

Shepherding The Church

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I. Titus 1:5-9

A. For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you-- if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

II. Paul's Ministry In Crete

- A. 4th and final missionary journey: under centurion escort to Rome (Acts 27:7-12).
1. Ship reached Fair Havens and remained there less than a month.¹
- B. Later, after Paul's release from prison in Rome, Paul appears to have returned to Crete with Titus.
1. Paul leaves Titus in Crete and eventually returns to western Greece where, in approximately A.D. 65, some 2-3 years before Paul's final imprisonment and death, he is now writing to Titus.

III. Exposition

A. Titus 1:5

1. Why was Titus in Crete?
 - a) Titus was left in Crete to take care of ministry needs that remained after Paul's departure.
2. Why were elders needed?
 - a) Shepherds - to nurture, guide, and develop the fledgling Christian community in Crete.
 - b) Responsibility requires some measure of authority.
 - c) What is an elder?
 - (1) Presbuteros (Tit. 1:5) = "older." Age brings:
 - (a) Experience – school of hard knocks, Christian experience.

¹ *The ship reached Fair Havens in the latter part of September, and was detained there by a continuance of unfavorable winds until after October 5" (Ramsay, p. 322). [Unger, s.v. "Paul"]*

- (b) Wisdom – practical ability to apply Christian teachings to real-world situations.
 - (c) Knowledge of subtle dangers which others do not see.
 - (d) Less subject to the dangers of pride
 - 1 Timothy 3:6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil.
 - (e) Increase in grace – as experience the need for grace.
 - (f) Meekness – ability to disagree with grace, but without compromising important principles.
- (2) Episkopos (Tit. 1:7) = “over seer”, “guarding,” “bishop.”
- (a) Synonymous here and in Acts 20:17,28.
 - (b) Often abused in an unbiblical attempt to build a hierarchical structure beyond what Scripture establishes.
 - i) Roman Catholicism's “college of bishops”: Archbishop, Cardinal, Patriarch, Pope.
 - (c) Tip: where pointy hats, miters, and ornate vestments predominate, its generally a clue to look elsewhere for a place of fellowship.
 - i) Elaborate uniforms to enforce the separation “clergy” from the so-called “laity.”
 - ii) Undermining the priesthood of all believers.
- (3) Poimēn = shepherd, most often a verb (action) rather than a noun (position).
- (a) Tend, feed, guide, restore.
 - (b) Equivalent to Episkopos – the Episkopos are to “shepherd” the church of God (Acts 20:28).
 - (c) Reflecting the characteristics of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.
 - i) 1 Peter 5:1-4 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.
- (4) Equivalence: elders = bishops = shepherds (1Pe. 5:1-2)
3. “appoint elders in every city” (Tit. 1:5)
- a) Multiple elders.

- (1) "In every city" - does this mean one elder leading each of several churches in the city?
 - (a) How many churches in each city during the time of fledgling Christianity?
 - (b) Acts 11:30 – First mention of the term "elders" in relation to the NT church.
 - i) Church at Antioch sent an offering by Paul and Barnabas to the elders (plural) of the (single) church in Jerusalem.
 - (c) Acts 15 – Both apostles (plural) and elders (plural) in the church in Jerusalem.
 - (d) Acts 21:18 – When Paul visits Jerusalem after his 3rd missionary journey, James and all the elders (plural) were present.
- (2) "In every church"
 - (a) Acts 14:23 – Passing through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, Paul and Barnabas appoint elders (plural) in every church.
 - (b) Acts 20:17 – From Miletus, Paul sends for the elders (plural) of the church (singular) of Ephesus.
 - (c) Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.
 - (d) 1 Thessalonians 5:12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord (presumably in the same fellowship – a single church).
 - (e) 1 Peter 5:5 – Peter urges the young believers to submit themselves to their elders (presumably in the same fellowship – a single church).
- (3) Benefits of plural eldership.
 - (a) Breadth of knowledge concerning the Scriptures.
 - (b) Breadth of ministry gifting.
 - (c) Differences in personality and ministry style.
 - (d) Wisdom in counsel.
 - (e) Sharing the ministry load.
 - i) Exodus 18:18 Moses' father in law:
"Both you and these people who *are* with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing *is* too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself."
 - (f) Availability.
 - (g) True accountability.
 - (h) Continuity of ministry (churches which fall apart when figurehead steps down or falls).

- (4) Practical considerations.
- (a) Lack support base to financial support of all those who are qualified to serve.
 - (b) Establishing a work where mature believers are initially lacking.
- b) Why the need to belabor this seemingly obvious point?
- (1) Human proclivities to elevate a single individual.
 - (2) As one writer observed:
 "[Machiavelli wrote] "a wise prince should devise means whereby his subjects may at all times, whether favourable or adverse, feel the need of the State and of him, and then they will always be faithful to him." This is consistent with a major and common failing on the part of those in church leadership. Rather than inviting church members to maturity in Christ and the independence that comes naturally with that increasing maturity . . . church leaders often invite members to become addicted to the sugar high of entertainment, programs, and the charisma of a dynamic communicator. Not only does this often-applied approach appeal to the leader's ego, but for Machiavelli it is a way to assure that followers will continue to be faithful to that leader. In other words, singularity and authority demands methodology that will maintain the continuance of that authority. . . . The Biblical model is simple indeed. It would appear that mandating a singular or monocratic leadership, or creating a complete distinction between a pastor and an elder or between an overseer and a pastor, represents a shift away from the natural interpretation of Scripture and the simplicity that results, and a shift toward anthropocentric and artificial forms of leadership." [Cone, 86,92].
 - (3) Not just a control/ego issue of the singular elder: the sheep want to imprint on one man – on a particular style or personality.
 - (a) Jer. 5:31 : The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?
- B. Tit. 1:6 - "If a *man* is blameless" - elders are *men*.
1. There are several reasons for this biblical distinction that church leadership is reserved for men only. Two reasons are found in Paul's first letter to Timothy wherein Paul gives similar instructions concerning Church leadership as those found in this letter to Titus.
 - (1) 1 Timothy 2:11-14 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.
 - b) First, in 1 Timothy, Paul appeals to the order of creation of Adam relative to Eve as establishing God's intention that men should lead (2Ti. 2:13).
 - c) Second, Paul indicates that, in general — all else being equal, women are more easily deceived than men (1Ti. 2:14).

- (1) There will always be individual exceptions which can be pointed to.
 - (2) However, this recognizes different characteristics between men and women — differences which were intentionally designed by God.
 - (3) Women, generally, are more *relationally/intuitively* oriented. Men tend to be more fact-based and less concerned with preserving relationships when doing so would be detrimental to the preservation of the truth.
 - (4) I believe that one factor contributing to the growing dominance of women in today's church pulpits is the trend away from doctrine in favor of emphasizing commonality, universality, and relationship over truth.
- d) Third, we find that the scriptures consistently indicate female leadership over men to be anomalous and a departure from the plan of God.
- (1) The prophetess Deborah
 - (a) It is a characteristic of false teachers to *twist* scripture. One such method is to appeal to the exceptions within Scripture in order to teach errant views (2Pe. 3:16).
 - (b) The prophetess Deborah encouraging Barak to go up against Sisera, the captain of the army of Jabin, king of Hazor.
 - (c) Judges 4:8-9 And Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!" So she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.
 - (d) As if to underscore this unmanly period in Israel, when Barak finally does set about to pursue Sisera, it is a woman who kills him in her tent by driving a peg through his temple (Jdg. 4:22).
 - (e) It is no accident that we find this episode recorded in the book of Judges, which is chock full of ungodly examples illustrating ungodly behavior and practices outside of God's ideals.
 - (2) Woman and children lead
 - (a) In a statement which is critical of the practices in Israel, God states through Isaiah:
As for My people, children are their oppressors, And women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, And destroy the way of your paths." (Isa. 3:12)
 - (b) The reference to *women* may mean that wives were unduly influencing their husbands who were rulers, or that the male leaders lacked vigor.
 - (3) Jezebel, an individual who dominated and manipulated her passive husband, king Ahab.

(a) A model for a similar individual in the church at Thyatira (Rev. 2:20).

(b) Revelation 2:20 "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

(c) Not just that she seduced, but that she was *allowed to teach*.

(4) Male headship in the home (1Cor. 11; Eph. 5; Col. 3).

2. We will search the NT in vain for a single example of a woman in the position of female apostle, pastor, congregational leader, or elder.
3. What about Paul's letter to the church at Galatia wherein he states there is "neither male nor female *in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3:28)?
 - a) The key phrase is "in Christ Jesus" - this passage is speaking about equality in access to and the means of salvation.
 - b) Using this passage in an attempt to erase all male/female roll distinctions is to engage in scripture twisting and make the Holy Spirit contradict Himself in the many other passages where male/female roll distinctions are upheld (e.g., 1Cor. 11; Eph. 5; Col. 3).
 - c) Christians who deny male headship, either in the church or in the home, make the mistake of confusing difference in role as necessitating difference in worth before God.
 - d) Trinity as counter-example.
4. A woman who believes she is called by God to be a pastor is simply deceived. And if she is deceived on something this basic, isn't she already a living demonstration of the deception which Paul refers to in 2 Timothy 2?
 - a) As a leader, already walking in deception, where is she likely to lead the sheep which choose to be fed by her?
5. Why would a Christian who knows the word of the Lord on this matter choose to attend a church led by one or more women?
 - a) DISCLAIMER: Not talking about a temporary situation, as on the mission field or in an evangelistic setting where no qualified male is available.
 - b) Why would a person knowingly place a person who is walking in open disobedience to the plain teaching of the NT in a place of spiritual authority in one's life? Is it realistic to expect to spiritually prosper under such a leader?
 - c) What would it say about our allegiance? Are we being guided by the Scripture or by the culture? By the Holy Spirit or the spirit of the age?
 - d) Do we truly love Jesus?

(1) Luke 6:46 "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?"

(2) Obedience is the most direct, practical, objective way by which we demonstrate our true love of Christ (Isa. 50:10; Lu. 6:46; John 14:15,21,23-24; 15:10,14; Acts 5:32; 1Jn. 3:24).

e) God is not obligated to bless practices which are opposed to His Word.

IV. Points Of Application

A. First: biblical Christianity is a form of "organized religion."

1. The body of Christ, the Church, is not "disorganized religion" -- which many people today seem to prefer.
2. Not "organized religion" as practiced in some large Protestant denominations or as the Roman Catholic church -- with a large hierarchical structure above the level of the local church.

a) Only three levels:

(1) pastor = elder = overseer = shepherd

(2) deacons

(3) sheep (and we are *all* sheep!)

3. Nor is it a democracy.
4. Nor is it fashioned upon a business model.
5. Leadership, but not as the world conceives of leaders -- servant leadership which exhibits humility in alignment with the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

B. Second: the Church is to be led by *men*.

1. Recognizing that there will be some situations where qualified men are temporarily lacking.
2. God's design is to have spiritually-minded men at the helm of the local church.
3. Where this mandate is jettisoned:

a) The church is already embracing unbiblical practices.

b) Such a church will be increasingly open to other deceptions which follow.

c) With women leading the church, the deceptions will often be characterized by a tendency to elevate relationship over revealed truth.

(1) It is no accident that women pastors are at the forefront of the ecumenical movement's embrace and endorsement of unbiblical lifestyles and beliefs.

(2) Certainly such perversions of God's truth are promoted by both men and women, but we have no less an authority than Paul himself, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit warning us that the feminine gender has a greater proclivity in this area.

C. Third: the Church is to be led by *several* men.

1. Again, there may be temporary or extenuating circumstances which make this impractical at a given point in time, but the intention should be to move toward such a leadership model.
2. There are a host of benefits which accrue from the practice of plural leadership which God has intended for the benefit of His people: both the shepherds and the sheep.

D. In summary: where all of these Scriptural norms are practiced, the local church is closest to walking in the will of God in regard to church government and will benefit accordingly.

V. References

- Cone Christopher Cone, ed., *Practical Aspects of Pastoral Authority* (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2009). ISBN:978-0-9814791-5-6
- Strauch Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis And Roth Publishers, 1995). ISBN = 0-936083-11-5