were men in these churches teaching there were other ways to God than through simply faith in Christ. They were teaching you could work your way to heaven through religious works. That’s exactly why the Reformation happened 500 years ago – I mention it because this is Reformation week. The 502nd anniversary (Oct. 31st) of when Martin Luther nailed that 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg, protesting the false gospel of the Roman Catholic Church was teaching that taught you could work your way to heaven or even purchase your way to heaven through buying indulgences. The Church at the time was basically selling tickets to heaven and Luther, one of the “elders” in the church, had to stand up against that error. That meant excommunication for him and all sorts of things but he had to do what he had to do! He had to hold fast to the Word of God and fulfill his responsibility to God as an overseer. He had to carry out his function even if others were not.

But also He had to be qualified for that function. Nothing stains the Church more or destroys the trust and confidence of believers more than a leader who doesn’t meet the biblical qualification of the office of elder.¹ And in Martin’s day there was a lot of open corruption in the Roman church he

was a part of. When he started to doubt the teachings of the Catholic Church, his “overseers” were a little worried about him making a thing of it and so one of the things they did was send him on a pilgrimage to Rome to try to encourage him and sort of revive him. They thought that the “glories of Rome” would reawaken him but it had the exact opposite effect of him. It increased his doubt in Roman system because it was there that he noticed the higher up you go, the more corrupt and hypocritical it seemed. It was to be this supreme place of adoration and reverence but upon going there he found it even more corrupt. The leaders just flat out weren’t biblically qualified in the first place to hold such a position in the churches. That’s what we see next.

III. THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ELDER/OVERSEER – WHO HE IS. (VV. 6-8)

Paul lists several qualities that are to be characteristic of the church leaders. The function of elder describes what he does but the qualification of an elder describes who he is.² Since he is to be an example for the flock, **these qualifications we see here aren’t just for elders.**

❖ **These qualities are for all of us.**

Just because we’re talking about the qualifications for elders doesn’t mean the rest of you get to tune out because they’re supposed to be examples for all of us. This list is not some perfectly detailed and exhaustive list but a general scope of what an elder’s life should be characterized by. There is another list like this found in 1 Timothy 3 for elders and deacons. Both lists are similar.

A. **Quality #1 – Above reproach.**

In both NT elder qualification lists, this is the quality mentioned first and the most important because **all the other qualities given can further define what it means to be above reproach.** The word used here means “blameless”. He is regarded as genuinely godly person. He has a name in town for being a godly man. *There was an instance I had when I worked on the railroad: a coworker was telling everyone about a conversation he’d had with one the elders in my church, just rehashing the dialogue between them (the conversation had nothing to do with church). But as he’s repeating what the elder said to him, he was including a lot of profanity so I spoke up: I’ll call the elder Jim, but I said, “Jim didn’t say that.” He said, “What do you mean? You weren’t there.” “No, I wasn’t. But I know Jim and Jim doesn’t talk like that. Don’t put those words in Jim’s mouth. He wouldn’t appreciate it.” He agreed it wasn’t right and no one listening argued because we all know Jim. Jim’s a guy who lives above reproach.

B. **Quality #2 – A one-woman man. (husband)**

He is known for being a one-woman man. And that’s all it means. It doesn’t mean he can’t be an elder if he had a divorce *before* he knew Christ. It doesn’t mean he can’t be an elder if he’s a widower or remarried; it also doesn’t mean that he has to be married to be an elder. It just means he must be known for being a one-woman man. To go beyond that is to read into the text. He is an example in purity and fidelity to his wife or if he’s pursuing a wife, faithful to his girlfriend. He’s not a womanizer. I think cultural context helps us out here because in Crete in this day it was common for a married man to have a mistress. But Paul wants the leaders to stand out from the culture of Crete and honor God by being faithful, one-woman men, who love their wife as Christ loved the Church.

C. **Quality #3 – Have faithful children. (father)**

This is a highly debated quality like the one-woman quality. Does it mean faithful children or children who are actually believers? I think it could go either way and both should naturally be taken into consideration. The reason it could go either way is because this

verse is a lot like that fruit of the Spirit we looked at recently – “the fruit of the Spirit is... faithfulness.” Some simply translated it as the fruit of the Spirit is faith. So is it children who have faith or who are faithful? What interprets it is the context and the position I first lean towards is the position that an elder’s children are to have a **faithfulness to them as long as they’re in the home**: the children aren’t **underdisciplined**, being rebellious, but at the same time not **overdisciplined** and exasperated. Each kid is different, some harder than others, but certainly how a man raises his kids says something.

Also, if he has several kids and has had the privilege to raise them in the Lord, you would expect some to grow up to be believers – some fruit from that. Ministry starts in the home and hardest in the home and it says something about that man. Let’s say the elder has 5 kids and only 3 grow up to walk with the Lord. Does that discredit a man because 2 have decided to go astray? I don’t think so. We see fruit in his life from the other 3. Besides, you can’t make anyone believe and each kid has to eventually make his own decision to trust Christ and walk with Him. Even the most-godly parents have prodigals. **The family says something about the man and should be examined because the home is the hardest place to minister and maintain godliness.**

D. Quality #4 – Not self-willed.

A godly elder is not “over-bearing”. He doesn’t push people around and always have to have his way. He isn’t in it for want of fame, fortune, success, popularity, limelight, or control and authority. In fact, **most qualified elders I know are more like Moses and don’t feel qualified or they try to avoid any limelight.** But the Holy Spirit will do His thing and convince them of their God-given purpose in the church and the Titus’ in their life recognize it. Because they’re not self-willed, they’re good stewards in God’s household.

E. Quality #5 – Not quick-tempered.

Some people are a lot like those Black Cat firecrackers – they have short fuses and blow up easily. An elder in the church can be a Black Cat. He’s got to have a longer fuse than most.

F. Quality #6 – Not addicted to alcohol (given to drunkenness).

This isn’t teaching total abstinence from alcohol but he knows the limit and he knows not to be a stumbling block to others by it. He does not let himself be a slave to any substance, alcohol included.

G. Quality #7 – Not pugnacious (violent).

He’s not violent. He’s not a striker. He doesn’t fight and quarrel or throw punches.

H. Quality #8 – Not fond of sordid gain (greedy)

They’re not in it for the money and can be trusted with handling money and finances.

I. Quality #9 – He is hospitable.

This literally means “love of strangers”. They take care of people, even strangers. Because there were no church buildings back in this day, elders regularly opened their homes to fellow Christians and travelers and should do the same today.³

J. Quality #10 – He loves what is good.

He doesn't support evil, but supports what is good, for everyone's good.

K. Quality #11 – He is sensible.

This means he is moderate and sober-minded. He has good judgment.

L. Quality #12 – He is just.

He is upright and righteous; he stands for justice and has integrity. If the cashier gives him and extra \$20 back on accident, he one who would give it back.

M. Quality #13 – He is devout.

He is faithful to God and has a deep reverence for God. He pursues God with his whole heart and soul and mind and strength.

N. Quality #14 – He is self-controlled.

He's not like the Cretans who as verse 12 states were, "...always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." He doesn't let himself be controlled the sinful passions or pride of the flesh.

O. Quality #15 – He holds fast the faithful word.

This again, goes back to function. The qualities are there because without the qualities, the function won't be there. No man should be in a position of authority like this unless these qualities are the overall theme of his life. It doesn't mean they're perfect, but they are characterized by them consistently. A man won't be wise in the things of the Lord unless he's walking with the Lord himself. Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:1 that, "If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing." God doesn't grant wisdom and spiritual insight to people who don't listen to His most basic commands for godliness. But if you want to sum up these characteristics,

❖ **Elders are to be above reproach.**

I say that but at the same time *a good elder with a humble and meek mindset, who is really qualified for leadership, typically is never satisfied with where he's at and never see themselves as fully qualified.* A qualified elder won't appoint himself because he probably has a genuine reluctance. But at the same time, **they should have somewhat of a desire for it because they want what's best for the church and couldn't stand to see it go the wrong direction.** The Holy Spirit is going to affirm it in their heart (Acts 20:28) and other qualified leaders like Titus will notice it. It is high and holy calling and the standards must not ever be lowered for anyone. 1 Timothy says it's a fine work he desires to do and 1 Peter says those who do it faithfully with receive the unfading crown of glory when the chief Shepherd appears.

In conclusion I remind you that God has a plan and purpose for this world from beginning to end. He has a plan and purpose for His churches in this present age in which we live. And He has a plan and purpose for each believer in that church. For some of the men, He has this specific office of elder/overseer in mind. Titus can't do it all on his own. That's why it says to **appoint elders, plural**. If these churches are going to go places for the Lord, they're going to need some **solid and faithful men who don't go anywhere, but will serve their heart out in their church.**

I remind you of our verse: “Our people must learn to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful,” (3:14). Ask yourself: *What good works does the Lord have for me? How can I serve my heart out for the Lord?*

ELDER/OVERSEER QUALIFICATIONS

TITUS 1:5-9	1 TIMOHTY 3:1-7
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Above reproach 2. A one-woman man (faithful husband) 3. Faithful children (faithful father) 4. Not self-willed (good steward) 5. Not quick tempered 6. Not addicted to wine 7. Not pugnacious (violent/quarrelsome) 8. Not fond of sordid gain (greedy) 9. Hospitable 10. Loving what is good 11. Sensible 12. Just 13. Devout 14. Self-controlled 15. Holding fast the faithful word. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Above reproach 2. A one-woman man (faithful husband) 3. Temperate 4. Prudent 5. Respectable 6. Hospitable 7. Able to teach 8. Not addicted to wine 9. Not pugnacious 10. Gentle 11. Peaceable 12. Free from the love of money 13. Manages his household well (faithful children) 14. Not a recent convert 15. Good reputation w/ outsiders

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Titus* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1996), 18-19.

² Glenn Daman, *Developing Leaders for the Small Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), 31.

³ Philip H. Towner, *The New International Commentary on the Greek New Testament: The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 689.