

Message #2
Titus: Being the Church in a Hostile Culture

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THE WORLD, THE FAMILY, AND THE CHURCH NEED GOOD MEN

INTRODUCTION

Our world is in desperate need of good men and fathers. The evidence is clear. In her book *The Toxic War on Masculinity* published last year, author Nancy Pearcy says, **“The flight from fatherhood may be the most devastating social problem of our day. The boy crisis is happening in all of the largest developed nations. Boys are falling behind on a host of measures, from education to mental health to addiction to criminality. Yet there is a crucial divide: Boys with two involved parents are much less likely to be in crisis. Children with absent fathers account for 63 percent of youth suicides, 90 percent of homeless and runaway children, 85 percent of children who exhibit behavioral disorders, 71 percent of high school dropouts, and 85 percent of youths sitting in prisons.”** (p. 193) Other research shows that 75 percent of rapists and 75% of children in substance abuse centers come from homes without a father. (*World*, 5/18/2024)

Guns have often become the scapegoat for mass shootings in which children are victims. Yet 70% of the killers come from single-mother homes. (*World*, 9/10/2022) What we desperately need are committed men and fathers. In a *Wall Street Journal* article published a little over a year ago researcher Jennifer Wallace surveyed a multitude of studies and found, **“Fathers who were involved in caregiving and play, and who reacted with warmth and greater sensitivity to a child who expressed emotions, were significantly more likely to have children with better emotional balance from infancy to adolescence. Such emotional stability in turn predicted ‘higher levels of social competence, peer relationships, academic achievement and resilience’ among kids.”** (Breakpoint 3/20/2023) Such is the need for committed men and fathers.

We know from the Scriptures that the church is the primary instrument which the Lord is using to promote His kingdom upon the earth. The local church desperately needs more committed men to be involved in this effort. The *USA Today* reports that “Women outnumber men in every major Christian denomination.” Women are also 20 percent more likely than men to attend church. (*USA Today*, 7/23/2008) A researcher by the name of Ross Sawyers says, **“Families are 90% more likely to attend church if the man of the house goes.”** (Capterra, 8/10/2016)

The focus of the passage before us this morning is the need for good men in the leadership of the church. This leadership is needed not just in the church but also in the home and the society at large. But many, perhaps most, of these qualities could be applied to women as well.

We began a study last week of the small New Testament book of Titus. We saw that the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to his coworker Titus who was hanging out on the island of Crete (PROJECTOR ON CRETE MAP) in the Mediterranean Sea. The likely scenario is that Paul had been released from his first imprisonment in Rome and headed out on another missionary trip. The island of Crete was a likely early stop. There is evidence from Acts #2 that some of the Jews present at Pentecost in Jerusalem responded to the gospel and returned to their home island of Crete. The churches seem not to have been well established there. Paul's visit was probably brief. He left his coworker Titus, whom he had introduced to Jesus years earlier, to build up and strengthen these churches.

Paul himself was originally from Tarsus (ANTIOCH MAP), in what we know today as Turkey. We talked about his ancestry last week that his parents may have originally been taken as slaves from an anti-Roman town in Galilee. After his dramatic conversion on a trip to Damascus to arrest Christians, Paul got his first significant ministry experience in Antioch in Syria. Titus was apparently introduced to Jesus there by Paul.

I.

We come then to our passage today in v. 5 of Titus #1 where we consider THE NEED FOR ELDERS. (I. THE NEED FOR ELDERS) Paul writes, **“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—”** Titus has a unique role. He is not called a deacon or an elder or a pastor. He serves as the representative of Paul who is an apostle. In this role he is to put what remains into order. There is no further explanation given for what this means. It would seem that he is being called upon to help organize local churches on the island of Crete. Central to this task is the appointment of elders.

At about this same time Paul wrote similar letters to his coworker Timothy who was stationed in the city of Ephesus in western Asia Minor. Paul gave him instructions also about appointing elders. He also spoke about deacons and deaconesses. Paul does not mention those two positions here. The suspicion is that the churches in Crete are not as far along in their organization as is the church in Ephesus. The basic thing which needs to be done is to get some elders in these local churches in Crete. Paul tells Timothy about how to remove elders when a problem arises in the Ephesus church. On Crete there are not very many elders who have even been appointed yet.

Paul next proceeds to describe the qualifications for elders. But first we need to consider what an elder is. That term was used to describe tribal leaders of Israel in the Old Testament. The term is carried over into the New Testament to describe the leaders of local churches. Always the leaders of local churches in the New Testament are referred to in the plural.

There is confusion in our day involving the term “pastor.” This past week the Southern Baptist Convention held its annual conference in Indianapolis. Several churches were expelled from their denomination for having female pastors. An effort to add an amendment to the Southern Baptists’ constitution banning all women pastors fell just short of the two-thirds vote necessary to enact an amendment. According to their

governing documents a pastor is **“one who fulfills the pastoral office and carries out the pastor's functions.”** Their Baptist Faith and Message also declares that **“the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.”**

In our own local church constitution I am likewise described as having the position of pastor. But Biblically speaking, pastor is not an office. It is described in the New Testament as a spiritual gift, and pastoring is described as a responsibility of elders in the local church. Thus the Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians #4 vv. 11 & 12 (EPHESIANS 4:11-12), speaking of Christ, **“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...”** This ESV translations uses the word “shepherds.” That is the literal meaning of the word, but often it is translated as “pastors.” Thus shepherding/pastoring is included in a list of spiritual gifts.

I suspect that there are a number of women in our congregation who have this spiritual gift. Carol Tyson is just very pastoral in her care for hurting people in our congregation. Jenny shows pastoral care for widows and others in our church. Eva seems pastoral in her care for kids and in her work as a nurse. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The real issue, it seems to me, is whether women should be elders in the local church. Biblically speaking, my position or office at Bethany Baptist Church is teaching elder. Many evangelical churches today have teaching elders, who are commonly called pastors, who are women. Most Pentecostal churches accept the idea. Women teaching elders, or pastors, are common in Methodist churches, Lutheran churches, Presbyterian churches, Nazarene churches, and Episcopal churches. An increasing number of Baptist churches accept the idea of female teaching elders or pastors.

The foundational issue is: What is our authority? If we believe the Bible, what does it say? It seems pretty clear in our passage. But consider also what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy #2 v. 11. (1 TIMOTHY 2:11) Speaking of the meeting of the church he writes, **“I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.”** Paul defends this position by appealing to the order of creation, not to some temporary situation.

Some object to this understanding by appealing to Galatians #3 v. 28. (GALATIANS 3:28) There the apostle writes, **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”** We are all equal in the body of Christ. Therefore to say that only men should be teaching elders and to call upon Christian women to submit to that situation and to husbands in marriage is unfair and demeaning.

The counter to that argument comes from what the Bible says about Jesus. Consider this statement from Luke #2 v. 51 (LUKE 2:51): **“And he [Jesus] went down with them [His parents] and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.”** Jesus was not just equal in position to His earthly parents. By virtue of His deity He was inherently superior to them. Yet He

submitted Himself to them. Thus submission does not necessarily mean inferiority, and it seems clear from the New Testament that men only are to be elders. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Returning then to v. 5 in our passage the exact mechanism for how Titus is to appoint elders in every city is not described. Titus could not possibly know all of the Christians in these churches in many different cities. He may have had some divine help from the Holy Spirit, but I expect that he also relied on the recommendations of Christians in these various cities.

We shall see in a moment the qualifications of the men who might fill this role. It is probably wise that the New Testament does not tell Christians exactly how to go about the selection process. Probably the methodology will vary somewhat across the different cultures of the world. In our church we have a nominating committee composed of representatives of the elders, deacons, and deaconesses, along with another member from the congregation. They propose elders at the annual meeting, and the committee members have to be unanimous in their recommendations.

II.

In the remaining verses of our passage the apostle proceeds to describe three general areas of qualification for any prospective elder of a local church. Most of these characterizations are worthy of emulation by any man. Most of them have applicability to any Christian woman. So first in v. 6 we encounter THE QUALIFICATION OF FAMILY LIFE. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE QUALIFICATION OF FAMILY LIFE) Verse 6 gives the first area of qualification: **“...if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.”**

To be above reproach cannot mean sinless. For all of us are sinners. This appears to be describing a person, in this case a man, about whom it is difficult to say much that is bad. I think about Dan Bunch, whose memorial service we had a week ago. Dan served as an elder at various times. It was clear from the stories that people told about him that there was not too much bad that people could think about him. He was pretty much above reproach.

The text goes on to say that a prospective elder was to be the husband of one wife. Dan was a lifelong bachelor. Did that mean that he did not qualify to serve as an elder? I don't think that this was the point of the Apostle Paul. The Greek phrase literally means “a one woman man.” The idea is that this prospective elder is not someone who is immoral. He does not play the field. If he is married, he is devoted to his wife.

Next our translation says that this possible elder has children who are believers. This is a possible translation. The underlying Greek word is a form of the word for “faith.” But it could have the idea of “faithful.” In other words, the text might be saying that this prospective elder should have kids who are well behaved. The adjective involved here

appears two other times in Titus. Both times it seems to have the nuance of “faithful.” For example, v. 9 in our passage speaks of the “faithful,” or “trustworthy” word.

So it seems most likely that we should understand that the prospective elder has kids who are well behaved and reasonably obedient. This interpretation is supported by the contrast that is presented in the second part of the verse. We don’t want to have an elder whose kids are characterized by debauchery or insubordination.

“Debauchery” is not a real common word. The NASV has “dissipation.” In Ephesians 5:18 debauchery is associated with drunkenness. This word is also used to describe the behavior of the prodigal son in Luke #15. This younger son in the parable of Jesus wanted his share of the inheritance. He went off and spent the money on wild living. The temptations in that day for a young man would include alcohol and women. Today we would add illegal drugs to the lifestyle which would be characterized by debauchery.

The other negative behavior of kids is described as insubordination. This is disobedience to a legitimate authority, in this case parents. In our recent study of Proverbs I pointed out that corrective discipline is needed to deal with this sin nature that is present in kids. A consistent, loving approach to corrective discipline of children generally produces kids who turn out well.

The point of all of this is that we cannot expect an elder to be a good manager of the church, the local family of God, if he is a poor manager of his family. (1 TIMOTHY 3:4) In a parallel passage in 1 Timothy #3 v. 4 the same apostle writes, **“He [a prospective elder] must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive...”** The family is a prime testing ground for the godly leadership of a man and a father. A prospective elder needs to successfully pass this test. (PROJECTOR OFF) Such is the qualification of family life.

III.

In vv. 7 & 8 we come to a description of personal characteristics. This is THE QUALIFICATION OF PERSONAL LIFE. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE QUALIFICATION OF PERSONAL LIFE) Paul writes, **“For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, & but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.”**

Notice first that we have a different term to describe an elder. Here he is called an overseer, an *episkopos* in the original Greek. This is where we get the term “Episcopal.” Often it is translated as “bishop.” There is a slight change of focus in the use of this second term. “Elder” points toward the idea of maturity and experience. “Overseer,” or “bishop,” has a stress on function. A prime responsibility of the elder is to oversee, which in this context means overseeing the local church.

The elder and overseer is to oversee “as God’s steward.” The steward was the chief servant in a wealthy household. Joseph was a steward in the household of Potiphar in

Egypt. This chief official under the Egyptian pharaoh entrusted the management of his household to Joseph.

Again the qualification of being above reproach is repeated. This is followed by five negative descriptions. The elder candidate must not be arrogant. Arrogance is anathema for a Christian leader. Jesus laid down this standard for His disciples in Mark #10 vv. 43 & 44 (MARK 10:43-44): **“But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.”**

Paul also says that an elder should not be “quick-tempered.” Literally it is “quick to anger.” (PROJECTOR OFF) In my first church I went to a freshman football game where one of the kids in my youth group was playing. The boy’s father was one of the elders of our church. As soon as the first call of the refs went against his son’s team, he started ripping into the referees. This continued as the game went along. I was appalled. I was embarrassed to think that people at the game would know that this guy was a leader in our church. Such behavior ought not to be present in elders.

An elder also ought not to be a drunkard, literally “given to wine.” He should not be “violent.” He is not to be pugnacious. No one likes a leader who is a bully, especially in Christian leadership.

Then an elder should not be “greedy for gain.” There are some TV evangelists and preachers who focus on prosperity. They appear to be largely motivated by personal material gain. Then you read about some of them having personal jets and multiple mansions, and you have a hard time seeing how they can be representatives of Jesus.

I think that Samaritan’s Purse does some great ministry. But then I read that Franklin Graham in 2020 had an annual salary of over \$700,000. (*Christian Daily*, 6/12/2024) On top of that he also serves as the CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. His salary there is not even public. But ten years ago it was reported to be \$258,000 a year. These organizations appeal for financial contributions from widows and people on fixed income and small churches, and their Christian leader makes a million dollars a year. I have heard some people say that his salary is determined on the basis of what leaders of large corporations and organizations are getting. Really? We get our Christian standards from the business and secular world? What happened to the servant example of Jesus? Sure because of his leadership position he should be paid decently, but a million dollars a year? It comes across to me as greedy for gain.

In v. 8 the list of five vices is followed by a list of six virtues. The prospective elder is to be “hospitable.” The word is literally “a lover of strangers.” In the ancient world public inns had a bad reputation. In an early Greek play a playwright by the name of Aristophanes has one of his characters ask a friend for advice about where to spend the night on their journey. The friend replies, “Where the fleas are fewest.” Such it was that in the early church traveling evangelists and teachers depended upon the hospitality of fellow Christians on their journeys. Titus and Paul experienced first hand this kind of hospitality. Today hospitality can be exercised by hosting Christians and church

meetings at one's home, by taking people out to eat, by helping out Christians going through hard times financially.

Then in v. 8 Paul speaks of being "a lover of what is good." The exercise of wisdom was a central theme of our recent study of Proverbs. We defined that as "skill in godly, daily living." Part of that skill involves loving what is truly good, whether it is in people, or public policy or music or literature or art or church programs.

Then there is self-control. This involves control of our passions and resistance to temptation. In the world in which we live there are all kinds of temptations. We want elders who demonstrate that they can resist the worst of these temptations.

Then an elder is to be upright. The word means "righteous." We Christians know that we have an applied righteousness. We are sinners, but if we have trusted in Jesus, we are justified, which means that we are declared to be righteous. The righteousness of Jesus is applied to our account. But this righteousness should also spill over into our behavior and into the way in which we treat others.

Then elders are to be holy. Holiness sometimes has a negative connotation. In popular culture we may refer to someone as "a holy Joe." The idea is that such a person is overly pious. He or she is uncomfortable to be around. Yet we know that Jesus was a holy person. He was the most holy person who ever lived. Isn't it fascinating that the people who seemed to like to hang out with him were sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes and disabled people?

C. S. Lewis once commented to an American friend: "**How little people know who think that holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing, ...it is irresistible. If even 10% of the world's population had it, would not the whole world be converted and happy before a year's end?**" (*Letters to an American Lady*, p. 19)

Then also a prospective elder was expected to be disciplined. Paul was fond of using this term of athletes. In 1 Corinthians #9 v. 25 (1 CORINTHIANS 9:25) he writes, "**Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.**" The word here for "self-control" is "discipline." The picture is that we Christians are involved in a serious contest. We want to be winners. We want to succeed in pleasing Jesus and promoting His kingdom. So that requires discipline. It requires keeping a focus on what is important and giving up things which are not so important. We seek to be generous toward the right things with our time and energy and money.

IV.

Then fourth in v. 9 Paul speaks about THE QUALIFICATION OF DOCTRINAL LIFE for elders. (IV. THE QUALIFICATION OF DOCTRINAL LIFE) Paul writes, "**He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.**"

The New Testament was not yet put together. Christians who were literate may have had some access to the Old Testament. But these first believers were largely dependent upon oral teaching for their Christian doctrine. People like Paul and Titus were crucial to their understanding of doctrinal truth. So these potential Christian leaders had to have some handle on the basics--- things like the authority of the apostles, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the identity of Jesus, the promised Second Coming, and salvation by grace through faith.

These candidates for leadership not only had to have a grasp of these basic doctrines but they had to have some ability to teach them. There was no TV or radio or live streaming or Christian bookstores or even Christian books. It was essential that these first elders have some ability to communicate Christian truth.

They also had to recognize ideas that contradicted basic Christian doctrine and have some ability to speak against them. That was a challenge because they did not yet have much Christian Scripture that was written. As we saw in our study of Galatians one of the biggest early challenges came from Jewish Christians, or at least Jews who claimed to be Christians, who kept trying to tell Gentile Christians that they needed to be circumcised and follow the law of Moses. Today elders need to have some recognition of the false teaching of the cults and the insidious ideas of our culture that would have us compromise the teachings of the Bible.

This is all tied in with the Biblical idea of pastoring. So it is that the Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter # 5 vv. 1 & 2 (1 PETER 5:1-2A), **“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.”** “Shepherd” is also the word that means “pastor.” Good shepherds feed their flock with good food. They also protect the flock from enemies who would seek to hurt the sheep. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Such are the qualities that are needed for elders in the local church. They are also needed in our families and in our work life and in our community. David Blankenhorn has served as the president of the Institute for American Values. He writes, **“The famous anthropologist Margaret Mead once said that the supreme test of any civilization is whether it can teach men to be good fathers. Today, the United States is failing that test. But we need not make permanent the lowering of our standards. Passivity in the face of crisis is inconsistent with the American tradition. We can do better. We can reverse this trend. We can change our minds. Let us start today.”** Praise God for the committed men and fathers in our midst. Happy Father’s Day!