

Recognizing Leaders: A Never Ending Task

Titus 1:5-9

Introduction: Back in the 1990's, when we sat down to watch sports or any show on TV, we were subjected to something called commercials, advertisements we could not pause or skip, but just had to sit there and take it. One of these thirty second spots featured a skinny Charles Barkley at the height of his pro basketball career, with a message about the expectations of pro athletes as role models to those that idolized them, wearing their shoes, jerseys, and t-shirt. "I'm not paid to be a role model. I'm paid to wreak havoc on the basketball court. Parents should be role models. Just because I dunk a basketball doesn't mean I should raise your kids." I'm not sure what he was selling, but this statement is nothing short of interesting, in which I both agree and disagree with this assessment. People are thirsty for role models, people they can emulate, follow, and become like. Far too often we look at the wrong criteria for these: entertainers, athletes, internet sensations, or simply someone who is famous for being famous become those we strive to become, regardless of their character, life, and moral adherence, as long as they can sing real pretty. So in this, Sir Charles was correct, we should not look him simply because of excellence in one area of life.

On the other side of the argument, too many have shirked their opportunity and responsibility to be leaders and role models, given the platform to do so. Mature believers understand that they should never act like they are only responsible for themselves. Regardless of our position or stage of life, we understand that because of spiritual dangers all around, Christian leaders need to lead. Francis Schaeffer said "leadership aversion for the sake of personal peace and affluence" is the primary goal of most people in our culture and is not Biblically defensible.¹ Part of leading, whether in our homes, businesses, schools, community, or church is for mature people who are willing to sacrifice personal comfort and privacy for the sake of helping others.

We come to the primary purpose of Titus in this section. In order for truth to be displayed as beautiful, leaders had to be set up to lead since the church was being influenced by false teachers with false doctrine. **As leaders go, so goes the home and the church.** Though men and women are called to be leaders (we will cover this in Titus 2), the focus in Titus 1 is on men leading as elders or pastors in the church. There was a need in the church on Crete (as there is a need in EVERY church) for men to play their God given role. A few Biblical principles to make clear before going through these verses:

- We uphold the equality of male and female value and personhood (Gen. 1:26; Gal. 3:28) while simultaneously acknowledging the difference in function and role. Genesis 2 and Eph. 5 lay out the role of men women in marriage, where men are commissioned to loving leadership and women are called to lovingly follow and support their husband. The church takes her cue from these realities
- This Biblical reality will always be counter-cultural - Roles were flipped because of sin, and desires were flipped because of our sin nature (see Genesis 3:14-19), which both can be recovered in the gospel. We never take our cues from culture, rather live out Biblical truth within it.
- Male leadership primarily should be defined by SERVICE, sacrifice, and sanctifying work, not dominance, control, and hierarchy. Just as husbands take their lead from Jesus (Eph. 5:25), men take their leadership cue from the way Jesus served His bride.
- When men lead well - families and churches can be healthy, women are cared for and freed up to play out all that God made you to be. In other words, when men lead well, it helps everyone else play their role well

¹ Bryan Chapel, *Titus*, p. 293.

- So we pray for, equip, invest in, and uphold a high value on true Biblical leadership, for both men and women, but particularly in seeing men become character qualified to lead their families and God's church.

So we look at these high level qualifications that all believers should attain to, but must absolutely be true of those leading God's church.

Finishing a Job Left Undone (since it is always undone) - v. 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-*

Giving order to disorder in the church

Paul's mode of operation in church planting was to be in a certain place for a time, evangelize, make disciples, and form a church. As the initial teaching and training would take hold, he would leave for other places and continue the process, and then return after months/years to appoint elders to lead. (Acts 14:23) On Crete, it seemed that he was not able to get back for this last part of the training, so he had Titus go there to finish. Setting things in order, bringing a settling spirit among those without direction was the key task for this young pastor.

Appointing recognized elders/pastors

Notice that Titus was to *appoint* elders. This does not mean he was going to arbitrarily doing this on his own whim, it was that he would **recognize** elders who had distinguished themselves. **Acts 20:28** says that the Holy Spirit makes elders, and there was a specific qualification for these men. But the point is important that we as a church do not MAKE an elder. An elder will be recognized by our church when they have the character qualifications, desire, and are actively shepherding in our midst. We appoint men who the congregation says, "Yep, that's the guy. You mean he's not an elder already." We do not make an elder with the hope he becomes qualified, we appoint qualified men who are already recognized.

Finding Qualified Men to Get the Job Done - v. 6-9

*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.⁷ 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,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 doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*

Reputation (it matters)

What is an elder or overseer?

Acts 20:28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to **care** for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

Episkapos - office of overseer, bishop, pastor, elder
Poimainein - Tend like a shepherd; care and keep sheep

Before moving forward, it's good to define terms. There are several terms for elder in the NT: *presbuteros* is a general term which refers to age (elder brother); *poimainein* which refers to pastoring and shepherding; and *episkapos* which means bishop, overseer and refers to the office. Most often, the word *episkapos* is used to refer to pastors/elders as we know them, and the office of "deacon" is known as the *diakonos* or servants. **Acts 20:28** gives a great example of how these words and ideas intertwine. The office of elder **functions** as a shepherd, one who cares for God's church. An elder is one who cares for the people of God's church as an undershepherd, one who protects, feeds, and teaches through the Word and example.

One Main Thing: Above Reproach

1 Timothy 3:2 Therefore an overseer must be **above reproach**,

1 Timothy 3:7 Moreover, he must be **well thought of by outsiders**, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

The general qualification in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 begins with the same thing: an elder needs to be **above reproach** or here in Titus, **blameless** (a synonym). This means that in terms of reputation, an elder is known consistently in all areas of life: church, home, community, work, neighborhood, gym, Friday nights, etc. There is nothing to hold on to, nothing to grab on and take him down.

What does this mean and not mean? It means we should care about what people think of us, but not for the sake of our identity, but how we operate and how we act makes an impact for or against the gospel. It does not mean an elder has to be perfect, but he is mature and sanctified, having dealt with sinful patterns and walking by the Spirit. It means that being an elder **touches every part of life**, is not something you can shut off, and must be consistent in every part of life, not ever dichotomizing one part against the other. This does not mean that an elder will not face criticism, false accusation, or have people angry with him, since any leader who helps others will have a larger target painted on their back and will face all of this from the enemy.

Family Matters (the proving ground)

Marital Faithfulness & Purity

1 Timothy 3:4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,

It seems clear that the proving ground for an elder is his home. If you want to know if a man can shepherd God's church, look no further than his relationship with his wife and children. This does not mean that a **single man** cannot be an elder, but does mean that man must have another proving ground where leadership is seen. It does not mean a man could not have been married before or had divorce in his past, but does mean that he is faithful to his wife now. Some have found the translation "*one woman man*" helpful. An elder must have a standard of sexual purity and holiness with his wife that means he is not engaged in or accused of affairs, inappropriate relationships, or lust driven activities. In our culture today, this is a growing distinctive as we see far too many men giving into the lusts of their flesh, both pre and during marriage, and have found themselves disqualified in leadership or passionless to get there. We have all heard far too many stories of marriages falling apart or pastors leaving the ministry because of breaking the sexual covenant of marriage. This is an area we must be prayerfully dependent on the Lord for our young people, for our married couples, and our leaders to remain pure in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation with ample temptation.

Parenting & Leadership in the home

1 Timothy 3:5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

We will not have time to go into the whole nuance of the parenting commands for an elder, but here we have a tricky verse about an elder having "believing children". The word simply means "believe" (the word *pista*) and is used both for saving faith and "faithful". What is the meaning here, and what are the implications? Does God demand that all the children of an elder have to be Christians for him to continue on as an elder? Some have landed here, which can be Biblically backed up, but is not how we land here. We believe it has the idea of "faithful" children, those who are under control and submission, who have been taught the gospel by their parents. There are several reasons:

1. Salvation is an act of God, not man. We can present, model, and pray, but we are not the one's to give salvation. An elder should model belief, should inform, and have his children under loving discipline, but cannot give salvation.
2. The issue is having children under submission in 1 Timothy 3, and here is Titus the qualifier is children who are not accused of "debauchery or insubordination". If an elders kids were out of control or bringing shame to the name of Christ or the family, that is a different story.
3. How an elder navigates the rearing of his children, including leading them to Christ, should be followed by the church. This means that an elder should not be pressured to affirm faith in his kids too early, or pressured to hide the struggles kids have with faith, but be free to walk by grace through faith to trust the Sovereign hand of God. If an elder believes he needs to step down for the sake of his family, that is one thing. If an elder is forced to step down because a child is struggling with belief, that goes beyond the scope of this qualification.

Character (who you are over time)

1 Peter 5:3 not domineering over those in your charge, but **being examples** to the flock.

Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and **imitate their faith**.

In rapid fire succession, Paul gave 11 different qualifications, **5 negative** and **6 positive**, that each had to do with the **character** of an elder. **Character** is defined as "faithfully living out Biblical principles over time", or who you are as you walk by the Spirit and He produces fruit out of you. An elder is NOT a manager, or visionary, or financial wizard, or a marketing genius. An elder is one that leads and who others can follow. Being an elder is far from glamorous work, and requires knowing and being known by people, opening up one's life, and sacrificing one's own time for others. Teaching and preaching is only part of this role, but the primary way an elder makes an impact is through his life and example. That is why WHO HE IS is more important than anything he does, or his gifting, or his abilities or talents. What do we learn from this list?

Five negatives he should not be

Not arrogant - He does not live His life out of pride or have everything revolve around himself; he does not seek to please himself

Not quick tempered - Does not let anger get a hold of him, or allow volcanic temper to explode

Not given to drunkenness - Is not controlled by wine, but rather the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)

Not violent or a bully - Does not lead by control or intimidation; is not a brawler

Not greedy for gain - Does not view ministry through the lens of monetary gain

Notice that in each of these, there would be a "positive" side. Not quick tempered would rather be someone who is gentle and kind. This is a matter of character since these are all categorized by **walking by the flesh**. This means that an elder has recognized that any/all of these could be issues in his flesh and has worked through them.

Six positives he should be

Hospitable - Means a lover of strangers, opening up life and home for those outside of the church, both other believers and unbelievers. This means sacrificing comfort and anonymity

Lover of good - Includes all of what it means to love God and others; loving virtue and what promotes good for others.

Self-controlled - A fruit of the Spirit that means he is not given to his lusts or controlled by anything fleshly

Upright - Lives his life according to God's Word

Holy - He is devout and committed to godliness, living out the truth

Disciplined = Invests time in a disciplined way, not wasting time on frivolous, but applies Biblical truth like an athlete in training.

Why is this so important? Not only is his character important for his credibility, but it is essential for his ability to shepherd. An elder will have people come to him with their sin struggles, doubts, fears, and depression and are looking for hope. An elder is not perfect nor did they start out mature, but have faithfully implemented Biblical truth in the gospel and have grown, have mortified sin, and have continually put off the old man. In other words, **an elder is a practitioner of the heart** since he has examined his own and has allowed the truth of the gospel to shape, refine, and change his own. When you bring your struggles to an elder, they don't answer as one who has never struggled, but one who has found victory in Christ and the gospel, bringing hope to the struggler that there is light and hope! An elder is willing to show and share weakness, vulnerability, and be transparent since they have walked and worked through their own sin and have found Christ faithful. This is why an elder cannot be a novice or new believer. This is one with a tried and true track record of persistent faithfulness.

Ability (Devoted to the Word - Primary task)

In teaching and training

It is telling that no amount of ability or talent is mentioned, and the only "do" part of eldering is the "ability to teach", according to 1 Timothy 3. Here in Titus, that ability is fleshed out a bit. Not every elder will preach regularly (1 Tim. 5:17), but every one should have the ability to do so. This comes out of a convictional relationship with the Bible, the ultimate source of authority for an elder. He has to "hold firm", or cling and be devoted to Scripture. An elder should have an ongoing study, appetite for, and expertise in Scripture. This is why we do not require seminary but encourage it for men (and women) who want to know their Bible better. An elder who does not know the Bible is like a mechanic who cannot explain an engine or a musician who cannot play an instrument.

Out of this commitment to Scripture an elder will "give instruction in sound doctrine". He must be able to communicate truth, the gospel, and clarify who God is from the Bible. This will happen in his home,

one on one, in groups, and with the whole church. An elder takes the Word seriously, teaching seriously, and spends appropriate time to make that happen.

In rebuking false teaching

Unfortunately, an elder cannot only operate in the positive realm of teaching. He must also wield Scripture that will point our error and keep false teaching out of the church, and be able to confront those who perpetuate and teach falsely. Elders are gate keepers. They bring in good teaching and keep out the false. This does not mean that we do not teach people how to think. Quite the contrary, an elders job is to equip people to THINK BIBILICALLY in order to discern what is true and what is false by the only standard that shows both: God's Word.

Truth is made beautiful when we understand it and live it out. Elders are God's given leaders to help model this and teach this to the church. We are hopeful that we can continue to train up, equip, and invest in leaders for the future, since this task is NEVER DONE. We want to be able to have recognized leaders who will take responsibility for others, some who will stay here and some who will go.

We continue to pray that God will raise up more and more leaders, men and women, who are willing to take responsibility for others.

We pray for more and more elder qualified men

We pray for the maturation of God's church, more and more people who will know God's Word, will faithfully live it out, and prove to be people of Biblical character.