



TITUS

A HEALTHY CHURCH

IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES: A HEALTHY CHURCH

TITLE: A HEALTHY CHURCH TAKES LEADERSHIP SERIOUSLY

SCRIPTURE: TITUS 1:1-9

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INTRODUCTION

This morning we are starting a new series through Paul's letter to Titus. Our series is entitled "A Healthy Church." In the series we will discover from Titus that healthy churches are those who take seriously leadership, truth, discipleship, holiness, the gospel, and unity. These things give evidence of a healthy church.

To be clear, people can often determine if churches are healthy by the size of its budget, how clean the building is, the charisma of its senior pastor, or the size of its congregation. And while each of these things can be helpful, the true health of a church is marked by other factors. Man will look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. God determines the standard of health that we should use. Paul's letter to Titus helps us determine that standard.

Our theme for this week is that a healthy church takes leadership seriously.

Titus 1:1–9

Greeting

Paul, a servant^[a] of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, ² in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began^[b] ³ and at the proper time manifested in his word^[c] through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior;

⁴ To Titus, my true child in a common faith:

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Qualifications for Elders

⁵ 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 — ⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife,^[d] and his children are believers^[e] and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷ For an overseer,^[f] 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, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound^[g] doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Explanation

Background to Titus

We think it is helpful to begin by providing some background to Paul's letter to Titus. Understanding the setting of the letter, who Titus was, and why Paul wrote this letter will help us better appreciate Paul's instruction regarding leadership in the church.

The Pastoral Epistles

Paul's letter to Titus is one of three New Testament letters commonly referred to as the Pastoral Epistles. These letters include 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. They are called the Pastoral Epistles because they were written by Paul to two young ministry leaders, Timothy and Titus, as they carried out their responsibilities in leading local churches.

In 1 and 2 Timothy, Paul gives Timothy instructions for shepherding the church in Ephesus. In Titus, Paul gives instructions for bringing order and establishing leadership within the churches on the island of Crete. While these letters were written to specific individuals, their instruction provides valuable insight into God's design for church leadership, discipleship, and godly living.

Who Was Titus?

Interestingly, Titus is not mentioned by name in the book of Acts. We learn about him primarily through Paul's other letters. As we trace Titus' appearances throughout the New Testament, we gain a glimpse of a faithful and trusted partner in Paul's ministry.

Paul likely met Titus early in his ministry. It is possible that Titus became connected with Paul during or even before Paul's first missionary journey. In Galatians 2:1, Paul mentions traveling to Jerusalem with Barnabas and bringing Titus along with them. Scholars debate whether this visit refers to Paul's journey to Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15 after his first missionary journey or an earlier visit described in Acts 11:27-30 when Paul traveled to Jerusalem in response to a famine.

We also learn from Galatians 2:3 that Titus was a Greek. When Paul brought Titus to Jerusalem, he met privately with influential leaders to explain the ministry God had given him among the Gentiles. Significantly, after hearing Paul's message and seeing Titus, the leaders did not require Titus to be circumcised. For Paul, this was a clear affirmation that Gentiles were welcomed into God's people through faith in Christ alone and not through observing the works of the law.

We learn more about Titus through Paul's correspondence with the Corinthian church. The church in Corinth was struggling with division, sexual immorality, arrogance, and questions regarding Paul's authority as an apostle. Included in Paul's efforts to lead the church, He sent Titus as a trusted representative. Titus would communicate Paul's love for the church and help address these concerns.

In 2 Corinthians 7:6–16, Paul describes how Titus was received by the Corinthians and how effectively he communicated Paul’s concern and love for them. Titus returned to Paul with encouraging news about the Corinthians’ repentance, their longing for Paul, and their renewed commitment to him.

We also see Titus’ faithfulness in 2 Corinthians 8. As Paul helped organized a collection from various churches for believers in Jerusalem, Titus was one of the trusted brothers who helped collect and deliver the offering. Paul describes Titus as someone who was “earnest” and who willingly went to serve the Corinthians. He also calls Titus his “partner and fellow worker” for their benefit (2 Cor. 8:23).

Paul’s confidence in Titus is evident. He had entrusted Titus to represent him faithfully, and he could later remind the Corinthians, “Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?” (2 Cor. 12:18). Titus was not simply a messenger for Paul; he was a trusted ministry partner who shared Paul’s commitment to the gospel.

Titus in Crete

Scholars debate the exact timing and circumstances of Paul’s ministry in Crete. The difficulty is that the book of Acts does not record a specific visit from Paul to Crete, and Titus is never mentioned by name in Acts.

One possibility is simply that Paul traveled to Crete during a period of ministry that Luke did not record. A more prevalent view among scholars is that Paul wrote to Titus after the events described in Acts 28, the book’s final chapter. In Acts 28, Paul is under house arrest in Rome. During this imprisonment, Paul likely wrote to the Philippians, where he expressed confidence that he would be released and hoped to continue his ministry (Php. 1:18–26; 2:23). If Paul was released from his imprisonment, as some scholars believe, he may have entered into another season of ministry often referred to as Paul’s “fourth missionary journey.” During this time, Paul may have traveled to Crete and left Titus there to help establish and organize the churches. Paul’s statement in Titus 1:5 that he left Titus in Crete indicates that Paul had personally visited the island.

Presumably, after this fourth journey, Paul could have been arrested again. In 2 Timothy, Paul writes from prison and seems to recognize that his death is approaching. This provides the likely setting for the final letter we have from Paul.

Paul's Greeting

Paul begins his letter to Titus with a somewhat lengthy introduction of himself considering that Titus already knew him well. As we have seen, Paul considered Titus a trusted co-worker in the gospel. At the end of his greeting, Paul refers to Titus as his “true child in a common faith,” a description Paul also uses of Timothy. This language reflects the close spiritual relationship Paul had with these younger ministry leaders.

Paul uses the introduction to establish several important themes that will shape the rest of the letter. Paul identifies himself as both a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. These two descriptions are important because Paul understood leadership differently than the world does. Apostleship was not a position of status, recognition, or entitlement. Instead, it was a calling marked by humility, sacrifice, and service. Paul saw himself called by God for the sake of the faith of God's elect.

One of Paul's primary responsibilities as an apostle was to help people come to the knowledge of the truth. Throughout this letter, Paul will emphasize that true knowledge of God always produces godliness. Christianity is not merely about gaining information; it is about being transformed by the truth of God and living in a way that reflects that truth.

In verse 2, Paul explains that this faith and knowledge produce hope for eternal life. Paul's ministry centered on proclaiming the salvation God had promised long ago and had now revealed through Jesus Christ. God had made the way of salvation possible, and Paul's responsibility was to make that message known. He understood his ministry as a stewardship of the gospel that God had entrusted to him.

To Titus: Put What Remained in Order

After his greeting, Paul immediately identifies the purpose for leaving Titus in Crete. He writes that he left Titus there “so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town” (Titus 1:5). Titus' responsibility was to help establish healthy, orderly churches, and Paul begins by addressing the importance of qualified leadership.

Paul clearly had confidence in Titus. Leaving someone behind to establish leadership in churches was not a small assignment. Titus had already proven himself as a faithful servant and trusted representative of Paul.

For Paul, healthy churches begin with healthy leaders. The character and faithfulness of those who lead the church matters because leaders are entrusted with caring for the people of God.

Qualifications for Elders

Throughout Scripture, the terms elder, overseer, and pastor/shepherd are closely connected and are often used interchangeably. We see this connection in passages such as Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5, where elders are also described as overseers who shepherd God's people. In Titus 1, Paul uses the term "elder" to emphasize the maturity expected of a leader and "overseer" to emphasize the leadership responsibility entrusted to him. The position is not based on age but on spiritual maturity and demonstrated godliness.

Paul instructs Titus to *appoint* elders. This reminds us that biblical leadership is not something a person simply claims for himself. Elders are recognized and affirmed by the church because their character and qualifications have been observed by others.

Interestingly, Paul does not spend much time in Titus describing what elders *do*. Instead, his focus is on who elders *are*. Other passages explain that elders are responsible for teaching, leading, protecting, and shepherding the church (Acts 20:17-38; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Heb. 13:17 Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Thess. 5:12-14). Since elders are held to a stricter standard and are called to be examples to the flock, their character matters greatly.

Let's walk through these qualifications.

Above reproach

The first qualification Paul gives is that an elder must be "above reproach." This does not mean that an elder must be perfect or without sin. Rather, it means that his life should not be characterized by patterns of sinful behavior that would bring legitimate accusation against him. An elder should live in such a way that his reputation is consistent with his profession of faith. When people observe his life, there should be evidence of integrity, maturity, and godliness.

The husband of one wife

Paul next says that an elder must be “the husband of one wife.” Literally, the phrase in Greek could be translated “a one-woman man.” The emphasis is not simply on whether a man is married, nor is Paul only addressing the issue of polygamy. Rather, the emphasis is on faithfulness. An elder should be a man who demonstrates commitment, purity, and faithfulness in his marriage relationship. His relationship with his wife should reflect the kind of character expected of someone who shepherds God’s people.

Having faithful children

Paul also says that an elder’s children must be “believing” or “faithful,” depending on the translation. The Greek word *pistos* can carry either meaning. Some translations emphasize the idea that an elder’s children must be believers, while others understand the qualification to refer to children who are faithful or submissive.

The interpretation that children must personally be believers raises an important difficulty. Parents can faithfully teach, disciple, and model the gospel for their children, but they cannot ultimately guarantee their children’s salvation. Salvation is the work of God’s Spirit in the heart of an individual.

Additionally, when Paul gives qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3, he does not state that an elder’s children must be believers. Instead, he emphasizes that his children should be submissive and that an elder must “manage his own household well.” The primary concern is whether the man has demonstrated faithful leadership within his own home.

For this reason, many commentators understand Titus 1:6 to focus not on whether his children have personally come to faith, but whether an elder has faithfully shepherded his family. The following phrase in Titus 1:6 supports this understanding because Paul says that an elder’s children must not be open to charges of “debauchery or insubordination.” The concern is whether the elder has led his household well.

Above reproach as God’s steward

Paul then returns to the idea that an overseer must be “above reproach.” As Paul shifts from the term elder to overseer, he is not introducing a different office. Instead, he continues describing the qualifications of the same church leader.

The word “elder” emphasizes the maturity expected of the leader, while “overseer” emphasizes the responsibility of leadership and care. A pastor is not simply someone who holds a position; he is someone entrusted with managing what belongs to God. Paul describes him as God’s steward, reminding us that church leadership is ultimately a responsibility given by God.

Not arrogant, quick-tempered, a drunkard, violent, or greedy

Paul next provides a list of characteristics that *must not describe* an elder. These qualities reveal the kind of character that would disqualify someone from shepherding God’s people.

- An elder must not be arrogant. Pride is one of the greatest dangers for leaders because leadership can easily become focused on personal recognition or control. A godly leader must remember that he serves Christ and His church.
- An elder must not be quick-tempered. Because leaders will inevitably face criticism, disagreements, and difficult situations, they must demonstrate patience and self-control. A short temper can damage relationships and prevent a leader from responding in a Christlike manner.
- An elder must not be controlled by alcohol. Drunkenness impairs judgment and self-control, qualities that are essential for someone entrusted with spiritual leadership. Pastoral ministry can be stressful. The elder need not turn to alcohol as a way to deal with the stress.
- An elder must not be violent. A shepherd of God’s people should be a peacemaker who seeks reconciliation rather than conflict.
- Finally, an elder must not be greedy for gain. Since pastors often receive financial support from the church, they must demonstrate that their motivation is not personal benefit but faithful service to Christ and His people.

Hospitable, loving what is good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined

After describing what an elder must avoid, Paul now describes the positive qualities that should characterize his life.

- An elder must be hospitable. In the early church, where many gatherings took place in homes, hospitality was especially important. Hospitality

remains an important quality for leaders today because it reflects a willingness to welcome, serve, and care for others.

- An elder must be a lover of good. This describes someone who desires what honors God and demonstrates kindness, generosity, and a willingness to do good works.
- An elder must be self-controlled. Since an elder should not be quick-tempered or violent, he therefore must demonstrate self-control.
- An elder must be upright. To be upright means that one can act righteous in any given circumstance. He considers what is fair and just. He understands what is good for church.
- An elder must be holy. An elder recognizes his need to pursue the Lord just like everyone else. He aims to put off sin and live in greater holiness before the Lord. He sets the example for the flock.
- An elder must be disciplined. Since elders are often tasked with lovingly confronting and rebuking, they must be self-disciplined. They need to live ordered lives with healthy habits.

Holding firm to sound doctrine

Finally, Paul emphasizes that an elder must “hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught.” A central responsibility of an elder is faithfully handling and teaching God’s truth.

An elder does not lead based on personal opinions, cultural preferences, or individual agendas. Instead, he is entrusted with teaching the doctrine that has been handed down through Scripture. In Titus’ case, he was taught sound doctrine through Paul. For pastors today, the responsibility remains the same: faithfully teach the Word of God. An elder must be able to teach and encourage others with sound doctrine. The church needs leaders who can clearly explain the truth of Scripture and help believers grow in their faith.

An elder must be able to confront those who contradict sound doctrine. This includes addressing false teaching, but it also includes confronting patterns of ungodly living that are inconsistent with the gospel.

A faithful elder is therefore both a teacher and a protector. He feeds the flock with the truth of God’s Word while also guarding the church from teachings and behaviors that would lead people away from Christ.

Discussion Questions

- When people evaluate whether a church is "healthy," what standards do they typically use? How do those differ from the standards we see in Titus?
- Why do you think Paul begins his instructions for a healthy church by talking about leadership rather than programs, growth, or ministry success?
- Titus was sent into difficult situations (Corinth and Crete). What does that tell us about the kind of leaders God often uses?
- Paul left Titus to "put what remained into order." What kinds of things create disorder in a church today?
- Paul spends much more time describing an elder's character than his abilities. Why do you think character receives so much emphasis?
- What does "above reproach" mean—and what doesn't it mean? How can we distinguish between perfection and integrity?
- Looking through Paul's list of negative qualities (arrogance, quick temper, greed, violence, etc.), which do you think pose the greatest temptation for leaders today? Why?
- Which positive qualification stands out to you the most? Why do you think it is especially important in today's culture?
- Even if someone is not called to be an elder, what principles from this passage should shape every Christian's life?
- How can church members encourage, support, and pray for their pastors and elders as they seek to meet these biblical qualifications?