

The Character Of An Elder: Part 2

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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. Review

- A. Paul left Titus in Crete to "set in order the things that are lacking and to appoint elders."
- B. The fledgling Christian community in Crete was at risk until the "things which were lacking" were established. This included the appointment of elders to shepherd believers in each local church.
- C. Having examined verses 5 and 6 in our previous times together, we saw Paul set forth the following requirements concerning eldership:
1. FIRST: it is God's ideal for there to be multiple elders within each church – a plural leadership of elders functioning within each local congregation.
 2. SECOND: the Scripture uses several terms emphasizing different aspects of the identical role of shepherding the local congregation.
 - a) Elder (*presbuteros*)
 - b) Bishop or overseer (*episkopos*)
 - c) Shepherd or pastor (*poimēn*)
 - d) An elder is to be a relatively older, more experienced, mature individual who is responsible, with other similar individuals, for overseeing and guarding the local flock in a similar way that a shepherd tends a flock of sheep.
 - e) The Scriptures do not support the idea that a pastor is over a group of elders or that a bishop is over a group of pastors. Elder = pastor = bishop = overseer = shepherd.
 3. THIRD: an elder must be a man – in accord with the gender-specific roles which God has established regarding leadership within the church and family.
 4. FOURTH: an elder must be 'blameless' – the Greek term meaning "not having been called up or arraigned before a judge." Free from reproach, not accused of having done anything wrong.

(1) 1Timothy 3:7 - "... he must have a good testimony among those who are outside..."

5. FIFTH: an elder must be a "one woman man" - any man who would serve as a pastor/elder and is involved intimately with a woman must be married and must exhibit consistent and complete faithfulness to his God-given mate within the marriage.
6. SIXTH: an elder must demonstrate godly leadership skills within his family – the children of an elder must benefit from his leadership and instruction within the home as reflected by their godly behavior.

III. Exposition

A. Titus 1:7-9

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.

1. In verses 7 and 8 Paul continues to emphasize *character* - the personal qualities, or fruit of the Spirit, needed to serve effectively as an elder.
2. In verse 9 Paul's emphasis shifts to *gifting* – the abilities that an elder must possess to fulfill his role as a 'bishop' or 'overseer.'

B. V7 - "a steward of God"

1. An elder is, ultimately, a *steward* of God
2. Bishop (*episkopos* – meaning 'one who watches over' or 'guards')
 - a) Who is being guarded?
 - b) Why do they need to be guarded?
 - c) How are they to be guarded?
 - d) Paul takes up these subjects in the remainder of his letter to Titus.
3. Steward (*oikonomos*)
 - a) *Oikos* – house, *nomos* – law or rule.
 - b) One put in charge of a household or estate: manager, administrator, trustee
 - (1) Not the type of administrator/CEO visionary type many churches seem to be seeking as their pastor, but a *spiritual* administrator or trustee of *souls*.
4. What does this stewardship entail?

- a) 1 Peter 5:1-4 – Peter writing to believers of the dispersion:
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.
- b) Paul writing to the elders of Ephesus
"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)
- c) Stewards do not own that which they are entrusted with. God is the owner of the flock:
 - (1) The "flock of God," "the church of God."
 - (2) "He purchased with His own blood."
 - (a) Establishes the *value* of each believer.
- d) The flock, owned by God, is *entrusted* to the leadership of the elders.
 - (a) Those being shepherded belong to God to Whom the elders must give account.
 - (b) Hebrews 13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.
- e) The primary function of an elder is to serve as an instrument under the Chief Shepherd to safeguard the souls of those whom God has purchased.
- f) As such, an elder is a *tool*.
 - (1) A tool does not have its own will.
 - (2) A tool serves the purposes of the one wielding it.
 - (3) Each elder is a tool chosen by God to serve His purposes in the local congregation. In Acts 20, Paul told the Ephesian elders that is is none other than "the Holy Spirit [Who] has made you overseers"
 - (4) In our passage, Paul is describing two aspects of this "tool of God"
 - (a) Characteristics – what does the tool look like? What must an elder's life and behavior resemble?
 - (b) Function – what does the tool accomplish in its service under God's hand? What are some of the primary responsibilities of an elder?
 - (c) As with any effective tool, the characteristics of the tool are a prerequisite for its proper function. Character must precede gifting!

- (d) A tool might embody tremendous function, but if its quality isn't up to the task – and it breaks – it can no longer be used and may even damage the work in progress.
- (e) This is why character is so key and why Paul focuses on issues of character prior to gifting or function.
- (f) 1 Corinthians 4:1-2
Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

5. Character of an elder

- a) V7-8 - Paul contrasts 6 negative traits which should not be found in the life of an elder with 6 positive traits which should be found.
 - (1) Negative: without-blame, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money.
 - (2) Positive: hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, hold, self-controlled.
- b) V7 - Negative – these traits should not characterize the life of an elder.
 - (1) FIRST: Blame – as mentioned before, an elder must not stand accused of wrongdoing, in any legal sense, especially among “those who are outside.”
 - (a) If such accusations are true, then the man has demonstrated character issues which are incompatible with being a spiritual leader.
 - (b) Even if such accusations are ultimately untrue, the cause of Christ will still be compromised by the churches appearance of endorsing moral failure. Such an individual should step aside – placing the cause of Christ ahead of his own personal desire to serve as an elder.
 - (2) SECOND: Self-willed – the word used here denotes one who pleases himself and exhibits arrogance or stubbornness or will not submit to external authority (2Pe. 2:10).
 - (a) Plural eldership simply will not work without room for humility and cooperation among individual elders.
 - (b) As a tool of God, the elder should not have his own agenda.
 - (c) Our culture exalts the self and especially the self-will (often recast in more politically-correct terminology as a “dynamic visionary”).
 - (d) How often, one can only wonder, are dynamic leaders with seemingly successful external ministries actually lacking in humility and driven by self-will behind the scenes? This is where plural eldership serves as a vital safety check.
 - (3) THIRD: Quick-tempered – prone to anger.

- (a) This does not concern righteous anger where called for.
 - (b) Paul has in mind a tendency to react to disagreeable situations by resorting to anger rather than other more godly means, such as respectful communication.
 - (c) Proverbs 15:1 - A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.
 - (d) Proverbs 25:11-15 - A word fitly spoken *is like* apples of gold in settings of silver. . . . by long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, and a gentle tongue breaks a bone.
 - (e) Remembering that we do not wrestle with flesh and blood, but with spiritual entities which are not always evident.
 - (f) 2 Timothy 2:23-26 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and *that* they may come to their senses *and escape* the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to *do* his will.
- (4) FOURTH: Given to wine
- (a) "Addicted to wine," a drunkard.
 - (b) May be listed between "quick-tempered" and "violent" because these are typical actions of a person who is addicted to wine.
 - (c) Straight-forward enough, but often misused in an unbiblical attempt to mandate that elders or all believers in general must abstain from any use of alcohol.
 - (d) In regard to the use of alcohol, Scripture teaches temperance rather than abstinence – except for cases where use of alcohol (or other foods) would stumble a brother (Rom. 14:21; 1Cor. 8:9-13).
 - (e) The Christian means of overcoming sin and abuse is found by walking in self-control under the power of the Spirit rather than external legalism which has a tendency to excite the flesh toward sin (Rom. 7:8-9; Col. 2:23).
- (5) FIFTH: Violent – a bully or 'striker'
- (a) A person who uses intimidation as a means of persuasion.
 - (b) One who seeks argument or enjoys confrontation by picking a fight.
 - (c) There are many who are "zealous for the truth," but the way in which they uphold the truth is primarily confrontational and focused on 'winning their point' rather than true edification or exhortation which has a motive of correction unto restoration rather than victory.
- (6) SIXTH: Greedy for money

- (a) The motivation of an elder must not be monetary gain.
 - (b) This is essentially covetousness and violates the 10th commandment (Ex. 20:17).
 - (c) Pastors who view serving as an elder as “just another profession” and thus are attempting to “climb the professional ladder.”
 - (d) Marked by relatively short periods of service in any one fellowship.
 - (e) Always on the look-out for an opportunity to move to the next fellowship with a larger congregation or bigger cash-flow.
 - (f) Exacerbated by the secularization of the so-called “pastoral job market” where churches view the role of an elder primarily as that of an employee instead of a New Testament shepherd.
 - (g) Just as in the business world, there is always the temptation for a church to attempt to grow numerically through human means by offering a larger salary to attract the best talent.
 - (h) Although the Greek word here has the desire for *dishonest* gain primarily in mind, it should be obvious that an elder who is motivated primarily by financial concerns is unlikely to maintain spiritual priorities.
 - (i) Favoritism toward largest contributors (Jas. 2:1-6).
 - (j) Reluctance to enforce church discipline involving financially influential believers.
 - (k) Inability to preach the unvarnished truth due to fiscal liability.
- c) V8 – Paul contrasts the preceding negative characteristics with positive characteristics which should be found in the life of an elder.
- (1) FIRST: Hospitable – (*filozenos*) - “exhibiting brotherly love for strangers”
 - (a) Kind to those he doesn't know closely.
 - (b) Not exhibiting bias toward a person on the basis of their origin or background.
 - (c) The NT equivalent of what God told Israel in the OT – that they were to treat strangers equitably since they too were once strangers in Egypt.
 - (2) SECOND: Lover of what is good
 - (a) Having a mindset which is in alignment with that which God desires.
 - (b) Matthew 5:6 Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.
 - (c) One who dislikes evil schemes and perversity and looks to the light rather than dabbling in darkness.

(d) Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things.

(3) THIRD: Sober-minded

(a) Having a sound or healthy mind.

(b) Moderate – the ability to assess things rightly and balance truths using wisdom to avoid extremes.

(c) Having the ability to curb desires and impulses so as to produce a measured and orderly life. [Friberg, 373]

(4) FOURTH: Just (*dikaios*)

(a) One who is honest, law abiding, and lives morally and ethically.

(b) Whose actions are informed by Scriptural priorities and who is committed to live according to Biblical principles.

(5) FIFTH: Holy (*hosion*)

(a) One who is concerned to live right before God.

(b) Being in a right relationship with God – not separated by unrighteous thoughts or deeds.

(6) SIXTH: Self-controlled (*enkratēs*) - "in or with power"

(a) Having a firm hold over one's desires [Friberg].

(b) One of the fruit of the Spirit highlighted in Galatians 5 (Gal. 5:3).

(c) One who exhibits a consistency of living according to God's principles without periodic lapses.

(d) Denying fleshly impulses by the power of the Spirit.

C. V9 - The function of an elder

1. Having described the characteristics God requires for those who would serve as elders, Paul now begins to give the "job description" for the position of eldership – as relates to gifting.
2. Titus 1:9 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.
3. Notice how contrary verse 9 is in light of modern trends in pastoral ministry! *Paul, you can't be serious?!* How old-fashioned and out-of-touch with today's purpose-driven and customer-oriented ministry focus!
 - a) "Holding fast?" – how inflexible and unyielding!
 - b) "Sound doctrine?" – now *there's* an irrelevant idea today!

- c) "Convict those who contradict?" - how divisive!
4. Paul has just given us the character requirements for "applicants" for this job and now, turning to the job description itself, he is presumably going to tell us some of the most important elements of the task of eldership.
 5. FIRST: *an elder is someone who has been taught the Scriptures*. His primary responsibility is to know God's Word – not business acumen, not oratory skill, not motivational speaking, not house and hospital visitation – as helpful as all these may be in their place.
 6. SECOND: *an elder must hold fast to the faithful word*. Make no mistake: a minister's faithfulness to God is only as good as his faithfulness to the Scriptures.
 - a) What does it mean to "hold fast" and why is it important?
 - (1) The Greek word denotes "to cling to," "to be devoted to."
 - (2) Why such dramatic imagery? Apparently there will be forces actively working to break the elder's hold on the Word – to move him away to something else: *anything else*.
 - (3) Satan doesn't care what it is that supplants the Scriptures from their rightful position at center stage! Emotion, entertainment, ministering to felt or real physical needs, spiritual activities – it really doesn't matter so long as the minister's hold on the word is compromised or broken.
 - (4) As the elders move away, so goes the fellowship!
 - (5) One of the first questions we should ask ourselves when evaluating a potential elder or when seeking a place of fellowship is what place do the Scriptures have in the activities of the elders?
 - b) Assuming an elder is "holding fast," the next question is what does he see himself as holding fast to? In his estimation, how *faithful* is the Word?
 - (1) The investment that an elder is willing to make in apprehending the Scriptures and making them known will never be greater than his view of the reliability of the Scriptures. Does the elder believe the Scriptures to be worthy of complete trust in all matters they touch upon?
 - (2) When seeking a place of fellowship it is critical to establish what the elders think about Scripture! Is it inerrant? Is it inspired in all its parts and on all matters it touches?
 7. THIRD: an elder must be able to exhort and convict those who contradict.
 - a) This is the ultimate purpose for his knowledge of and steadfast hold upon that which he views as faithful Scripture.

- b) Although we know from 1 Timothy 5 that not every elder will labor in the Word and doctrine (1Ti. 5:17), this ability to exhort and convict from a knowledge of God's Word should be the ability of every elder. Why? Simply because it is impossible to be a *spiritual* leader without it.
 - c) Correction and growth involve both positive and negative elements.
 - (1) Exhort (*parakaleō*) – the same Greek word which describes “the Comforter” or “Helper” - the Holy Spirit Whom Jesus promised to send in His stead (John 14:16).
 - (a) Someone who is “called alongside” to render needed assistance.
 - (b) The elders explain and uphold God's Word to encourage and assist believers as they progress in their Christian walk by the power of the Holy Spirit working together with the received Word.
 - (c) In exhortation,, the elders, as shepherds, lead the sheep in the right direction – the sheep are already motivated and willing to go.
 - (2) Convict (*ekenchein*) – to reprove, show someone his fault, convince someone of his error.
 - (a) Others, be they unbelievers or untaught sheep, contradict (*antilegontas*) – speak against – the truth of God.
 - (b) The elders, as shepherds, attempt to turn these from their path and point them in the right direction. In many cases, those who contradict remain steadfast in their belief their direction is the correct one and that it is the shepherds who are lost.
 - (c) Not all ministry is encouragement and smiles – some aspects of Scriptural ministry involve correction, conflict and possibly confrontation.
 - (d) Many elders embrace the responsibility of exhortation but shy away from their responsibility to convict where required. Where there remains an unwillingness to convict the truth will be sacrificed on the altar of peace. A Biblically balanced ministry will embrace both exhortation and conviction.
8. FIFTH: V9 - “by sound doctrine”
- a) What is the basis upon which exhortation or conviction can take place?
 - b) *Sound* doctrine – correct, whole, or well-grounded teaching.
 - c) Spiritual growth and safety as a Christian are predicated upon receiving sound teaching from God's Word.
 - d) This is the reason why Satan seeks to unseat the teaching of Scripture from the place of central focus in any Church.
 - e) Anything and everything in the church must take second place to the teaching of sound doctrine – no matter how desirable and worthy it may seem – because this is the God-ordained means by which believers grow in Christ (Rom. 6:17; 1Pe. 2:2).

(1) 1 Timothy 4:13-16 Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. . . . Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

IV. Points Of Application

A. What should we look for in spiritual leaders?

1. I would submit that these qualities and priorities which Paul says are to characterize those who we would submit to as spiritual leaders under Christ are not those which many believers seem to look for when they evaluate a potential place of fellowship.
2. Isn't it interesting to see what Paul *doesn't mention*? Slick talk or appearance, a forceful or charismatic personality, being an inspirational visionary or a dynamic administrator, demonstration of supernatural gifts, oratory gifts, or having widespread influence.
3. Neither has there been any mention of the ability to establish and promote programs and activities with a view toward keeping everyone busy and feeling engaged.

B. The bottom line

1. A person in spiritual leadership must be a mature Christian manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. Otherwise, great damage can be done – both to the elder and those under his influence. Fruit must precede function!
 - a) One is reminded of the words of Paul in Romans 2
Romans 2:21 You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? . . .
2. Elders must have a sound grasp of Scripture and be willing to take unpopular stands to uphold its truths. The primary responsibility of an elder involves knowing and making known the Scriptures through sound teaching.
3. To the degree God's people compromise these requirements or, more commonly, substitute other requirements in place of these, we will impede the work of God in our midst and compromise our testimony as people who know God.

V. References

Friberg Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament library, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000).