

June 14, 2009

Titus 1:4-6a

Alright good morning and welcome back. Take your Bibles and let's go back to Titus chapter 1. As we go through Titus verse by verse we have already discovered that it is going to be different than most of the other books of the Bible we have studied through. Instead of focusing mostly on personal discipleship, we are looking at Titus as compact blueprint from God for establishing His church – the local church. We'll see why that is again this morning in our text.

Last Sunday we got through verse 3 which was the end of the blueprint within the blueprint – how God used Paul's description of his ministry in those opening verses to give us a model for ministry, for the church, even before we got into the meat of the letter. While you turn to Titus chapter 1, let me just remind you of what God told us.

First – God's church is established under the sovereign authority of God. It's His – not mine or any pastor's or any group's or whatever. It is His to lead.

Second – Because of the hope God has promised us of eternal life, God's church is to be about bring people to salvation by faith and growing the saved into godliness through the knowledge of His truth.

Third – that truth – the message of God's church is the Bible and nothing else – not my opinion, not my feelings, not my experience, and not yours – but God's Word.

Last – the means of getting that message out in and as God's church is through preaching. Not only what I'm doing up here today – but every single one of us proclaiming God's truth from God's Word every where we go – every way we can – every chance we get.

And until we get those truths, there is no point in moving forward – because until we as the Christians who make up the church embrace those 4 things as being God's plan for us, then Fairway will not be able to conform to God's plan either. So that's where God has brought us so far, now we move into the rest of the letter. Let's begin in verse 4.

To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.

An elder must be blameless,

So having seen through Paul the blueprint within the blueprint – basically God's mastery, the Church's mission, message, and means, as we get started in the text of the letter, we see one more key to the process – again illustrated in the life of Paul. Paul had a way of multiplying himself into the lives of others that God wants us to understand. Titus – the man – is a part of Paul's team; in fact he is a major player. Towards the end of Paul's life, he writes to two people, Timothy and Titus – at that point possibly the two most important leaders for the next generation. We'll come back to Titus in just a moment, but we've got to see this first.

Paul was committed to God's people – to extending himself through others. He knew God didn't expect or desire for him to function alone – to be out there all by himself. He had to spread the work – to pour his life into others – to delegate things to gifted, faithful friends who had both responsibility and authority. Paul had to be willing to meet needs, make sacrifices, build deep relationships, to teach & correct & rebuke, to exhort and pray. He had to live the very principle he gives to Timothy in **2 Timothy 2:2** where he says *“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”*

That's leadership. Especially in the church. No one does ministry in the Kingdom of God effectively with any kind of long-lasting impact who doesn't follow that example. **God designed His church around relational discipleship and LEADERSHIP.** So when we see verse 4 Paul saying *“To Titus my true son in our common faith”* – almost the same thing he says about Timothy in 1

Timothy 1:2 where he calls Timothy “My true son in the faith” – we’re seeing not just a letter opener – but a principle for leadership in God’s church – which is where we are headed in chapter 1.

But let’s start with **Titus**. We don’t know a lot about him – not like many others of Paul’s partners – not even as much as we know about Timothy. But to really get a fix on Titus, you have to start in Galatians. Let me just real fast run down the history here.

Paul is saved on the Damascus road when Jesus appears to him in a bright light. Once he surrenders his life to this Jesus, he spends 3 years in the wilderness learning from God. Then he goes to Jerusalem where the only other Christian leader he really meets is James, the brother of Jesus. Then he starts his missionary journeys. Fourteen years later he goes back to Jerusalem – because God tells him to – and takes Titus with him – to the Jerusalem Council.

That council in Jerusalem is there deciding what must be in the gospel message as it is carried around the world – what must be communicated to both Jews and Gentiles about Jesus and salvation. And in that council there was a group called Judaizers who were saying it is fine to preach the gospel but you also have to preach circumcision and the Mosaic law – people have to believe in Jesus, be circumcised, and follow the Jewish law.

Here’s where Titus becomes a key player. Titus was not a Jew. He was Greek – a Gentile. Hadn’t been circumcised. Now listen to what Paul says about that encounter. In **Galatians 2:3-5** *Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. Because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.*

Paul shows up – takes Titus into this council as a trophy – as proof – as a living illustration of a converted, redeemed, and saved Gentile who has never been circumcised. This is the unarguable example. They can see in his life that his conversion is real – they can see his love for Jesus. They can see his love and pursuit of holiness. They can see the transformation of his life, his passion for God. There is no doubt that he is genuinely saved just as Paul calls him his true son in our common faith. The point of all that for us is to understand that Titus was the real deal.

In fact, he really begins to shine in reference to the church in Corinth. If you’ve read any of Paul’s letters to the church in Corinth, you know how absolutely messed up this church was. Titus is mentioned 9 times in 2 Corinthians. He had the unenviable task of being Paul’s envoy to that church – walking into that buzz saw and bringing it in line as well as collecting offerings for the churches in Jerusalem. So we can reasonably infer from that assignment that Titus possessed considerable people skills and was a man of unquestioned integrity, especially with regard to financial resources. And what we see Paul entrusting Titus with here in Crete shows Paul’s regard for his zeal and abilities to organize local churches and ministry. In a day when many Christian institutions have been marred by financial irresponsibility, lack of integrity, division over nonessential issues, and the constant threat of false teaching, **Titus serves as an example of a man whose CHARACTER was consistently available to do God’s work.** And we will see in the next few weeks how crucial such men are, but let’s keep going. Now that we have been introduced briefly to Titus the man, we can move forward to verse 5 where we find Titus’ task. *“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.”*

Now, we don’t know who founded the churches on the island of Crete. The first we hear about it is in Acts 2:11 that at Pentecost there were some Jews from Crete. So it’s possible they heard the gospel in their own language at Pentecost, embraced it, went home and began to spread it. But that’s speculation. Point is Paul didn’t or he would have taken care of these things a long time ago like he did everywhere else he went. But by this time, the church had spread across the island – Paul says appoint elders in every town – so it’s widespread. In fact probably very widespread. The poet Homer – as in the Odyssey Homer – called Crete the island of 100 cities. So if there was a church in every city – or even most of the cities – then Titus had a pretty daunting job.

We don’t know what Paul had in mind when he wrote **“straighten out what was left unfinished.”** It most likely had to do with the rest of what he writes in this letter but definitely

was **NOT** restricted to appointing elders and most likely did entail dealing with the **FALSE** teachers. But we do know that Titus was to appoint elders in every town. Here's where we begin to get to some meat.

Appoint means to ORDAIN – to set in place – to put in office. And the office he is filling is that of ELDERS. Now we are going to spend some time here today because most of us – especially those who grew up Southern Baptist – that is not a well understood term or issue in the church.

When you look in the New Testament, you find three terms used for the leadership in a local church. **The three terms used for LEADERSHIP - Elder, overseer, and pastor – they are interchangeable.** I mean here in Titus chapter 1 – in verse 5 Paul calls them elders, in verse 7 he calls them overseers.

Elder speaks to the MATURITY of the man – not so much physical age as spiritual.

Overseer speaks to his function of LEADERSHIP.

Pastor speaks to his function of FEEDING the sheep as a shepherd. These are the spiritual leaders of the church. And within that, 1 Timothy 5:17 indicates that there can be at least two types of elders. Listen to what Paul writes: *The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.*

So you have elders who direct the affairs of the church and those who ALSO preach and teach.

Now when Paul charges Titus to appoint these elders, Paul is not giving Titus permission to do everything arbitrarily – to impose whatever he wants on the churches – but as John Calvin explains – for him to moderate and guide the election of these men in the churches. And what we see is **the basic biblical pattern for the New Testament church organization was that leadership was:**

- **to come from WITHIN the church (to be local in nature),**
- **to meet certain STANDARDS of behavior – in other words to be qualified, and**
- **to be PLURAL in composition (not to be dominated by one personality).**

But I want you to understand something here. Even as Titus is empowered by Paul for this task, again, that is not the source for its accomplishment. Listen to **Acts 20:28**. *“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”*

It is the Holy Spirit who appoints pastors – who chooses and provides elders. What Titus had to do was get in line with the mind of the Spirit. The Spirit has a plan. **The HOLY SPIRIT is the one who calls and ordains and gifts and who sets apart those to lead His Church.** Folks that simple point is going to be absolutely crucial in our understanding as we come to several more difficult principles in the weeks to come. So remember that. The Holy Spirit calls and ordains and gifts elders – because He is the one who qualifies and provides the church with elders.

Now here at the end of verse 5, just like we discussed in relationship to the first 3 verses, Paul is arming Titus here when he says *“as I directed you.”* He is just writing down what they have already discussed – so again this is not so much for Titus' benefit as it is for the churches Titus will be working with. And it isn't going to be an easy work. You can imagine if Titus showed up in these churches without a letter from Paul and says ‘alright, we need to appoint some elders in this congregation’ how it might have gone.

Somebody would say “I want to nominate Bill because he has a lot of money and is very successful and he's over a lot of people and can just organize like crazy.” And someone else would say “I want to nominate my husband because he is a really wonderful guy and ought to be on this group of elders because we like to know what is going on.” And someone else would say “Well I want to nominate this guy over here because he is well-read and educated and just really smart and he'd be good.”

So to keep away from that kind of free-for-all, Titus has this letter in hand that says here's the God-inspired criteria and it has nothing to do with all that. John MacArthur points out that in 2 Timothy 2, Paul uses seven different metaphors to describe a spiritual leader. He calls the minister a teacher, a soldier, an athlete, a farmer, a workman, a vessel, and a slave. Each of those images evokes ideas of sacrifice and work and service and hardship. They lay out the complex and varied responsibilities of spiritual leadership. And none of them makes the ministry sound glamorous.

That's because it's not supposed to be. Listen – leadership in the church is not a mantle of status to be conferred on the church's aristocracy. It doesn't come by seniority. It isn't purchased with money. It isn't inherited through family ties. It doesn't necessarily fall to people who are successful in business or finance. It isn't doled out on the basis of intelligence or education or human talent. Its requirements – as we're going to see – are faultless character, spiritual maturity, a willingness to serve humbly, and a skill in teaching. It can go to the rich or the poor – the well known or unknown in the world – to those who have failed or not as the world measures success because that has nothing to do with it.

But before we begin looking at the specific qualifications that do, a few preliminary observations are in order. First, the creation of a specific group of elders within the church membership should facilitate unity and effective ministry by means of an organizational structure – not discord and discontent based on a holier-than-thou mentality either assumed by the elders OR projected on the elders by the members of the church.

Second these church leaders serve as shepherds of God's church and as such accept increased responsibilities for the spiritual welfare of the members. And third, those increased responsibilities mean increased accountability and visibility.

These realities don't mean that such a person must be perfect of course because such a standard would be impossible. But what we have to see is that **the increased visibility of the church leaders both in and outside the church requires PERSONAL CONDUCT that clearly reflects the saving gospel of God's grace AND the ongoing process of sanctification.**

Finally – as we go through these we'll see – **the elder is selected as a result of his already exemplifying such a life. The qualifications are to be met BEFORE he becomes an elder.**

This office then belongs to those who by God's grace can meet the qualifications. Not everyone can be an elder. Not everyone can be a pastor. Not everyone can be an overseer. This office is reserved for men who meet the character standards outlined in the text here in Titus chapter 1 as well in 1 Timothy 3 and a number of other glimpses throughout the pastoral letters. And we're just going to have time to look at the first and foremost of them today. Look at the first part of verse 6.

"An elder must be blameless,"

Paul was especially sensitive that the witness of the church as a whole could be compromised by valid objections to its chosen leaders. So **this first qualification is general but it is the sort of overarching statement to which ALL THE OTHERS are going to somehow relate.** He is saying that 'elders must be blameless' and then he'll define it throughout verses 6, 7, 8, and 9 – so we'll get a specific sense of the word in the weeks to come, but in a general sense what does it mean to say that elders must be blameless?

Your translation may use the phrase "above reproach" instead of blameless. That's ok – it is just an attempt to communicate what the Greek word means. **Blameless means to be without fault, UNCHARGEABLE,** without indictment, without accusation. It's **the idea of not being CALLED into court or into question – not being called to account for what you've done.**

So the elder is one who has no defect in his life that calls his godliness into question. Again, **this is not someone who is SINLESS, but someone to whom no one can point to any public or gross sins in his life. He must have a good REPUTATION.**

Why? That's the key to the meaning and to the list that will follow. **The elder is a man whose life is a MODEL for spiritual conduct. He has to be a model because that's what shepherding is** – what pastoring – what overseeing is. **The congregation doesn't just listen, they FOLLOW.** Blamelessness is a necessity – not an option, which is why Paul says an elder *must* be blameless. It is a necessity to lead God's flock as a steward because his life must exemplify what he teaches. That much is clear throughout the New Testament.

Philippians 3:17 says: "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you."

2 Thessalonians 3:9 says: "We did this, ... in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow."

Hebrews 13:7 says: "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."

Finally, **1 Peter 5:1-3** says: "To the elders among you, ... Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, ... not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."

God has ordained that this role of elder, overseer, pastor – the spiritual leaders in the church – be a role of humble and loving service. The leaders are not called to be governing monarchs but humble slaves. They're not called to be slick celebrities but laboring servants. Not called to be charismatic personalities, but faithful shepherds. The men who lead God's people must above all things exemplify sacrifice, devotion, lowliness, and a love for and ability to communicate God's truth.

Obviously – in terms of application, we are beginning to see how God wants His church led as a church that chooses its leaders – that calls its pastors – we need to know God's plan in order to follow it. But quickly let me make just give you three areas of personal application today.

First of all, as we look at the qualifications for elders today and as we go, we need to **understand that the only way anyone is qualified is by the GRACE of God.** The word we hear as we study it will be provocative – it may be hard to hear because it is demanding – but we must not allow it to make us feel like some men are better than most. Do not elevate the man in terms of worth instead of pursuing the God who has made him. And for those of us who are or end up in these positions of leadership remember that according to Jesus, he who is most suited to leadership is the one who is most humble.

Along with that, going back to verse 1 in the blueprint within the blueprint remember that **God is the AUTHORITY in His Church.** This is not only crucial to our obedience and submission, but means that **even in terms of the selection of and service of elders,** this is God's deal, not ours.

Secondly in terms of response today, going back to Paul's example of pouring his life into Titus – **Going back to verse 4, the obvious application is who are you really INVESTING in? Who are you discipling spiritually by pouring your life into them as often as you can?**

And then taking that principle on a corporate level - **As the congregation, you must not see yourself when it comes to membership in God's church as a RECIPIENT only nor can you hide behind the idea that "that's the pastor's job."**

What I mean by that is that yes while involved with God's church, we receive – we receive much. But the truth is we are here just as importantly to give – to serve – to take what we receive and give it to others. When it comes to most realities in the church, the idea that "that's the pastor's job" is almost never true. It can be applied very rarely.

In fact most things only get to be the pastor's job when they have failed to be done by the individual believers in God's church.

Folks I told you Titus was going to be practical and more often than not difficult to hear. And the truth today is that **whether or not you are or become qualified to be an elder, overseer, pastor in**

God's church – YOU are responsible for choosing and supporting those who are, you are responsible for submitting and rejoicing in the authority of God in obedience as His church, and you are responsible for most of what God calls His CHURCH to do and be.

So as we step back and let God challenge us in this midst of laying out his blueprint for his church and for its leadership, we discover that any attitude or way of seeing church and our role in it as less than what God gives us here can cause us to miss out on what is rightfully ours in Christ and as His Bride. Paul is saying don't settle for something less than God's plan for His church and its leadership. Amen?

Let's pray.