

## The Work of Elders Titus 1:9-16

Last week we examined the basic qualifications for elders or bishops in the church, and saw that they should be an example to other believers. We already noted in v. 5 that this is part of the good order that Paul wanted Titus to maintain in the churches. Today we will look at why Paul thought it necessary for every congregation to have elders.

In addition to the high moral and spiritual qualities we examined last week, v. 9 says “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.” This outlines three duties of elders regarding doctrine. First, holding firm to the faith, then being able to teach those doctrines to others, and then to respond properly to those who speak contrary to that faith.

Holding firm to the faith – I mentioned in our first message that the salutation used the word “kata” three times, “according to the faith of God’s elect,” “according to godliness,” “according to the common faith.” Now we find the same word used in v. 9, “according to the teaching” (ESV “as taught”). The Greek word used here is *didache*. One of the earliest published works of the church was called “The Didache” – The Teaching. It was a summary of the key doctrines held dear by the church and taught by the apostles. These elders were expected to uphold and protect the body of truth that had been delivered to them, the “faithful word.” The Word we teach is not our own opinion, or something we make up as we go along – it is the revealed Word of Almighty God, which was delivered to us through the prophets and apostles of God.

Notice that there is a result of holding firm to the faithful word – the ability to give instruction in sound doctrine. What are we supposed to do once we have received and understood the Word of God? We’re supposed to teach it to others. This word for instruction is *parakaleo*, the same word that describes the work of the Holy Spirit in us. It means to call alongside, to comfort or exhort. What are we to teach? Sound doctrine – healthy (hygienic) doctrine; that which gives us a solid foundation for life. We come alongside others to encourage them by applying the Word of God to life – that is sound teaching.

The third reason elders were necessary in the church is responding to those who contradict the faith. Yes, Paul expected that in every church people would show up who had ulterior motives. It happened throughout his own ministry, and it has happened throughout the history of the church. How should the elders respond to these people? Rebuke them. This word usually carries the idea of putting the convicted person to shame, not just telling them they are wrong.

The remaining verses tell us more about these people who can be so dangerous to the church.

1. They are insubordinate – not subject to rule. This is more than just being disobedient; it is refusing to come under authority. This person proudly claims independence and self-direction, and will not be taught or controlled.
2. Empty talkers and deceivers – the word here denotes vain or idle talk. They are constantly talking, but never saying anything of real value. There is more to their talk than just empty words, though. They are categorized as deceivers, seducers, misleading others by their important-sounding speech. By using theological balderdash, they convince others to follow their religious opinions. Paul said this was true of those who tried to force gentile believers into circumcision.

What needed to be done with these people? “They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.” Take away their platform, their ability to speak in the church. This is for the protection of whole families. We also get a glimpse of why these people usually do what they do – in order to make a living off of others. It is called shameful gain, or dishonest gain.

Paul makes a brief comment about the common character of Cretans, and then in v. 13 goes on to more instruction about responding to these people. “Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith”. Notice his purpose wasn’t simply to put them out of the church, but rather to restore them to a proper standing in the church, holding to sound teaching. If someone will receive a rebuke, we have a duty to help them overcome whatever sin that was troubling them. On the other hand, if they refuse the rebuke, maintaining their insubordination, v. 15 says “but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.” These are strong words, and they address the deeper reality that the person who will not accept a rebuke of this sort has a false salvation. We have a duty to recognize that, so that false teachers can’t get a foothold in the church and lead others astray.

This is the work of elders on behalf of the church – upholding and standing firm on the faithful word, teaching sound doctrine to others, and rebuking anyone who contradicts sound doctrine. The result will be a stronger, healthier body of believers who know the Word of God and live by it.