

June 21, 2009

Titus 1:6b

Good morning. Happy Father's Day. Grab your Bibles and turn back to Titus chapter 1 with me. On Mother's Day a month ago I pointed out how often when we are in the middle of studying a book in God's Word when we come to a holiday like today, something in the next part of the study is very apropos. That is the case today as we continue our study in this portion of Titus about those God puts in place to lead his church.

So we are looking at the kind of man that God wants to lead His church – they are called elders, overseers, pastors – all speaking of the same man – or rather men since all through the Word there is always a plurality of elders in these churches. All of them lead, some of them preach, but all are responsible to God for their leadership of God's church. So these things we're looking at are explicit and non-negotiable in many ways. It tells us that there are certain men who fit as leaders in God's church and others who do not. And anyone who does does so only by the grace of God. And again – as we saw back in verse 1 and last week – God is the authority in his church even in the selection and service of elders so it is crucial in order for the church to continue to become more and more like Jesus that the right men are its pastors, elders, overseers.

And that role in general is one of example. The truth is the truth no matter who says it, but when it comes to leadership especially in God's church behind anything we say is what we are. Which is why in this text starting in verse 5 and going through verse 9, you don't hear anything about teaching until you come to verse 9. Up until that point, it is all about character. We are preachers or teachers, but that is done from the platform of our lives more than the pulpits where we stand. **Leadership is by EXAMPLE and elders are to set a pattern to be followed in how they LIVE as much as in what they say.** And we see that in the text today. Let's look at **Titus chapter 1, verse 5 & 6.**

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, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

As we saw last week, being blameless or above reproach is the overarching description to which everything else is going to refer in some way but it does not mean an elder is sinlessly perfect – obviously there is too much in Scripture against that sort of expectation. What it does mean is that there is no obvious inconsistency or flaw that everyone agrees is there and serves as a reproach to the man or as Macarthur says “no overt, flagrant sin can mar the life of a person who must be an example for his people to follow.” It is one thing to be weighed down with ordinary faults that do not tarnish a person's reputation but it is totally different to have a reputation that is blackened by scandal.

So now we move forward to see how God through Paul to Titus gives practical meaning to this picture of a blameless elder. Verse 6 next says he must be “*the husband of but one wife.*” In many ways this has been the most difficult or at least most-disputed qualification. Some think that it means he must be married – he must be a husband. That is unlikely since Paul wasn't and Titus wasn't – at least at this point – and Jesus wasn't and in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul acknowledges there are even certain advantages to being single in ministry, so it is highly unlikely that that's the meaning.

Others suggest it is saying that an elder is forbidden to remarry after his first wife dies – the husband of only one wife no matter how long she lives. Again – unlikely since in Romans 7 Paul insists there is nothing wrong with remarrying a Christian spouse after a first one has died – certainly he gives no hint that doing so is unthinkable when it comes to an elder.

Others say this verse is that an elder cannot be divorced and remarried. Now the Bible obviously warns against divorce in many ways but it is also important not to make divorce the unforgiveable sin.

There are very limited examples where divorce has a biblical warrant so to make that an absolute criteria makes it a sin where God permits it.

Where divorce can disqualify someone is back in the first half of verse 6 – an elder must be blameless. It's a credibility issue. As DA Carson explains it: "You worry about someone whose life has cracked up in his marriage and then three months later he feels he's qualified to be back in ministry. He has repented, after all, and the gospel is all about forgiveness, isn't it? Clearly the Bible has something more stringent to say than that. Divorce is not the unforgivable sin, yet it may disqualify a person for ministry precisely because it destroys so much of a person's credibility." There is more we could say about all that but divorce simply is not what this verse is about.

Still others interpret verse 6 to mean that an elder cannot be a polygamist – not married to two or more wives. We of course today think well that's pointless then – after all, who in their right mind would want to be married to two or more women, right? But polygamy was not uncommon when Paul wrote this or on the island of Crete – in fact in many instances, the more power you had, the more likely it was that you had multiple wives. Even among the Jews it was generally allowed partially because they took a false understanding of their forefathers – Abraham, Jacob, David having more than one wife gave a precedent for them. So as a precise matter Paul deals with that right here – polygamist are ruled out – cannot be an elder. And it is this reason that leads to the deeper understanding of what this phrase means.

In the Bible marriage is presented as not only a social institution, but also as a MODEL – a 'type' – of the relationship between Christ and his bride, the Church. And Christ doesn't have multiple brides – many churches. So there is something being modeled about Christ and the church by a husband and a wife so the marriage structure is not only characterized by monogamy, but also by fidelity and integrity. And that's what we see in the meaning of this phrase. **It literally means "a ONE-WOMAN man" because God sets up the models of virtue in his church – the elders – as someone who is known both in the church and out of the church as a man who has a wife, is DEVOTED to her, and that is his reputation and nothing more.**

A one-woman man simply means a man devoted to the woman who is his wife. And there are a lot of men who have one wife but aren't one-woman men, right? So **the issue here is not primarily marital status, but MORAL character.** Find men whose reputation in the eyes of everybody in regard to their marital situation is blameless – one woman, one wife for life, and loyal to her. And that obviously can also be true of the single man. If he is not married, then he is to be one who is not flirtatious – is of the same moral character in his dating as the husband is to his wife.

Then in verse 6 we go from the husband wife relationship to the father children relationship. Go back to verse 6 with me. This also is a debated statement in terms of the intent and application – largely because of the translation here in the NIV.

An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

An elder must be *"a man whose children believe."*

Does this mean that the children of every elder, pastor, overseer must be devout Christians? If you say 'yes,' then from what age? Two? Five? Seventeen? When does this requirement kick in?

If you say 'yes,' are you putting the responsibility on the elder for his children's genuine conversion, which is beyond anyone's control other than God?

Many godly men have had children who rebelled against God in spite of the father's example and conscientious attempts to bring the child to saving faith. People try and cite Proverbs 22:6 that says *"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it"* and argue that if a child goes astray, it means the father failed to bring him up properly. Now there may be a lot of truth to that logic, but that is misinterpreting that verse. Proverbs is not a book of ironclad promises, but of general maxims about life. Generally if you train a child properly, he'll grow up to follow Jesus but there are exceptions. **As important as a father's example and training are, ultimately**

salvation is a supernatural act of GOD. And while God uses godly parents in this process, no actions on the part of the most godly father can GUARANTEE the salvation of his children.

Thankfully, this statement in Titus is not the only place God gives us qualifications for elders. Hold your finger here and turn to 1 Timothy chapter 3. The vast majority of what Paul says to Titus he says to Timothy and vice versa. On the issue of family we have verse 2 in **1 Timothy 3** that says he must be above reproach and be the husband of one wife, (pretty much the same thing as in Titus) but then in **verses 4 & 5** God gives us this – look at it. *“He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?)”*

Now – with that in mind, we need to understand that **the word back in Titus for ‘believe’ in ‘whose children believe’ is *pistas* in Greek. That word can mean and is used to mean in Scripture as well both ‘believe’ and ‘FAITHFUL.’** So word studies alone aren’t going to clear this up. But **the PARALLEL between Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:4 is crucial for understanding.**

I won’t go into all the Greek grammar stuff because most of you don’t care about that, but for those of you who are interested the Greek phrase in Timothy for ‘having children in *hupotag*’ - the word for obedience or control or respect is synonymous with the Greek phrase in Titus for ‘having children in *pistas*’ – the word for faithful or believing. So Paul is making a similar point in both. But there is a huge difference in meaning and requirement between having respectful children and having believing children. And when you include the last part of Titus 1:6 about those children ‘not being open to the charge of being wild and disobedient’ then that becomes a description of what *pistas* means. Children who are faithful – not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient – which matches what God told Timothy about elders as well.

So as Alexander Strauch in his book Biblical Eldership suggests “The contrast is made not between believing and unbelieving children, but between obedient, respectful children and lawless, uncontrolled children.” **What is at stake is “the children’s BEHAVIOR, not their eternal state.”**

Beyond using the context and Greek to understand this truth, let me give you a few other reasons. As we saw in Timothy in the explanation of what when he asked how can an elder manage God’s house if he can’t manage his own – then we see in regard to this qualification here in Titus, the connection is to the elder’s managerial skills, for lack of a better word. And generally – though my mom and dad may beg to differ – obedient behavior does not require miraculous intervention. As one commentator wrote, “even a good lab technician can make a rat follow a certain path if enough planning and forethought is invested.” And no – I don’t think he was calling your children ‘rats.’ But again as we said earlier, while a godly home is conducive to saving faith, it does not produce it. But a godly home can be expected to produce faithful children.

Second, even the best pastors or elders are going to have unbelievers in their church and under their sphere of influence. The logical outflow of this qualification then means that if an elder is expected to manage the larger household – the church – even though not everyone in it is a believer, he ought to be able to manage the smaller household – his family – even though not all within it may yet believe.

See Paul is not asking any more of the elder and his children than is expected of every Christian father and his children. However, only if a man exercises such proper control over his children may he be an elder. Why?

The point also goes back to the first part of verse 6 – being blameless. When a man stands in a pulpit or Bible study as an elder in a church and says “this is how to live – this is how to conduct yourself – this is God’s standard for the next generation – here’s how you are to raise your children – this is how you pass godliness from one generation to the next” and you can look at his life and say “Wait a minute – you’ve got wild and disobedient children who live in rebellion – or who disrespect the gospel – why are you the guy who is telling us how to do this?”

You see it brings reproach upon his life. It sucks the credibility out of his message and thus the impact with it. That doesn't mean elders kids have to be sinlessly perfect. It doesn't even mean they can't do some pretty stupid things. The question is how is the home being handled? What kind of discipline is being imposed? What kind of encouragement is there? And how are these strengths being reflected in the character and faithfulness of the children? **What is expected is neither conversion nor perfection, but the kind of parental LEADERSHIP that produces faithful children.**

Let me just talk practical for a minute – see if we can understand this.

Let's say for instance that Nicole and I had a 15 year old son who came to me after doing a lot of his own study and said, "Dad, I've thought it through and I know the different arguments and I don't believe that Christianity is true." As long as he remained submissive and respectful under my authority so as not to bring shame on the gospel and call into question my shepherding of the household, then in good conscience – though possibly broken hearted – I could continue to serve. To argue that that alone would disqualify me would be to conclude again that I should be able to effectually guarantee my son's spiritual life.

Now if his lack of faith began to translate into a lack of respect for my authority and he became so disruptive in our home or church or whatever that a stench was associated with my name and leadership rather than the aroma of Christ – then I should step down.

On the other hand, if I have a 15 year old son still living under my roof who has confessed Christ yet lives in open unrepentant sin or continual disrespect, that can disqualify me outright because it proves my ineptitude as a leader. Or if it didn't disqualify me outright, it can suggest that it would be wise for me to step down for a time to give extra attention to my little flock at home. How much time? That would depend on my fellow elders to determine how long that would be.

Also in practice – once a child is independent of his parents, he is outside his parent's authority as it relates to what is in Titus and Timothy. When a kid is on his own, he is on his own. Now that granting of independence may be gradual – a child in college somewhere else with parents paying the bills can move the independence to a gray area. But the general principle is the more dependent the child is on the parent, the more the qualification sticks to the elder.

We find a kind of illustration in 1 Samuel though not exactly the same situation. In 1 Samuel chapter 2 you find part of the story of Eli. Eli was a priest when Israel was being ruled by the judges and so he was set up to be an example to the people since he led them in worship. And yet his home-life disqualified him as a model to be followed. Scripture describes his sons as being worthless men who didn't know God. And though normally we wouldn't blame Eli for his adult sons' actions because the Scripture also tells us he rebuked them for their sin, apparently Eli's parenting there was half hearted at best since God charges him with exalting his sons above the Almighty in verse 27-29, something that most likely traced back to their youth. So Eli's undisciplined and sinful family revealed a heart that was not wholly devoted to God. And being unfit then for leadership, Eli was finally removed from his position.

What we're seeing here in Titus and mirrored in 1 Timothy is that if you want to know if a man lives an exemplary life – if you want to know whether he can lead someone to faith in Christ by the influence of his virtue – if you want to know whether he can teach the truth – whether he can model it – whether he is consistent – whether he can lead them to understand salvation, to holiness, to serve God – then look at the most intimate relationships in his life and see if he can do it there. Is there integrity there? Is there credibility there? Look at his family and you find the people who know him best – who know him the most – who see him the closest. If you want to know what kind of man he is, ask them.

The elder – the overseer – the pastor in the church must be a man who has demonstrated his spiritual leadership ability and integrity by leading his FAMILY to RESPECT the truth he holds most precious which is the same thing he must do in the church.

And listen – to quote from RC Sproul’s Tabletalk magazine about how to do that – “the submission that accomplishes that – that qualifies a man to be an elder is not instilled through a harshness or legalism that requires perfection or that the children be something other than what they are, both of which will provoke the child to anger. Instead **this results when a father raises his kids in the discipline and instruction of the Lord which manifests itself in**

- **a firmness that makes it advisable for children to OBEY,**
- **a wisdom that makes it NATURAL for them to obey,**
- **and a LOVE that makes it a pleasure for them to obey.”**

Ruling the church well requires the same sort of nurture, courage, and thoughtfulness that makes discipline effective. And like the issue of marriage, not having kids does not disqualify a man from being an elder, it just means the church must look elsewhere in his life to see this kind of evidence.

So let me pull this together for us. Paul is more concerned with who an elder is than with what he does in being an elder. It is not a list of duties we find here in Titus but qualifications of character that are observable by other people. So **a man is ordained as an elder** not just because he feels and confesses that God has called him to be so, though both of those are important, but he is appointed **because the church recognizes that God by His grace has chosen him for leadership and it is clear first of all in his HOME.**

And let me just make it clear again as we will probably every Sunday, **what is REQUIRED of an elder is no different than what is EXPECTED of all who believe** – that means in one way or another this truth is true for everyone here who claims to be a Christian – male, female, married or single. As the elder is the example for the church to follow, the church is the example for the world to see.

So – husbands and wives – your MARRIAGE is meant to be a picture of Jesus Christ & the Church. How’s that going? The best place to start is your heart. You choose to be a one-woman man or a one-man woman. Youth – college students – singles – the same is true for you. Live and date faithful to your future spouse.

Parents – your home is in many ways meant to be a reflection of the LORDSHIP of Jesus in your life. How’s that going? Again – the best place to start is your heart. You choose to love God enough to raise your children to respect you and God’s truth – again through those three things - a firmness that makes it advisable, a wisdom that makes it natural, and a love that makes it a pleasure for them to obey.

And finally – a word to **young men** – married or single – fathers or not – I challenge you to really hear the Word of God today. It is character that first qualifies a man to be a leader in God’s church. **If you ever want to be rightly used by God in a leadership role in His church, know that you must work now to LOVE your wife and RAISE your kids, both according to God’s truth.**

I hope you all will pray with me that the women and children of this church in the days ahead will rise up in praise of their godly fathers and husbands.

Amen?

Let’s pray.