

July 5, 2009

Titus 1:9

Good morning – hope you have had a great July 4th weekend! Take your Bibles and let's return to Titus chapter 1. We are looking at Titus as a way for God to show us His blueprint for establishing His church – that's what Titus is about. Having laid down a solid foundation of what the church is about through Paul's example; God then began explaining how His church is to be led – by elders, pastors, overseers. We've spent the past two weeks or so letting the Holy Spirit show us the qualifications necessary for men to be in that position as well as challenge us to be like them. And today we come to the final criteria to consider when choosing elders here in Titus. We will look at chapter 1 verse 9 in just a moment.

You know I doubt that there has ever been a time in the history of the church when the Word of God has not been under attack in one way or another. Even in my lifetime that has been true. Back in the late 70s early 80s there was an attack on the inerrancy – the absolute accuracy - of Scripture as churches and even whole denominations let their trust in the Bible simply erode.

God raised up several pastors along with the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy to fight that battle culminating in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy which spells out what we affirm and deny regarding the authority and truthfulness of the Bible.

More recently, the attack has been more subtle through the Seeker church movement and the Emergent church movement. You may have heard or read about these terms.

The Seeker movement has a worthy goal – to reach out to unchurched seekers and bring them to faith in Christ. At the heart of the strategy was re-doing the Sunday morning worship service so that it was aimed at that target group. A lot of things went into that – some good – some bad – the worst of which was a de-emphasizing of the Word. Sermons stopped coming from the Bible and became topical self-help talks aimed at what you might call success in life and being entertaining. Preachers were told if you want your church to grow, you should never preach on anything controversial or negative.

The Emergent church movement says Seeker churches are too big and glitzy and program driven. They instead want to emphasize building close relationships in the church – which of course is a good thing – but they also buy into the postmodern philosophy which denies any absolute truth in the moral or spiritual realm. Experience is more important than doctrine – tolerance and acceptance are primary so to have a pastor stand up and tell everyone how they should live – even if it is based on the Bible – is viewed as arrogant and judgmental.

I say all that to introduce us to the text today. The final qualification of elders here in Titus. A statement that when followed can steer the church back to the much-needed direction of the Reformers and Puritans of whom JI Packer writes that they understood that reverence for God means reverence for Scripture and serving God means obeying Scripture. That no greater insult could be offered to the Creator than to neglect His written word and conversely there could be no truer act of homage to Him than to prize it and pore over it and to live out and give out its teaching. And that's what we see required of men who would lead in God's church this morning. Look at **chapter 1 verse 9** with me.

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

See the fact is today that **EVERYONE who professes to know Christ holds to a theology. The question is whether they hold to a BIBLICALLY sound theology.** To the extent that our theology veers from Scripture, we are worshipping a false god of our imagination. Which means we all need to continue to grow in understanding the Bible so we can know God better and follow His ways more carefully. And **the primary function of elders is to know Scripture well enough that they are**

able to keep the church in the TRUTH in the face of Satan's repeated attempts to introduce error.

So in **verse 9 we see the single qualification that relates to a SKILL or function.** That is his teaching or preaching ability – **these men are to be teachers and preachers.** That's what they do – that's their primary function.

You say "well I thought they were leaders and overseers." That's true, but they do that by the proper application of Scripture. Leadership in the church is not based on human ingenuity, it is not based on the kind of experience in the leadership environments outside the church, it is not based on common sense. **The elder's, pastor's, overseer's leadership in the church is the direct APPLICATION of the truth of God's Word through the will of the Spirit which has become the fabric of his THINKING.** As John Calvin wrote in regard to Titus 1:9 "the church cannot be governed unless it is through the Word."

But before an elder can teach and preach, there is another starting point at the beginning of verse 9 that still fits with the character qualifications that have gone before it. *"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught."*

This is the starting point – the necessary foundation. No one can preach or teach without a strong personal compassionate commitment to the truth. The idea of holding firmly means to cling to or be devoted to. It has built into it a definition from the opposite – in other words you cling to it and despise all others. It is a commitment to the singularity of Scripture as John MacArthur explains.

And what an elder is to cling to – to hold firmly to - is *"the trustworthy message."* The literal translation is the faithful word – and just as a note – Paul uses the same word here for faithful – *pistas* - that he used to describe an elder's children back in verse 6. But in calling it faithful or trustworthy he simply means the reliable or dependable word as opposed to the word of men which is not reliable, not dependable, and not trustworthy.

And the way you tell is that it – in the NIV – is that that message is *"as it has been taught."* Which is a weak translation of the Greek that means "which is in accordance with the teaching."

Paul is referring to apostolic doctrine – the teaching of the Apostles as it had been verbally passed down. Christian doctrine was beginning to be formed into recognized orthodox propositions that became the basic dogma of the church. And so **Paul is saying that elders are to be men who CLING to the reliable, trustworthy, dependable Word of God which will be in perfect agreement with what has been taught by the APOSTLES.**

Fast forward to today and that's what we have right here. **The man who qualifies to be an elder is personally and practically devoted to the Word of God: the SCRIPTURE.** The spiritual work of the elder in shepherding God's flock demands that they be faithful as students of Scripture.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 says that the servant of God – the elder, pastor, overseer – must be able to teach. Now again – I'm not saying I believe Scripture dictates that every elder be gifted to teach in a large group setting for example. But **every elder must be grounded in and mature in understanding and knowledgeable enough of God's Word to INSTRUCT a younger believer and to CORRECT doctrinal error with confidence when he encounters it.** So even though preaching or teaching may not be a specific elder's spiritual gift, every elder must be studying and growing in his understanding of God's Word. Practically, if a man doesn't have a deep personal desire to study God's Word diligently and to read books that help him understand sound doctrine, he shouldn't be an elder. Because every elder in the local church must be able to clearly communicate the Word of God according to the guidelines we see next in verse 9.

The two functions of an elder that emanate from his own personal devotion to the truth of God's Word verse 9 says are *"to encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it."*

The word for doctrine there is literally TEACHING so it includes both the doctrinal as well as the more practical parts of Scripture. But a lot of people don't really want the doctrinal portions. They say "just give me what I need to know to have a happy marriage, to raise my kids, to succeed in business. Let the theologians deal with the doctrine, just give me the practical stuff."

Even in our study of Titus we are dealing with something like that because Titus is more ecclesiastical – more about the structure and purpose of the church – than it is about the personal 'how to live my life' – and we have to want to know God's heart to consistently see the value of this study.

But folks the truth is, **there is no PRACTICAL without the doctrinal.** That's what we saw just back in Colossians – two chapters of theology, two chapters of application. The fact is the great doctrines of the Bible are immensely practical. Without them – **without DOCTRINE you are building your Christian life with no foundation.** And as I said earlier – all of us who claim to know Jesus have a theology. The question is to what extent is your theology biblical?

So elders must be able to rightly apply and use sound doctrine for the good the church and the individual believers in it. "Sound" by the way gives us our word "hygienic" – it means life-preserving, life-giving. So elders are to be able to use the life-preserving doctrines of the Word to "*encourage others.*"

The word "encourage" there is parakaleo – literally the word for CALL and the word for ALONGSIDE. You think of a paralegal or a paratrooper – soldiers who come flying out of the sky to come alongside the ones on the ground. The Holy Spirit is called our paraklete – He is the Comforter – the strengthener – who comes alongside us in our Christian life and urges us toward righteousness. And you begin to get the feeling for what the teaching or preaching of the elder is to be.

The idea here is a tender and passionate and powerful pleading for obedience. That's what they do – they plead with you to be obedient and they use the Word for that pleading. This is not just about disseminating information but truly caring about those under our care. There are men who just want to preach – to teach – to give out what they think or what they have learned – even when it is solid truth – but it is without real investment in those who hear.

All they care about is the persona of authority or even more that they know that those who hear them have heard the truth and are therefore without excuse in following it – they want to combat their own sense of "what's wrong out there" but that is not what God is talking about in Titus – that's not the heart of the elder, pastor, overseer who preaches or teaches. It is to exhort – to encourage. **The heart of an elder who preaches or teaches is to come alongside in life and educate and PERSUADE and entrust them with the goal of them being able to understand and to APPLY and even – according to 2 Timothy 2:2 – that they would be able to pass it on and teach others.**

Even in the other side of this qualification – that an elder must be able to "*refute those who oppose [sound doctrine]*" – the goal is not to destroy an opponent, but to restore him with and to sound doctrine.

Now obviously as you read this part of the verse, there are false teachers behind the scenes here. And as you can guess by the fact that they are called false teachers – what verse 9 explains is that they oppose the truth – they oppose sound doctrine – they are teaching error. And one of the roles of the elder is to be able to refute those kinds of people. **"Refute" here means literally to convince them of their error. Again it isn't to humiliate them – it isn't to brow beat them – it isn't to speak evil of them – it is to effectively show them their error and again – Scripture is the SOURCE through which we do that.** As John Calvin says, "The pastor ought to have two voices: one, for gathering the sheep, and another for warding off and driving away wolves and thieves. The Scripture supplies him the means of doing both."

Anyone who enjoys confrontation has to be a little demented – I can say that because I've been accused of it myself! But since Paul explained last week that an elder is not to be quick-tempered or a bully – it goes without saying that he doesn't relish confrontations. And yet when the gospel is at stake – when the health or unity or vibrancy of the church hangs in the balance – when someone totters on the brink of spiritual or moral ruin – the elders rise to the challenge. They

confront and they must. They aren't out trying to pick doctrinal fights, but they are to rush to the battle when necessary as stewards over God's household.

And understand – **the implication here is that the false teaching is coming from WITHIN the church. Which means within this qualification of an elder is a requirement for him to be courageous enough to be willing to confront so-called Christian BROTHERS.**

This task that the elder must be qualified to do is echoed well in **2 Timothy 4:2** where the Timothy and by implication elders are challenged to *“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction.”*

Be ready in season and out of season. What's that mean? It means whether it is seasonable or unseasonable. It means whether people want to hear it or don't want to hear it – whether it is popular or not popular. And to be honest, this function of elders is not popular in general. It's not what people want. It's not the new thing. The new thing is to be relevant. The new thing is to be user friendly. Like we talked about when we began. The new thing is to entertain people and make them feel comfortable and don't offend them – to win them over with your cleverness and make them feel loved and accepted no matter how they live. But the Bible doesn't do that. In that sense – scripture is not always 'user friendly.'

And the elder must be ok with that. Again he must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught. Anything less is the unacceptable assumption that what I have to say is better suited to men's minds and hearts than what God has to say. God gave His Word to His people. He expected it to be communicated.

If you will – let me sum up in two ways. First – on verse 9 alone as it relates to the elders of the church – the men who direct the affairs of the church and preach and teach – who God by his grace puts in place to lead. I don't usually read large quotes like this – but DA Carson nailed why this is so important for all of us to understand. Here's what he wrote – you can read along with me on the screen:

“The authority that rules the church is not primarily an authority of independent office; it's an authority that is ministered through the Word. I cannot stress that enough. We do not obey pastors/elders/overseers because they are pastors/elders/overseers, because they've got the job and therefore they're "up," we're "down" – they're the administrators so we obey them; and then also there are people that teach. That is not the idea.

The idea is that the authority they wield in ministry is precisely the authority of ministering the Word of God. ...if they are genuinely teaching the Word, then of course devout Christians will see that the real authority lies in the Word, in the Lord of the Word, even if in due course such elders accrue to themselves an enormous amount of credibility and a functional authority, because they are seen to be faithful teachers of the Word of God. ... **the fount of authority is the WORD. And out of this framework come teachers who explain that Word well and apply it well, so that believers say, "Yes, this is the MIND of God."**”

And having said that – it makes sense for us to remember that the majority of the qualifications listed here are about character – not duties. As we finish the section on the qualifications for elders, I want you to secondly to remember what we've seen – go back to verse 6 with me:

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. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless-- not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

Let me draw your attention to just 2 closing facts.

First – the great qualification for this office of elder, pastor, overseer, is a HOLY LIFE. The emphasis falls here and throughout God's Word on the man's character and godliness. Get that and you get almost all of what you need. It is the elders who rule – who lead – in God's church. And if

you put GODLY men together, a church is likely to get wisdom and sound judgment and proper direction from them. But let no one forget or be confused – the emphasis is on his character – his commitment to Christ, his love for the church, his loyalty to the Word of God.

And secondly – as we've heard again and again. **What God's Word REQUIRES of elders is no different than what God's Word expects to be found to an increasing degree in EVERY Christian.**

The qualifications of elders remind us of what God prizes in His people, what He loves to reward, what He will make fruitful during our time in this world. **If we ALL aspire to be what elders must be, we will not only be happier and more useful to Christ ourselves, but will together produce a CHURCH that God can and will greatly favor.**

That sounds like a worthy goal to me, amen?
I hope you will do your part to pursue it with me.

Let's pray.