

Elders in the Church

Titus 1: 5-9

After a warm greeting, Paul immediately got to the heart of the matter. He was writing to Titus with purpose, seeking to equip him for ministry, while serving to establish local churches. The task at hand was ordaining elders within every city in Crete, so they could lead local congregations that were being planted. While not as widely referenced as the passage in 1 Timothy, Paul also laid outline biblical guidelines for pastors in the passage as well. In fact, the two passages are very similar, revealing the same requirements.

Paul refers to *elders* in verse five, and a *bishop* in verse seven. The word *elder* is translated from the Greek word *presbuteros*, speaking of an older man, but the term had become widely accepted as an official title – a term associated with leadership within the church. Switching to the term *bishop* in verse seven, it is apparent that Paul viewed the two words as interchangeable within the church. The word *bishop* refers to a *watchmen or overseer*. Again, when we compare this passage to the one in 1 Timothy, it is evident Paul is dealing with pastors within the local church. Whether they are identified as a pastor, elder, or bishop, the qualifications and duties are the same.

Let's take a few moments to examine the [criteria](#) Paul established for: [Elders in the Church](#).

I. The Charge to Titus (5) – [For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee](#). Paul revealed his expectations for Titus as he served in Crete. He dealt with:

A. A Matter of Order – [For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting](#). Paul desired Titus to set things in order in Crete that needed to be addressed. This was an essential aspect of his ministry. If ministry was to be successful, Paul knew Titus would need to serve in a manner that pleased God and produced results. This is an interesting phrase. Consider the thoughts of John McArthur: The verb *epidiorthoō* (**set in order**) is comprised of two prepositions, *epi* ("upon") and *dia* ("through"), attached to *orthoō* ("to make straight"). It is from *orthos* that we derive *orthodontist*, a dental specialist who straightens and aligns crooked teeth. In ancient times, the term was used of setting broken bones and straightening bent limbs, a function of the medical specialty that today we call orthopedics. ⁱ

B. A Matter of Ordination – [For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee](#). As I mentioned in the

introduction, the most pressing matter Titus needed to address was ordaining elders in every city in order for the local congregations to have leadership. This was not just a matter of personal preference, but of conviction. Paul knew the churches must have solid, biblical leadership if they were to endure the difficulties they faced and thrive in such an environment. The challenges were many, and leadership was essential. [Titus 1:10 – For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision.](#)

II. The Qualifications for Elders (6-9) – Just as Paul had done for the young pastor Timothy, he also sent a list of qualifications unto Titus for the elders at Crete. Many seem to ignore these biblical qualifications, but they are eternally preserved for our benefit. Paul mentioned three areas in which a man must be examined and found worthy. He is to be examined:

A. Socially (6) – [If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.](#) Paul first mentioned the social aspect regarding the qualifications of an elder. Consider:

- **His Reputation** – [If any be blameless.](#) He must be “*above reproach; not open to attack; not able to be criticized by the enemy at all.*”
- **His Devotion** – [If any be...the husband of one wife.](#) This has the idea of being “*a one-woman man; being completely and wholly devoted to his wife.*” William Barclay said, “he must be a loyal husband, preserving marriage in all its purity.” I believe in order to meet this qualification, the pastor cannot have been divorced and remarried.
- **His Administration** – [having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.](#) Paul knew it was imperative for a man to lead his family well if he was to lead the church and have the respect of the community. His children were a reflection of him. Paul further adds to this in 1 Timothy 3:5. [\(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?\)](#) This does not mean that every pastor’s child will be a life-long committed servant of the Lord. It does not imply that every pastor’s child will be saved by grace. It does require that the pastor faithfully and biblically lead his family, setting the example first at home, then in the church.

B. Personally – Paul now lists personal qualifications for the pastor. We have already discussed his being blameless. He must also be:

- **Not Self-willed** – *self-pleasing, arrogant, haughty, and self-centered.* It is a person who thinks too highly of himself, who looks at his own things and ignores or neglects the things of

others. It is a person who is harsh to others; who criticizes, grumbles, and condemns others; who downs others and elevates himself in his own mind.

- **Not soon Angry** – a long-lasting anger; an anger that is deeply rooted and has been held for a long time; an anger against someone that a person just refuses to let go; the person refuses to forgive the other person. The minister must not be quick tempered or hot-headed, nor given over to long-lasting anger.
- **Not given to Wine** – The pastor is not to be a drunkard, one who consumes alcohol.
- **No Striker** – not combative or violent, not contentious or quarrelsome, not a person who strikes out and contends with another person. The minister must not be a person who strikes other people or who becomes easily upset, irritated, or aggravated with others.
- **Not given to Filthy Lucre** – The pastor is not to love money, material gain, or worldly possessions. He has not sought ministry as a profession or means of profit.
- **Lover of Hospitality** – to have an open heart and home; "showing love or being a friend to the believers, especially strangers or foreigners."
- **Lover of good Men** – a lover of good things as well as of good people. The minister of God loves good no matter where he finds it, in people or things. He loves the poor and the homeless, the weak and the suffering, as well as the wealthy and healthy.
- **Sober** – be sober-minded, that is, to have a mind that is sound, sensible, controlled, disciplined, and chaste—a mind that has complete control over all sensual desires.
- **Just** – honest, upright, fair, above board in his behavior and dealings with both God and man. There is no deception, lying, cheating, stealing, meanness, misbehavior, or irresponsibility whatsoever in the minister's dealings—none with men or with God.
- **Holy** – pure, clean, moral, unpolluted from the dirt and filth of sin. The minister must be a person who is clean and pure before the eyes of God.
- **Temperate** – He must have power over his body, mind, and life. He must be vigilant and watchful, controlling and guarding his behavior both when alone and when with others. He must control his eyes, ears, tongue, flesh, appetites, thoughts, hands, and feet—watching where he goes, what he does, says, thinks, eats, hears, looks at, and desires. ⁱⁱ (Defining the social and physical qualities relied upon the POSB Commentary. See endnote ii.)

C. Spiritually (9) – *Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.* Paul also revealed the pastor (bishop) must possess a solid spiritual commitment and character. He spoke of:

- **A Firm Foundation** – *Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught.* The pastor must be grounded in the Word of God, settled in doctrine and faith – knowing what he believes, and having his beliefs founded in the Word. A man cannot adequately pastor the church if he is unsure of who he is and what he believes. This is why men are brought before an ordination counsel and questioned prior to being ordained into the Gospel ministry. That does not imply that a young pastor will have the knowledge and wisdom of a man who has been faithful for decades; but it will reveal whether he embraces and understands the fundamentals of the faith. Core doctrine is essential for the pastor!

- **Faithful Proclamation** – *Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.* Paul knew the primary responsibility of the pastor was the public proclamation of the Word. The bishop was to know the Word, and faithfully proclaim the Word in order to exhort the believer and convince those who were skeptical in the faith. A man who refused to study the Word and faithfully preach the Word was not worthy to serve as an elder in the church.

I fear the primary responsibility of pastors has been sidelined in favor of other aspects of ministry. Many today are less concerned with the pastor's preaching than they are his being involved in every area of church and community life. Many congregations expect their pastors to be at every function, meet every perceived or felt need within the congregation, and still have time to preach like the pastors do on television each week. I am not minimizing the need for other aspects of ministry, but the pastor's primary responsibility is to pray and study the Word in preparation to preach the Word.

Conclusion: I trust this study has been enlightening for you today. I am truly thankful that Fellowship continues to abide by the Word of God, seeking to follow these requirements. We need to pray that the Lord will continue to raise up faithful, godly men to serve the local church in pastoral roles. God ordained the pastor to lead according to His Word.

ⁱ MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Titus.

ⁱⁱ Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon.