

Titus 1 – Elders in the Church (pt 1, v. 5-8)

We've looked at the salutation of the letter, and identified a key purpose of it – to set things in order in the church. Crete is an island which lies mid-way between Israel and Italy, lying off the coast of both Turkey and Greece, so it was at the center of the shipping channels which crisscrossed the Mediterranean Sea. Paul's first visit there took place on his voyage to Rome in Acts 27, when he suggested to the ship captain that they spend the winter there. It is likely that he began evangelistic work during that stay, and then sometime after being released from his first Roman imprisonment, made a return visit. It is also worth noting that there were people from Crete in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost who witnessed the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. It is likely that they were the first to bring the message of the Gospel to that island.

We don't know a lot about the status of the church when Paul wrote this letter, but from his statement in v. 5, it is clear that he felt there was unfinished business regarding the church, and one part of that was to appoint elders in every town – every place there was an assembly of believers. Who were these elders? We'll get to the qualifications soon, but first I want to take a look at how the word is used. The word is *presbuteros*, and was commonly used to describe older people as compared to the younger. It carries with it the idea of honor and respect due to the wisdom and counsel available through these people. A second use of the word is to distinguish a person holding an office of leadership. In the OT, we find many references to "the elders of Israel," as representative leaders of the various tribes. These were men who, by virtue of their age and positions within family groups, were honored as leaders. There was no election as such, but they gained the title by popular acknowledgment. Much later, the title was formally given to men chosen to fill offices of leadership. It is used in this way to refer to members of the Sanhedrin and leaders of local synagogues. This practice was adopted by the early church, and Acts 11:30 mentions the elders of the church in Jerusalem meeting to make decisions on behalf of the church.

Paul said it was proper to appoint elders for the purpose of good order. Just as with the church in Jerusalem that I just mentioned, these men would make decisions on behalf of the church. Paul switches in v. 7 to the word overseer, *episkopos*, which we sometimes translate as "bishop." This indicates that Paul viewed Elders and Bishops as the same thing. Elder describes their spiritual experience, and Bishop describes their duty of exercising oversight, spiritual care, of the church. So what qualifications did Paul set for selecting them? "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. 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, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 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." Wow. That is a lot to cover. In short, Paul was saying that elders should be examples of moral uprightness and a stable home life.

Above reproach. This doesn't mean sinless perfection, but rather there is no outstanding charge able to be leveled on him. His interaction with people and his manner of life brings honor to God.

Husband of one wife. This has been viewed in several ways, but essentially describes a one-woman man. Certainly it focuses on biological men carrying this responsibility, and it also establishes they are to be married with children ("and his children are believers..."). How we apply the "one wife" aspect is

open for debate. Certainly it forbids polygamy and adultery. Some see it as excluding divorcees, while others say it emphasizes a stable commitment to the marriage.

Children are believers. He must have his own household under control, as displayed by his children. Paul addressed this in 1 Tim 3:4-5 with the question, “for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?”

Returning to the matter of being above reproach, Paul then addresses several personal qualities or vices. Not overbearing – this addresses the manner in which authority is used. The elder isn’t a master over slaves, but more like a loving father over a household. Not quick-tempered – this is self-explanatory. Not a drunkard – while the Bible doesn’t forbid the drinking of alcoholic beverages, it does clearly call drunkenness a sin, and speaks often of the negative consequences when we are under the influence of alcohol. Both as an example to the church, and in order to make wise decisions for the church, elders cannot be addicted to wine or strong drink. Not violent – this could describe a bully, or one who lashes out at others. Rather, an elder should be gentle and patient, self-controlled and disciplined. Not greedy of gain – whether this is financial, positional, or otherwise, the desire for profits as a primary motive is a sign of trouble.

On the positive side, elders are to be hospitable (literally a lover of strangers), welcoming people and extending grace to them. Lovers of good – wanting to see good, beneficial outcomes for all, and enjoying things that are good and upright. Self-controlled and disciplined, exhibiting order and restraint. Upright and holy – a moral and spiritual example to others.

Why are these qualities important in church leaders? We’ll look at that next week. What I want to leave you with today is that not only are these the qualities that you should look for in elders, but these are the qualities that every man in the church should strive to exemplify. This is what a godly man should be. These qualities are what make us fit to be a dwelling place for God, a sanctuary where He is glorified.