



## 2. Inspired Leadership Titus 1:5-16

*Titus 1:5 I left you in Crete, so that you could put in order the things that still needed doing and appoint church elders in every town. Remember my instructions: 6 an elder must be blameless; he must have only one wife, and his children must be believers and not have the reputation of being wild or disobedient. 7 For since a church leader is in charge of God's work, he should be blameless. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered, or a drunkard or violent or greedy for money. 8 He must be hospitable and love what is good. He must be self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 9 He must hold firmly to the message which can be trusted and which agrees with the doctrine. In this way he will be able to encourage others with the true teaching and also to show the error of those who are opposed to it.*

*10 For there are many, especially converts from Judaism, who rebel and deceive others with their nonsense. 11 It is necessary to stop their talk, because they are upsetting whole families by teaching what they should not, and all for the shameful purpose of making money. 12-13 It was a Cretan himself, one of their own prophets, who spoke the truth when he said, "Cretans are always liars, wicked beasts, and lazy gluttons." For this reason you must rebuke them sharply, so that they may have a healthy faith 14 and no longer hold on to Jewish legends and to human commandments which come from people who have rejected the truth. 15 Everything is pure to those who are themselves pure; but nothing is pure to those who are defiled and unbelieving, for their minds and consciences have been defiled. 16 They claim that they know God, but their actions deny it. They are hateful and disobedient, not fit to do anything good.*

Last week we saw how Titus had been given the task of sorting out the church in Crete. Paul had visited, but had not had opportunity to do much and now he commissions Titus to sort things out and establish churches properly in each town with proper leadership. In Acts 27 that Paul visited Crete as a prisoner on his way to Rome. His ship wintered in Crete. How long was he there? Did he go ashore? Did he have the opportunity to preach? Did he establish a church. It isn't recorded but presumably if he was a prisoner, his movements would have been limited. We know at least one of his aides was with him – Luke – but was Titus? Is this was when Titus was left? As I mentioned last week there is a church tradition that Paul was acquitted when he got to Rome and then travelled around the Mediterranean a second time before being finally arrested and tried in Rome when Nero started to seriously persecute the church. If you look through the letters to Timothy, you'll find travel instructions involving places not mentioned in Acts. If the letters to Timothy were written post Acts 28 and involve mission and ministry in that period then Titus is too as the language and instructions bear striking similarities as commissioning letters for both these men.

One commentator, Oden, puts their chronology as

1 Timothy – at Ephesus

Titus – on Crete

2 Timothy – Paul now in prison, Tim still in Ephesus, Titus in Dalmatia.

As we look through Titus 1, it's clear that Paul did have an opportunity to found churches, but had not had long enough to establish leadership in the churches and deal with the issues of converts from Judaism and other ideas and attitudes floating around which were affecting the conduct of the church of God. So Titus is tasked to

*"set in order the things that are wanting."* So, we saw last week that there are a number of themes in Titus, all of them to do with order in the church and personal conduct of members of the church. Here they are again:

- Qualifications & responsibilities for elders
- Members responsibilities
- Outlines for godly living
- Church doctrine to be upheld in order to be pleasing to God

This evening we deal with the first part – the qualifications and responsibilities of elders. The list here in Titus bears strong similarities to the one in 1 Timothy 3, which should come as no surprise really! As I said last week, Titus was a long-standing colleague of Paul so this wasn't written for his benefit but a something that could be shown to people on Crete who may have challenged the criteria Titus was using to appoint leaders.

One of the problems of Crete was that the culture was quite challenging for teaching the ways of God, and within that there were difficult people to deal with in that. One important issue when we come to reach people for Christ in different cultures is that customs we find acceptable are unacceptable in another culture and vice versa e.g. attitudes to women, attitudes to trade and money, attitudes to relationships.

Groups of people get reputations don't they? Sometimes it is just plain racist to put stereotypes on them. There are other times when people seem quite happy with the stereotypes placed on them. The Cretan stereotype was by one of their own poets, Epimenides (v12). Paul seems to have been familiar with Cretan poets, having used Epimenides and Aratus in his speech on Mars Hill in Acts 17. These attitudes about Crete were common in the first century. They seem to have been thought of as a mixture of Cockney Wide Boys and Essex Girls.

But look more carefully. Titus wasn't just facing your average Cretan, but Jewish Cretans who seem to have got themselves an unhealthy mix of Jewish legalism and Cretan dishonesty! They were already causing problems in the church teaching false things and making money out of others in the church – Jewish teachers often taught and promised spiritual favours for money (now where have we heard all that before?). Here's how Paul describes them: *For there are many, especially converts from Judaism, who rebel and deceive others with their nonsense. 11 It is necessary to stop their talk, because they are upsetting whole families by teaching what they should not, and all for the shameful purpose of making money.* That's what a lot of Jewish preaching was by that point in the synagogues, rabbis cashing in on preaching and the sale of worship paraphernalia. Paul found them a constant battle and it inevitably finds mention in some form of other most of his letters and Acts.

Titus is given licence to deal with it strictly. Paul says in one verse: *you must rebuke them sharply, so that they may have a healthy faith 14 and no longer hold on to Jewish legends and to human commandments which come from people who have rejected the truth.* When he talks about Jewish legends here Paul isn't referring to OT. Don't forget Judaism then as now was more than the OT. There were plenty of extra stories and a whole lot of rules and regulations that went well beyond the OT. Paul knew that only too well being a former Pharisee.

He goes on then to dismiss their morality. *15 Everything is pure to those who are themselves pure; but nothing is pure to those who are defiled and unbelieving, for their minds and consciences have been defiled. 16 They claim that they know God, but their actions deny it. They are hateful and disobedient, not fit to do anything good.*

Paul's argument is that even though they say they are believers, their actions do not show who they are. The people of God should be characterised by their purity of life and actions and this letter helps us understand what that is – and there can be no excuses for less.

Which brings us to elders. As I read down through the list of qualities of an elder, I see the overall requirement being that they were to be people of integrity in a culture where integrity was at a premium. It is possible to list the qualities of an elder in four ways

General qualities  
Domestic qualities  
Personal qualities  
Doctrinal qualities

## ◆ General Qualities

### *an elder must be blameless*

People without fault – as I've said – men of integrity. Here's one bit that's controversial in this modern day. Paul states in this list an in 1 Timothy that elders are men. Is eldership a male preserve? Female deacons can be argued for – there's at least two verses in the NT for that, but the same is not said for elders.

Elders also occur in the plural. Titus was tasked with appointing elders in each town. Elders, plural. In fact we can see plurality in the church leadership in several of Paul's letters and elsewhere, both elders and deacons. What of one-man ministry? There is no such term as Minister in the NT. Pastor has slightly more currency as the Ephesian elders were tasked with being pastors to God's people. That said, it was still not unusual to find a single person put in charge of a church or group of churches – Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete! Ministry was more flexible than structured in this period I would suggest.

But there is the question also of words. Paul uses the word *episkopos* in 1 Timothy to describe elders. We know that means an overseer: someone who's been put in charge to look after and manage the church. That's quite distinct from deacons – *diakonoi* – who exist to serve the practical needs of the church. A *diakonos* is different from a *doulos*. A *doulos* was a bond-servant, where a *diakonos* was a servant with authority over other servants – a privileged servant. Back to Titus. Titus doesn't start by using *episkopi* when describing the elders of Crete. He uses another word, *presbuteros* – and elder. That's used in other places in the NT and it was quite common in Jewish civilization as well as in Greek to have elders in charge of villages, towns, places of worship. They were older wiser people who were able to lead, advise and sometimes resolve disputes. Why the difference in Titus? We don't know other than go down a couple of verses to verse 7 where GNB uses the word church leader – it's *episkopi*. But Paul is still describing elders here – he's used the term interchangeably and this leads many to think that's exactly what the usage was.

But there are other who think differently. Other felt there was a distinction with *episkopi* being senior, *presbuteroi* being lesser elders and then you have deacons. That's the structure of most episcopal churches. When people go into the Anglican ministry they become first deacons, then they advance to presbyters – but in most episcopal churches they are priests – and then if they get really senior, they are overseen by bishops (episcopalian as in *episkopi*) who have authority over a group of churches.

Baptist have never had a system like that. We follow the model of elders and deacons, with the minister being elder (unless we appoint lay elders too) and then we have deacons. There are no bishops – episcopalianism has generally been rejected amongst baptists. We generally go with *episkopos* and *presbuteros* being the same class of leader. Some baptist recognise an apostolic ministry where churches come under the influence even authority of someone over them rather in the way that Paul exercised authority over churches he founded. We haven't quite got as far as apostles in way the BU with Regional Ministers, but back in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the General Baptists had Messengers who did have a much more apostolic if not "bishops" role in the church.

## ◆ Domestic Qualities

### *he must have only one wife, and his children must be believers and not have the reputation of being wild or disobedient.*

*husband of only one wife*

*believing children who aren't wild*

These have produced their range of controversy over the years. Some say this refers to polygamy, which it could. Others say it only includes men who have only had one wife, so those who have divorced need not apply irrespective of circumstances. Others say that single men need not apply because elders must be married. And others suggest that the phrase married to one wife just means that Paul is referring to a marriage that is one of fidelity rather than being "open" as was common in Roman society where rich men had their mistresses.

Where's the truth? Beware the danger of legalizing common sense. This passage is all about who the elders are now, not where they've been because we've all had a past we have needed to be forgiven from.

Elders are people with their lives together, not people whose marriages are so bad or so open that they are unfaithful in some way. This is a comment about stable, happy marriage, not marital history.

Looking at these verses as a whole, an elder has got it together with his family. That's the point Paul is making. People with poor relationships and a tearaway family are not likely going to cope with the example of leadership or the demands on their time if their family life is a mess. Actually, he's far more explicit in 1 Timothy about this. 1 Tim 3:4-5 Elders are people who have a strong personal family life and it is that quality that makes them good material for managing the family of God.

#### ◆ Personal Qualities

*For since a church leader is in charge of God's work, he should be blameless. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered, or a drunkard or violent or greedy for money. 8 He must be hospitable and love what is good. He must be self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.*

without fault  
not arrogant  
not quick tempered  
not a drunk  
not violent  
not a grasper for cash

hospitable  
love what's good  
self-controlled  
upright  
holy  
disciplined

I could go into these in detail but again there is more common sense than law here. Leaders have to be people of moral integrity and lead by example. As before, it is about who they are now, not who they have been. As younger men they could have been arrogant, greedy, angry boozers who beat their wives. But Jesus changes lives. But it is what they have become and are that is important. One thing that often comes with age is the tendency to be circumspect in our dealings with people – the positives in the list are the reverse in broad character terms to the notes. There are some people that never get wiser – they don't make good leaders. Similarly, some people just get wise quickly and reach leadership in their younger years.

Interestingly, these qualities listed focus on the person and less on his ability to relate to others. Yes, there's hospitality but the rest are things like loving what's good, discipline, self-control, holy and upright. Why these? Because leaders need to be an example to others, not reflectors of society.

#### ◆ Doctrinal Qualities

*He must hold firmly to the message which can be trusted and which agrees with the doctrine. In this way he will be able to encourage others with the true teaching and also to show the error of those who are opposed to it.*

*firm believer  
encourage others  
teach truth  
expose error*

An elder inevitably is not going to be a recent convert. In the 1 Timothy list it actually says that and is clear about how vulnerable a recent convert would be to spiritual attack. It's a matter of maturity. An elder needs to be clear in what good doctrine is and must have a firm personal faith.

The specific doctrinal qualities fall into three categories, encouraging, teaching and protecting. Eldership is not about service but about building the faith of the fellowship and identifying and dealing with error. That's quite distinct from deacons that have a more general role in leading the fellowship through service. It's a spiritual role rather than a practical one.

We're not all called to be elders, but it is our duty to pray for our elders, support them and encourage them that they may be an example of Christ to the fellowship and in term protect and build up the fellowship. On the other hand it reminds us all that even if we're not called to leadership, we are called to be people of integrity and to uphold all the standards our elders are supposed to be examples of: commitment to marriage, family life and marital fidelity, a commitment to moral standards that reflect Christ, and a willingness to grow in our faith. Let's pray that we will support our elders in that way.

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