

Titus 1:5-9 "Elders in Every Town"
Exodus 18
Psalm 80

September 11, 2016

Read Exodus 18:10-27

I had intended to read Ezekiel 34 today –

but then I realized that we needed a piece of background
in order to understand what the Bible means by “elder.”

The word “elder” can mean several different things
(this is true in English – as well as Hebrew and Greek).

First, “Elder” can refer to the older men in the community.

For instance, Israel had elders even before Exodus 18.

Exodus 3 tells us that Moses was sent to the elders of Israel.

Every community has elders –

those older people who are respected and wise.

Second, “Elder” can refer to an office – a formal position within the community.

Exodus 18 provides us with the foundation for the office of elder.

Of course, in Exodus 18, these elders are more like “town fathers” –
judges – or magistrates.

They are to decide civil cases as well as religious cases.

Throughout the OT – and even when talking about Jewish elders in the NT –
these men will be referred to as “elders of the people.”

Third, “Elder” can refer to a particularly *religious* office connected with *preaching*.

We see the beginnings of this in Numbers 11:16-30.

[READ]

These men are already elders.

But the LORD takes these 70 –

and gives them some of the Spirit that was on Moses –
so that that they might prophesy.

In one sense, this episode reveals the *problem* with the old covenant.

They prophesied – but they did not continue doing it.

Old Testament elders are *not* prophets.

And so Moses says, “Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets,
that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” (v29)

At Pentecost, that is *exactly* what Jesus will do.

He puts his Spirit upon all of God’s people –

so that all of God’s people become prophets.

But it is important for us to distinguish between these three uses of the term “elder.”

“Elder” can refer simply to an older man.

“Elder” can refer to a ruler in the community.

Or “Elder” can refer to a ruler who also preaches.

Our Psalm of response – Psalm 80 – recounts the story of Israel –
and Israel’s cry for Israel’s Shepherd to raise up a Son of Man
who would restore and save his people.

Sing Psalm 80
Read Titus 1

Today we are talking about the qualifications, the character,
and the doctrine (or teaching) of the bishop (or pastor).
It could be tempting for most of you to think “this isn’t really talking about me.”

But as we’ll see over and over again,
there is nothing about the pastor that is unique (except his office).
The pastor is simply supposed to be an exemplary Christian.
Therefore *everything* that Paul says about the pastor
is also said in some other place about the Christian.
So it would be equally true to say that today we are talking about
the character and doctrine of the *Christian*.

We’ve already distinguished between these three uses of the term “elder.”
“Elder” can refer simply to an older man.
“Elder” can refer to a ruler in the community.
Or “Elder” can refer to a ruler who also preaches.

If you want to see all three uses in a single chapter,
turn over to 1 Timothy 5:
verse 1 says “do not rebuke an elder” (the English reads “older man” –
but the word is the exact same word used later in verse 17);
verse 17 says “Let the elders who rule well
be considered worthy of a double honor,
especially those who labor in preaching and teaching...”

In verse 1 it is not talking about an “office” of elder –
but is simply referring to an older man
(as you can see from the rest of verses 1-2,
which refer to younger men, older women, and younger women).
But in verse 17 it is plainly referring to the elders who rule well –
and especially to the elders who rule and teach.

So pretty clearly in 1 Timothy 5, we have references to the “older men” in verse 1,
to the rulers of the community in the first part of verse 17,
and to the rulers who also teach and preach in the latter part of verse 17.

So, now we are ready to look at our text in Titus 3.
What kind of elders is Paul talking about here?
Verse 9 provides a helpful clue:

“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.”

So the particular task that Paul has assigned to Titus
is to appoint *pastors* – preachers – gospel ministers –
in every town.

It is likely that the churches in Crete already had elders
in the sense of rulers of the community
(what we would call “ruling elders”).

The old testament examples that we read earlier
had served as the paradigm for Jewish communities around the world.
Wherever you found a synagogue,
the “elders” of the synagogue would be the older men –
although it is important to note that “older”
had more to do with “influential” than it did with just “age.”

What you see in the NT –
for instance in Paul’s list of qualifications in Timothy and Titus –
is an insistence that age and status is not enough.

A man’s character and doctrine is essential
to be considered for a position of leadership in the church.

In the coming months, you will be asked to consider the men
who have been nominated for elder and deacon.

You will be asked which of these men (if any)
you believe are called by God to serve as your elders and deacons.

So you will want to look at their character and doctrine.

It is not an abstract question.

Do not compare them to some abstract ideal.

Rather, as you look *at this congregation* –

as you look at one another –

are *these* the men who best reflect Christian character and doctrine
in this church?

Introduction: The Task – “Appoint Elders in Every Town” (1:5)

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—*

I mentioned last week that there are two important points in verse 5:

First, Paul speaks of *elders* (plural) in every town.

And second, Paul speaks of elders in every *town*.

These two points are at the heart of *Presbyterianism*.

At the heart of Presbyterianism is the *presbytery* – the regional eldership.

Paul does not say “appoint elders in every *church*” –
he says to appoint elders (plural) in every *town*.

We see this in Acts 15 – the elders of Jerusalem – or Acts 20 – the elders of Ephesus,
where there is a single eldership in these cities.
(And the word “presbytery” simply means “eldership”).

There is no biblical warrant for having independent congregations.
Paul says that all the churches in a city should be subject to their elders.
When Presbyterianism was first established in Geneva, in France, or in Scotland
the idea was the same.
All the churches in Geneva were under a single eldership.
Of course, they also had the advantage of state support!
But if you look at the Huguenots in 16th century France –
they also established city/regional elderships
even though they did *not* have state support.

What we have in the PCA is a far cry from what Paul says.
We have a presbytery that covers the whole state of Michigan –
with a slice of northern Indiana.
If we were doing what Paul says, we would have a presbytery of *South Bend*
(which might include the surrounding countryside).
There would be another Presbytery of LaPorte, another in Valparaiso, etc.

And these presbyteries would include *all* the pastors and elders
from *all* the churches.

The problem is that we are divided into hundreds of different denominations.
It has taken a thousand years to create this mess
(if you go back to the divide between eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic)
so I don’t expect to solve the problem any time soon!
But we need to be clear that there *is* a problem!
It is not a *good* thing that the church is so divided.

But the solution to the problem will only come through fidelity to the apostles’ teaching.
We need to have elders in every city who will “give instruction in sound doctrine
and...rebuke those who contradict it.”

It is also worth pointing out that Paul uses the word for elder (presbuteros)
interchangeably with the word for overseer or bishop (episcopos).
In the fourth century, Jerome described how presbyter and bishop were once equal:
“Originally the churches were governed by a common council of the presbyters.
But after one of their number began to think
that those whom he had baptized were his and not Christ’s,
it was universally decreed that one of the presbyters
should be elected to preside over the others,

to whom the care of the whole church should pertain,
that the seeds of schism might be alleviated.” (285)

But in Paul’s day, the terms presbyter and bishop could refer to the same office –
namely, that of the elder who also labored in preaching and teaching.

I’d like to point out that our passage has three distinct sections.

First, there are the qualifications of the elder in verse 6.

Verse 6 describes what should be the case *before* a man becomes an elder.

Then, in verses 7-8, there is a distinct change.

V 7-8 are describing the *character* of a man who is an overseer (or bishop).

Obviously, if a man is not such *before* he becomes an elder,
there is very little chance that he will gain such character
as an elder!

But the point here is that this is what an elder *must be*.

Then in verse 9, Paul tells us what the *teaching* of the bishop should be like.

And while I have said that Paul is particularly talking about what we would call pastors,
his description of the qualifications and character of these men
is simply describing what a godly Christian looks like.

After all, the pastor, the elder, the deacon – the officers of the church –
are simply called to be exemplary Christians.

There are no special qualities that go above and beyond “ordinary Christians.”

1. The Qualifications for the Elder – Above Reproach – Leads His Household Well (v6)

*⁶if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife,^[c] and his children are believers^[d]
and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.*

The qualifications for the elder focus on his household.

Is he above reproach?

The question is *not* “Is he sinless?”

But is he above reproach?

And how do you know?

Well, look at his family.

He should be “the husband of one wife.”

There was a debate in the early church (which has continued to this day)
over whether Paul means “married only once” –

or “married to only one woman at a time.”

Some say that Paul is simply forbidding polygamists to be elders.

Others that Paul is saying that an elder should only be married once –
and even if his wife dies, he should not remarry.

Paul's point is that the elder must be a "one woman man" –
and not just "one woman at a time"!
It is not clear to me that Paul is excluding a widower who has remarried,
and it is *possible* that someone could be divorced and remarried,
and still qualify for elder –
but certainly there would be a question about the "twice-married" –
since it would at least raise the question *is this a one-woman man?*

I realize that this sounds odd nowadays.

Divorce and remarriage are so common that we find it strange and intrusive
to raise questions about a man's character in this way.

But it is worth pointing out that divorce and remarriage
were *at least* as common in Paul's day as in ours –
both among Jews and among Gentiles.

Remember that when Jesus says that one should only divorce for sexual immorality,
his disciples respond,

"if this is the case between a man and his wife,
it is better not to marry" – Mt 19:10.

They were used to a society where divorce was really easy:
in Jewish culture, you simply wrote out a statement "I divorce you"
and it was done.

In Roman culture it was even easier:

You simply say it – "I'm leaving" – and you are divorced!

But Paul says that the church should be led by exemplary Christians.

Therefore your pastors, elders, and deacons should be one-women men.

Likewise, his children should be faithful.

The word here is the adjective "pistos"
which can be translated "faithful" "believers" or "trustworthy."

There was a controversy in my presbytery a few years ago on this question,
and I served for a couple years on a committee that worked on this.

The ESV is simply wrong to translate this as "believers."

Neither the immediate context of Titus 1
nor the general context of the Pastoral Epistles
supports this translation.

Look at the rest of the sentence.

His children are [pistos – faithful or believers],
and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

The point at issue in this verse is the character of the man's children.
Are his children rebellious and debauched –
or are they trustworthy.

Certainly, it would be a good thing for them to have saving faith in Jesus –
but that is *not* what Paul is talking about here!

And in the broader context of the Pastoral Epistles,
Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:4
that the bishop should “manage his own household well,
with all dignity keeping his children submissive,
for if someone does not know how to manage his own household,
how will he care for God’s church?”

Here, in the parallel passage in Titus,
it should be clear that Paul is making the same point.
He is not talking about the secrets of the heart –
but the outward and open character of the people involved.

Indeed, if you do a broader survey of the word “pistos” in Paul’s letters,
you find that his general use of the word fits exactly what I am saying here.
It *can* mean “believing” – but it *ordinarily* means “faithful” –
someone who is trustworthy and reliable.

That’s not surprising, given that one of Paul’s favorite uses of the word *faithful* (pistos)
is as a reference to someone as a “faithful” minister or “faithful” child.

So, this means that when you are looking for an elder or deacon,
look at their households – look at their children:
Are they reliable?
Are they trustworthy?

And the contrast at the end of the verse is important:
Are they open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination?

A man cannot guarantee that his children will be believers
but how he has trained them will show in their character.
If his children are wild and rebellious,
then that points to a problem in the way that he has taught them.

Now, sure, every child will have his moments –
and every household will have their struggles!
But when you look at the general character of the household,
what do you see?

And the reason why Paul focuses his attention here
is because *the elder will treat you like he has treated his family.*

After all, the church is the family of Jesus.

And the elders will govern the church the way they govern their family.

2. The Character of the Bishop – Above Reproach in Practical Godliness (v7-8)

a. Not Arrogant, Quick-Tempered, Drunken, Violent or Greedy (v7)

⁷ For an overseer,^[e] 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,

In verse 7, we turn to the character of the bishop.

Verse 6 focused on the things that must be true *before* he becomes a bishop.

Verses 7-8 should also be true ahead of time –

but they are portrayed particularly as the ongoing character of the man.

He is, after all, God's steward.

The steward is the servant who is over the house.

(This word “steward” is *oikonomon* – from which we get our word “economy” – referring to the ‘law of the house’ – the way in which the household is governed.)

The overseer – the bishop – is a “steward” – he governs the household of God.

And Paul says again, “he must be above reproach.”

In other words, he must be an exemplary Christian.

He must be an example of what the Christian life looks like.

Not that he is perfect or sinless –

but that he is above reproach.

And Paul describes this first in the negative in verse 7:

He must not be arrogant.

He must be humble – not putting on airs

and thinking more highly of himself than he should.

An arrogant man will put down others in order to exalt himself.

And he must not be quick-tempered.

If a man has a serious anger problem, he should not be a pastor.

The pastor will face all sorts of challenging situations –

people will say and do things that *hurt*.

But the bishop must not be quick-tempered.

“Quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (James 1:19)

James says that this should be true of all Christians –

and therefore it should be especially true of pastors

(and elders and deacons).

(After all, the officers of the church are called to be exemplary Christians).

Likewise, he must not be a drunkard.

A pastor must always be prepared to shepherd the flock.

If you are drunk, then you are in no condition to help those in need!
(Again, this should be true for all Christians –
but it *must* be true of the leaders).

He must not be violent – not a ‘striker.’
You might think that this goes without saying.
But that’s only if you grew up in a family that was free from violence.
If you grew up with a violent parent –
or if you have experienced a violent spouse –
then you *know* exactly why this is so important!
The violent man uses force – or simply the *threat* of force –
to control and overpower people.
And there is *no place* for that in the church of Jesus Christ.
The pattern of our Savior demands
that we endure the wrath of others with patience.

As John Chrysostom put it,
“The teacher is the physician of souls.
But the physician does not strike.
Rather he heals and restores any who might strike him.” (287)

And he must not be greedy for gain.
Do you see my point
about how there is nothing particularly special about the bishop?
Covetousness is idolatry.
No Christian should be greedy or covetous.
We should be content with what God has given us.
If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

Verse 8 then deals with the positive characteristics of the bishop:

**b. But Hospitable, a Lover of Good, Self-Controlled, Upright, Holy,
Disciplined (v8)**

⁸ *but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.*

He must be hospitable.
The word – philoxenon – speaks of “love of strangers.”
We often speak of “hospitality” in terms of having friends over.
But the biblical conception of hospitality
has to do with showing love to strangers –
and particularly travelers.
Think of Abraham in Genesis 17 – who offers hospitality to three strangers –
not realizing that he was entertaining the LORD!

That is the standard for the bishop.
He must be like Abraham –

always ready to provide shelter and food for strangers.
In the early church, the bishop often lived in a large house –
because his house was essentially the hotel for traveling Christians!
I often say that if you are traveling,
and if you would rather not stay in a hotel,
let me know –
because I know pastors and elders all over the country.
And since Paul says that the bishop must be hospitable,
I am very willing to call them up and tell them that you are coming!
(and so far, I have never been turned down...)

But even here, we need to remember that this is not something *unique* to the pastor.
Hebrews 13:2 says *to every Christian* –
“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”
All of you are called to show hospitality to strangers.
This is what it means to be the body of Christ.
You don’t have to have everything perfect.
Hospitality is not about putting on a show.
It’s about love.
It’s about making people feel welcome –
it's about the family of Jesus living the way Jesus taught us to live!

And that is why the bishop must also be *a lover of good*,
Not only must he love strangers – he must also love the *good*.
These two words are used together on purpose.
What does it mean to be a “lover of good”?
Our love cannot be indiscriminate.
You cannot love everyone and everything.
If you love *good* – then you *cannot* love evil.

Some people say that you should “love the sinner, hate the sin.”
But that’s not quite the right way to say it.
You love the *person* – you do not love the *sinner*.
You love what is good.
And sinners are not good.
Yes, every human being was created in the image of God –
therefore we love every human being!

Think about how Paul says it in Romans 5:8 –
“God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners,
Christ died for us.”
God does not love the fact that we are sinners.
He loved us *in spite of the fact* that we were sinners.

You love the person – even though they are a sinner.

Why do I take the time to make this distinction?
Because what I love about you
is the way that you reflect the God whom I love.
And insofar as you *don't* reflect the God whom I love –
I *don't love you*.

When I see the sin in my own life – I don't love that!
I hate that!
If we *love the good* then we cannot help but hate evil –
because we hate the thing that is destroying that which we love!

And that is why the bishop must be *self-controlled*.
The idea here is the idea of moderation.
Moderation is the opposite of the negatives in the previous verse.
Being even-tempered – humble – moderate in the use of wine,
not to mention moderate in the use of things (vs. being greedy).
The moderate man is not given to extremes –
because it takes wisdom to know how to further the goal of love
in the difficult situations of life.
If a man is characterized by self-control,
then he is able to practice what he preaches.

Likewise, he must be *upright*,
He must be *just*.
He will be called upon to judge conflicts.
So he must be an upright man.

And he must be *holy*,
In one sense, upright and holy are inseparable.
An upright man *does* what is right.
A holy man likewise *does* what is right.
But you can imagine a man who does all the right things outwardly –
who is thereby “upright” in a way –
but who lacks the inward disposition.
Such a man is *not* holy.

Justice can have a mere outward existence.
Holiness cannot.

And finally, he must be *disciplined*.
This has a similar range of meaning as the word “self-controlled” earlier.
If the pastor lacks self-discipline,
then he will find it difficult to be effective in disciplining others.

And after all, *disciplining others* is the task and calling of the bishop (as we see in v9)

3. The Doctrine of the Bishop – Able to Instruct and Rebuke (v9)

⁹ *He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound^[1] doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*

Notice that there are three parts to the bishop's doctrinal task:

First he must *hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught*.

(the word translated "trustworthy" is the same word, *pistos*, that was translated "believers" in verse 6).

Before you can teach others, you first have to know it – and not just bits and pieces.

You have to be *solid*.

You have to *hold firm* to the faithful word.

This is why we require candidates for the ministry to go to seminary.

They need to be taught thoroughly –

and then examined thoroughly by the presbytery – so that we can be confident

that they hold firm to the faithful word.

In the same way that Paul and his traveling presbytery

trained Timothy and Titus carefully

over a period of many years –

we also require a man to undergo many years of training.

And then, second, he has to be able to preach.

He must be able to give instruction in sound doctrine.

And remember what we saw last week:

sound doctrine is not just a matter of academic knowledge.

Sound doctrine includes both what man is to believe concerning God

and what duty God requires of man.

Augustine once wrote a book entitled "On Christian Doctrine."

Do you know what that book is about?

There are two basic parts:

first, how to interpret the scriptures –

second, how to preach the scriptures.

And Augustine says that if you would understand any scripture aright,

then your interpretation and your teaching

must show how that scripture teaches us to love God and neighbor.

Sound doctrine – faithful teaching – must always include

both what man is to believe concerning God,

and what duty God requires of man.

But the pastor's task does not end with teaching.

There is the final task:

“and also to rebuke those who contradict” sound doctrine.

If sound doctrine includes both faith and practice,
then the pastor must rebuke both those who believe the wrong,
and those who practice the wrong.

There are men who have great theology – and who are great teachers –
yet are *incompetent* as pastors
because they do not know how to rebuke those who contradict.
Fear of man is usually the biggest problem.
They are worried about what people will think of them,
and so they say nothing.
That was true of me – and I fear it is still more true than it should be!

And as we saw last time, there will be different ways in which this works.
For instance, in verses 10-11, Paul says that the false teachers
must be silenced.
In that case, the rebuke is designed to cut them off.
Their teaching is harming the flock.
Therefore, they may no longer teach in the church.

But then in verses 12-14 Paul urges Titus to “sharply rebuke” the church in Crete,
“so that they may be sound in the faith.”
That’s a very different goal.
With false teachers – with wolves in sheep’s clothing –
the object of the rebuke is to keep them away from the sheep!
But with erring church members, the object is to restore them to health.
The erring church member is *not* a wolf in sheep’s clothing –
he may just be a clumsy sheep who is bumping into other sheep –
or perhaps he is a proud sheep
who thinks he knows better than everyone else.

How can you tell the difference?
Sheep don’t eat other sheep.
Wolves eat sheep.
If the sheep are being devoured and destroyed –
that is a sign that you are dealing with a wolf.
But if the sheep are simply bumping into each other and knocking each other over,
that requires the shepherd to bring order
by rebuking those who contradict sound doctrine.

So as you consider candidates for elder and deacon,
Paul’s description of the qualifications, character, and doctrine of pastors
helps you think about what to look for.
And even more, challenges *you* to be that sort of person as well.