

February 14, 2010
Titus Chapter 1 Remix

Alright good morning. I'm glad you are here. Happy Valentines' Day. If you haven't heard me tell you recently – I love you people – I really do. Now – with the small talk out of the way, grab your Bible, your message map, and hold on.

I want you to turn to **Titus chapter 1**. Your message map says this is a chapter 1 remix. The reason for that is for those of you who were here in June last year, you know that's when we started our study of the book of book of Titus and we went verse by verse through the first two chapters until we started our vision series in September. And there was a reason for that which you will probably remember as we go through this today, but our intent was always to come back and finish our study. And that's what we are doing today.

But as in all the books in God's Word, they are cohesive letters or writings and in general in order to correctly understand and apply what God says in part of them, we need to have a grasp on what He says through the whole of them. So before we pickup where we left off with chapter 3, we need to get back on the same page of what is going on. Thus the remix. I'm not going to go back verse by verse in detail, but I do want us those of us who were here back then to remember and those of us who weren't to get as much a handle as possible of what leads up to chapter 3.

So if at any point in the next two sermons you need more information or more detail, you can read or listen to the full exposition of the text at our website for free. But – we have a ton to cover and to understand – so again – hold on.

Look first with me at the first word of verse 1. It says "*Paul*" – there's our writer. God is again writing through the apostle Paul. Skip down to verse 4. Paul writes to whom? "*To Titus.*" Titus is one of Paul's key partners in the ministry – in fact he and Timothy are like sons to Paul and when Paul is dying and writing the last letters of his life, who does he write to, who does he long for? Timothy and Titus. And finally look at verse 5. Paul tells Titus "*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.*"

So here you have the who – the whom – and the why. See Titus is different than any of the other letters we have studied through. Where Philippians and James and Colossians and 1 John all deal with some issues in local churches, they are primarily designed for the discipleship of individual believers. **Titus has elements of personal discipleship woven through it, but it is primarily written as a compact BLUEPRINT from God for establishing His church locally.** That's what Titus is charged with doing on the island of Crete. There are already churches springing up in the different cities, but after having visited and preached there, God led Paul to move on to his next assignment so to speak and he left Titus on Crete to straighten out what was left unfinished.

Now let's go back to the opening verses. As Paul starts this blueprint from God, he gives in verses 1-4 a description of his own ministry. And in doing so, he gives us a mini-blueprint within the larger blueprint of the letter. What we see in Paul's ministry in principle is the plan for every church and every one of us. So let's look at it quickly. **Verses 1-3.**

"Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ" – stop there. Just as Paul is completely under the authority and plan of God, so is the church and so are we. **God's church is established under the sovereign AUTHORITY of God.** It is His – it is not mine or any pastor's or elder's or yours or any other group's. Like we referred to last week in Colossians – Jesus Christ is the head of his church – he is the Chief Shepherd. We are under his mastery. Period.

Keep reading: "*for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness--a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,*" – here we see the mission. **Because of the hope of eternal life that God has promised, God's church is to be about bringing people to SALVATION by faith and growing the saved into GODLINESS through the knowledge of His truth.** That's the

mission. Our wording of that same heart here at Fairway is that we exist to be moving people to life in Christ one step at a time together. Right?

Now finally verse 3, *“and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior.”* Here we see both the message and the means of the church. He brought His word to light. As simple as that sounds it is so crucial. Paul is saying that the truth at the center of my mission – the content of the gospel that elicits faith in the elect – the truth at the core of the knowledge that leads to godliness – the promise that enables this hope of eternal life - this truth comes from God.

In the context of what God is giving us I can't make this point strongly enough. I know most if not all of you would affirm this but it has tremendous implications. Paul is saying whatever I want to preach about salvation has to come from God – whatever I want to preach about sanctification has to come from God – whatever I want to preach about glorification has to come from God. Everything that we experience as Christians is because God brought his word to light. So the message that is the how – **the message that accomplishes God's blueprint is found nowhere else but the BIBLE.**

And what's the last element? The means of the church – **the means of getting the message out to accomplish God's will.** Paul says “through the preaching entrusted to me.” There you go. The word for preaching there is not limited to what I'm doing right now. It means literally to proclaim – simply to speak it out. The key is not the person – it is the preaching – the proclaiming – from all of us. Not just from behind a pulpit, but every single one of us – the means is **PROCLAIMING God's truth from God's Word every where in every way at every chance.**

So there's the nutshell of God's plan for his church before we get into the detail. And you've got to see this – everything I just summarized about God's church is also God's plan for you. **God's plan for His church is God's plan for YOU.** God's plan for you is to live under His sovereign authority and according to His plan – that you would be about bringing people to salvation and godliness through God's truth – that you would do that by proclaiming God's Word in every way at every chance every where you do life and trust the Holy Spirit to take it from there.

See before we together can deal with the practical blueprint of the rest of the letter, we've got to deal with the foundational blueprint that God gives us in these first three verses. Or we'll never fit in God's plan as God's church.

So having laid that out again, let's move forward – go to **verses 4 and 5.** *“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.”*

We don't know exactly what Paul had in mind when he says “to straighten out what was left unfinished.” When you read the rest of the letter you can tell it did have a lot to do with dealing with the false teachers that were causing problems in these baby churches and we'll hear more about in a moment. But we do know Titus was to appoint elders in every town.

The word “**appoint**” **there means to ordain, to set in place, to put into OFFICE so to speak.** And the office Titus is putting men into is that of elders. We talked a little about this last Sunday in conjunction with the guys we ordained into the other leadership office God has set up in His church, that of the deacons. But let me go a little further into this office of elders this morning.

When you look in the New Testament, the **three terms used biblically for this office of leadership are INTERCHANGEABLE.** I mean here in Titus chapter 1 – in verse 5 Paul calls them elders, in verse 7 he calls them overseers – same guys, same office, different word.

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 they should not be confused as simply being the staff in a church though some members of a church staff may fill the office of elder.

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 be PLURAL in composition (not to be dominated by one personality), to meet certain STANDARDS of character and behavior – in other words to be qualified.** That's so important because 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.

In other words, 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/pastor/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.

Paul was especially sensitive to the possibility of the witness of the church as a whole being 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.** Look at **verse 6** – he says *“an elder must be blameless.”*

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. Being above reproach is a necessity – not an option, which is why Paul says an elder must be blameless. And so Paul gives some explanation in detail in the verses that follow. Look at verse 6 again.

“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.”

Now you pause there and realize that those sound very similar to the qualifications we looked at last Sunday morning and two weeks ago Sunday night as the requirements for men to be deacons in God's church. That's right. The character of an elder and the character of a deacon should be aimed at the same standards. But then verse 9 gives us one of the main differences between the offices in conjunction with **2 Timothy 2:24-26.**

First verse 9: *“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.”*

The passage in 2 Timothy echoes this one in saying that elders must be able to teach. What we see here is **the single qualification that relates to a particular SKILL or function. That is his teaching or preaching ability.** These men are to be teachers and preachers. That's what they do – their primary function.

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 and mature in and**

knowledgeable enough of God's Word to INSTRUCT a younger believer and to CORRECT doctrinal error with confidence when he encounters it.

The men who direct the affairs of the church and preach and teach – who God by his grace puts in place to lead – have an authority that derives from this qualification. 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... 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" – ... 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, ... the fount of authority is the word. And out of this framework come elders who explain that Word well and apply it well, so that believers say, "Yes, this is the mind of God."

Now even without going into more detail on all those qualifications, you may be thinking the normal objection: no one is able to fulfill all those. And since no one can, we should back off of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 here and be realistic. Since no one can fulfill them, then we are free not to really ignore them but just to get the best guys we can and roll on, right? No. The qualifications are there to qualify. Which means two things. First – that the only way anyone is qualified is by the grace of God. That is so important for us to understand in order to keep us from elevating some men over others in terms of worth rather than pursuing the God who has made them. Remember – God is the authority in his church – Jesus is the head – and that applies in terms of the selection and service elders.

But also it means this – as pastor Terry Johnson explains, "No one is able perfectly to fulfill the qualification except Jesus. We understand this. Still, there are those officers who fulfill them, though they do so imperfectly. We insist that there is a difference between fulfilling the qualifications imperfectly and not fulfilling them at all. There is a difference and we are able to recognize that difference and we are able to speak meaningfully of that difference."

So yes the standards are high for the general character of an elder here. Why? Because that's how God wants YOU to live. You're getting that right?

The standards for an elders, pastors, overseers are high because that is how God wants you to live. And he wants his under-shepherds to be men you can follow.

So once again – it isn't that elders are to be different than everybody else, they just have to be what everybody else is supposed to be. That's what leadership is. See – **what God's Word requires of elders, and even deacons as we saw last week, is no different that what God's Word expects to be found to an INCREASING degree in every Christian.** So here's a good pause and think question in the midst of the text today – what you expect of your leaders, are you seeking to follow yourself? What you would be offended to see in your leaders, are you offended to see in your own life? What you want to see in your leaders, are you pursuing yourself?

Ok – let's get back to the last chunk of verses in chapter 1. Having just laid out the qualifications for leadership in God's church, especially the ability to encourage and refute with sound doctrine from the Word, in **verses 10-16**, Paul explains why. Let's read it.

"For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach-- and that for the sake of dishonest gain. Even one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good."

That “for” in verse 10 connects this to what we just saw – the horrible state of things in the churches in Crete. So here’s the deal:

The reason Titus must appoint QUALIFIED elders who are able to encourage and refute with sound doctrine is because in their absence the WRONG PEOPLE assume authoritative and instructive positions and because of the problems such leaders create. Which is what we just read about. It is not enough for elders to teach truth, they must be able and willing to refute, silence, and rebuke sharply certain people – and don’t forget – these certain people are not outsiders, they are people in the church – in the congregation.

And those are some strong words. In those Greek words, you have pictures of an animal literally with a muzzle strapped around its mouth as well as the image of cutting something off with an axe – severe words there. Why? John Calvin explains in his commentary: “One of the most important abilities required of the [elder] is to be able to adapt his teaching so that it applies to the people he addresses. He will not deal with the stubborn and insubordinate in the same way as with the meek and teachable. To the latter we should be gentle as this is appropriate for their teachableness, but the stubborn should be corrected with severity, for, as the saying goes, it takes a hard wedge to remove a hard knot.”

See false teaching WITHIN the church is deadly because not only can it destroy the souls of people in the church, but it cripples and sometimes renders entirely powerless the church’s WITNESS to the world.

That’s why the words are so strong, but please don’t miss the redemptive heart here. Both in Timothy when Paul addresses this function of the elders and here in Titus, even this protective function of the elders is still redemptive. In verse 13 he says rebuke them sharply so that they will be sound in the faith. The goal is not to damn them – but to show them their error, to show them truth in order that they might repent and be sound – be right – in the faith.

And again, just like in everything else we are seeing here – when God describes his church, when he describes the leaders in his church, and now when he describes this - the **difficult act of confronting those in error in the church is challenge for ALL of us, not just the elders.** Please get this – it is so important - **honest and loving though at times painfully blunt CONFRONTATION is one of the keys to spiritual soundness.**

When someone you know is consistently acting on a belief or doctrine that is wrong or, even worse, is teaching, proclaiming, holding out that false doctrine as truth, we do the church – nor ourselves – nor God – nor them any favors by letting it slide.

Anything less than God’s truth destroys churches – families – lives – eternities. There is too much at stake to be afraid of hurting someone’s feelings or of making the wrong people mad or of losing precious numbers or money or influence or whatever.

As long as truth and error compete for the minds and hearts of men, there is no escape from the necessity of this battle – no escape from the hard work and hard words and hard choices it requires of all of us who would represent the truth as it is in Jesus Christ.

And that right there is the key – the truth in and of Jesus Christ. **Verse 16** says these guys “*claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.*” Claim there literally is the word for confession – they confess that they know God – they claimed to be Christian believers. Yet God’s assessment of them is clear – like **Isaiah 29:13** says, “*these people draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.*”

Their actions deny that God is their God – their actions on the whole deny that their lives are surrendered by faith to Jesus Christ. You say wait a minute – these were people doing good things – these are folks going to church – confessing a belief in Jesus – giving to the church – even doing things the world around them would say was good – how can they be denying God by their actions?

Look back at **verse 15**: “*To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.*”

These particular false teachers weren’t very different than many today – they were emphasizing rules and regulations and traditions and outward actions as the most important things – as the things that you had to do – as the things that if you did this, then you were right with God.

They were trusting what they did on the outside to redeem them on the inside. But that's not the truth of Jesus Christ. **God judges us by the disposition of our HEARTS, not based on our external deeds. If we want God to accept our works, they must be according to His Word which says they must begin with a heart purified by true FAITH.** Do you see that? Here's what that means for us.

It means, doing the right things from the wrong heart or motive accomplishes nothing before God.

It means that doing what you decide is right but leaving undone the good that God wants you to do and just hoping God will be ok with that accomplishes nothing before God.

And it means doing the right things but also purposefully continuing in the wrong things and hoping God will take what he can get, accomplishes nothing before God.

See how all this fits together? That's why the description of the qualifications of elders is almost completely about character and faith more than function or works. See in chapter 1, God gives us a mini-blueprint as the foundation for his church and then he starts going into detail about the leadership of his church. And by using the situation Titus was facing, he shows the contrast between men who should lead and those who should not.

To use the words of this chapter: those who "claim to know God" but whose actions prove otherwise – those who "do not believe" – "whose minds and consciences are corrupted" are "detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good." They should not be in leadership in God's church. But those who are "blameless" and all that that entails and who "hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught" can be "entrusted with God's work" – especially being elders in the church of God.

Church as God has reminded us of his plan for his church – and his qualifications for the leaders of his church – and the importance of our hearts before him – in all of this, you've already been given several questions for application – for you to deal with individually today and I hope you take them seriously.

Because what we see in this first chapter is pretty simple:

God's church BELONGS to Him, not to us.

It is – we are to exist according to His PLAN, not ours.

It is – we are to be led by those He CALLS, those He qualifies according to His STANDARDS, not our opinions and not our wills.

And everything He expects of His CHURCH and requires of His LEADERS are the very things He expects and values in every one of US – male or female, young or old, elder or deacon or not.

His church will be what we make it because we are his church. And his blueprint for his church is a people purified by grace through faith and doing the good works that flow from that faith that he planned in advance for us to do – for his glory!

Sounds like a plan to me...let's move toward it!