

The Church Needs Godly Leaders

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[0 : 00] Let's turn in our Bibles to Titus chapter 1. I'm going to read the first nine verses. Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, 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.

And at his appointed season, he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior. To Titus, my true son in our common faith.

Grace and peace from God the Father in 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.

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.

[1 : 39] 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.

Well, may we hear the words of our Lord and increase our love for him. Pastor Jason. It has been a while, but tonight we're going back to Crete.

And you remember what kind of place Crete was. It was a backwater, thief-infested, pirate haven with a long history of civil war and infighting, and lying was normal, robbery was accepted, greed, stealing.

They were looked on as good. Is it possible for what is evil to be spoken of as good? And the answer is yes. Rome had enforced some civilization on this place.

Yet, culture doesn't transform itself overnight. And so here's Crete, and it's still carrying the baggage of centuries of sin.

[2 : 54] Now, in the middle of that context, the church here is young. They're sort of like a toddler out in a hostile world, a dangerous world.

And even part of the problem was some of that world was obviously still in those folks. Their ways of thinking, their ways of doing things, and that's always the case.

So things were a mess in Crete because they were so young, so unformed still. And Titus is on the island of Crete to straighten things out.

So, because when your mom or your dad tells you to straighten your room, it means to put things where it belongs. Put things back.

Put your clothes away. Put your Legos away. And that's Titus' job. He's going in there. He's staying there in order to put things where they belong, to set up the churches there.

[3 : 57] And Paul's letter to Titus is teaching him how to do that, what the aim should be, what the emphasis should be. And so it's been a while.

It's been a few weeks. But you remember where he starts. Paul doesn't start with a to-do list. Paul doesn't start with a plan, even, or a scheme or behavior.

He starts with thinking great thoughts. And that's how it always is in the Bible. God addresses us and addresses our minds, and he gives us these great thoughts to think about.

We saw some of those great thoughts that was to drive everything that Titus and the church were to be about and to shape them. And we saw this. God was a God worth serving.

Paul is a servant of God. Now, Cretans were used to serving themselves. And what Paul is saying is that someone bigger has come in, and he is now taking over.

[5 : 00] He is worth serving. You can't serve yourselves any longer. You have to. God is a God worth serving. And we're going to see how those kind of thoughts begin to play out in what Paul is going to give to them as we go through this book.

But God is a God worth serving. God is a God of sovereign grace. God is sovereign in salvation.

You see that right at the beginning. Paul is... Why is he an apostle?

He's an apostle for the faith of God's elect. God has a people. A people he's chosen. A people he's predestined to salvation.

He is sovereign. He is ruling. He is in control of man's salvation from the very beginning and all the way to the very end.

His kingdom has no beginning and no end. His kingdom and salvation begins in eternity past, and it goes all the way to eternity future. So he's the beginning and end of salvation.

[6 : 02] And you remember, that's the thought, that God is sovereign. He is in charge. He is in control. That Charles Spurgeon said, when I realized that, I grew from a baby Christian into a man.

And the whole Bible opened up. It was the key to all of Scripture. That understanding. So that's great thoughts.

We saw truth is for godliness. Godliness. So important. Truth is for godliness. Truth is for practical purposes. It is, he says, why am I an apostle for the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness? Knowledge isn't for pride. Knowledge isn't for looking at where other people are missing out and not understanding and feeling better than them. It's for godliness. Practical, daily holiness.

That's actually one of the things that drew me to this book as I was looking for something to preach is just how very practical Paul is. How practical godliness is.

[7 : 07] Then Paul said, I'm an apostle in the light of and for the hope of eternal life. Our gospel is not just for this world or just this life.

It is about eternal life. Life with God. If you're a Christian here, that eternal life has begun in you.

That shared life with God. The life of God in the soul of man with all of its vibrancy and power.

Again, Christian, your life is more than just you.

It's more than just you. It's Christ in you. Your life is more than these few years. Your life in God is forever. It's more than just this world.

And again, we're going to see why that's so important to think about as we go forward. But these Cretans were used to thinking about this is my life. This is my world. And it rose no higher than the clouds.

[8 : 06] And what Paul is saying is he's stretching them out. He's stretching them out of this world. He's stretching them out of their small thoughts, out of their little kingdom concerns.

And he's saying, look at God's big kingdom. You're here. He's taking us up on the mountain and saying, behold your God. Behold your life. It's so much more than here and now.

We are so much more than just us. So Crete was full of people, just like the United States, just like me, and probably you too often, with minds and hearts stuck in the here and now, living for so much less than what God has promised, what God is doing for his kingdom.

And so Paul is saying, Titus, think great thoughts. Get these people to think great thoughts.

Now today, what does the church need? That was what you saw, we saw a couple weeks ago or a few weeks ago, was what does the church need? The church needs to think great thoughts.

[9 : 15] Now today, we're going to see that the church needs godly leaders. Godly leaders. So think great thoughts and get the right men into leadership.

Now, I think almost everyone here, or most everyone, has an experience with management at work. Finding the right manager.

Maybe you've been put in charge of hiring the right manager. Or maybe a new manager has come over you. And you know, if the right man is put into leadership, that's sort of like the beginning of the end of a lot of problems.

They take care of a lot of things. If you put the wrong kind of person into leadership, well that's just the beginning of the problems, isn't it? And that's what Paul is talking about here.

Titus, we need to start by getting the right men into leadership. The reason I left you in Crete was that, so that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

[10:19] Now, my plan is, probably to take three, I'm hoping, only three weeks, including this week, on leadership in the church. And there's a lot about qualifications, and we're going to get to those later.

But tonight, I just want to take sort of an overview. And then I want to look at this term, elders. You see that in verse 5. He's to appoint elders. And that's what we're just going to have time for. And so, we want to do an overview of what is church leadership to look like? How are we supposed to think about it? And this is so important because, yes, Titus is a book written to people in churches that are very unformed and inexperienced.

And so, Paul is laying out a blueprint of leadership, church life, personal godliness. but, if we've been building a while, it's still good and important that we say, now, are we building as God wants us to?

Are we on schedule? Are we on the blueprint? And so, we want to talk about what does this godly leadership look like? Are we on track? And we want to refresh our minds about this whole issue.

[11:37] And so, an overview. First, I want to talk about the titles because that's what you see. What does Paul call these leaders? In verse 5, he calls them elders. And then in verse 7, he calls them overseers.

That's a word that has to do with being a steward over a household. The Greek word there is sort of where we get our word home economics or economics.

So, he's a steward, a household manager. And we're going to talk about that particular, that aspect of a minister's calling next week.

But just notice the titles. He's an elder and he's an overseer. It's the same group of people. It's the same men. But they have different names, different titles that belong to the same group.

So, elders, the idea, the main emphasis of that title and that idea is thinking about this is an experienced man who can offer wise leadership.

[12:48] And then overseer is talking about his responsibility as a steward. He is a responsible, authoritative figure over the household. Now, the Bible also has another name for these leaders.

It's not in our passage here, but you probably know what it is. It's a shepherd or a pastor. And that emphasis, the idea there, is talking about as he offers loving care.

So, wise leadership, responsible stewardship, loving care. Now, keep your fingers here in Titus and I want you to turn over to 1 Peter 5.

1 Peter 5. And I want you to see that though they have different names, sometimes given to the same group, they are all referring to the same group of men.

So, just as a woman can be a mother or a wife or a cousin or anything like that, different titles, same person.

[13:55] So, 1 Peter 5. Verse 1. To the elders among you. So, he's talking to the elders. To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's suffering and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed.

Be shepherds, be pastors of God's flock that is under your care serving as overseers. elders. So, who has primary care of the church, of the spiritual welfare of these individual churches?

Who are these godly leaders? They're elders, overseers, pastors. Same group. Now, there's no division.

You can see that in 1 Peter chapter 5, verse 1. there's no division in rank or in office. They each have that title, those titles.

They each have the same office. Now, they might have different emphases and gifts and responsibilities. So, one of those men might be primarily in charge of one aspect or particularly gifted in one aspect and another in another one, but all of these leaders are elders, overseers, and pastors.

[15:20] There's no clue, there's no evidence in the New Testament or in the Bible as a whole that some men are elders, but then they're not pastors or something like that.

There's no evidence at all of sort of like senior pastors or associate pastors or assistant pastors. When they are referred to in the Bible, they have the simple straightforward title as elders.

There's no evidence in the New Testament either of a hierarchy in leadership. Sort of after you get to apostles, then you have the elders, and since there's no longer any apostles in the church, we're left with just elders.

And so there's no evidence of a hierarchy where maybe you, like in the Roman Catholic Church, where you start with a parish priest, and then you work your way up to the Pope. No evidence of that.

Or there's no evidence of sort of the American evangelical version of that, where you start as a youth pastor, and you work your way up to the executive pastor, where there are men with more authority, more rule, or something like that, with more, it's a different position.

[16:46] Paul says elders and overseers. All the men called have the same office, the same titles, they might have different work, they might have different roles, or different responsibilities, different gifts, all of the rest, but they don't have a different office or title.

And so their title, and now we want to talk about their numbers. How many elders or overseers were to be appointed? It seems that the ideal that Paul was going for was elders, plural.

Elders, plural, in each town, for each church. Now, you can tell, just from the book of Titus, even, that you can have a church with no elders, under some circumstances.

churches. The churches in Crete did not have elders yet, but they were still churches. The church is the fellowship of baptized believers.

It's the fellowship of the believers. The church is not the pastor, it's the fellowship of baptized believers. So can you have a church with no elders? Yes. Sure.

[18:04] Is it good? Is it healthy? Is it according to Christ's plan? No. And that's why Paul left Titus to do this job. Now, can you have a church with just one elder or one pastor?

And again, the answer is sure. But that does not seem to be the ideal. Is it good? No.

Everywhere in the New Testament that these group of men are mentioned, they're in the plural. churches have plural elders.

That seemed to be Paul's normal method. Acts 14. 23, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church. So, singular church, plural elders, more than one.

Now, that's wisdom. And I want to talk to you just a minute about why that is so wise and so good, and why should we want more than one. Again, I'm not saying in every circumstance and every situation that that is always going to happen.

[19:15] But this is the ideal. Let me give you just some reasons real quick. The first is accountability, biblical accountability. Godly fellow elders are a great means for holding each other accountable.

Sharing authority keeps one man from wrongly lording it over others. If you have any awareness of what goes on in the world out there, you know that in churches, one of the great, scary, dangerous, big problems is when one man gets exalted and now he has no one to hold him accountable.

There's too much temptation for domination. There's too much temptation for abuse, for someone to go it alone.

And so plurality means accountability. It safeguards them, the pastor himself, the pastor, the singular, it safeguards the church, keeps them safe.

So biblical accountability, wisdom, very simple here. Read Proverbs. Proverbs 11, 14, there's just more wisdom to be found in a multitude of counselors.

[20:38] What do you need if you're going to lead a church? You need wisdom. Where do you get that wisdom? A multitude of counselors. Balance. I don't know if that's exactly the right word, but you have the idea.

No one man has all the gifts he needs, or all the gifts that there are, anyways. All the gifts that are necessary to build up the church. Not even the greatest pastors are perfect and fully have all those gifts.

Having a plurality of elders brings men in with different gifts, different strengths, different personalities, different perspectives, different ways of seeing things. It's so easy to see things just your way or do things just your way, but when you can complement each other's strengths and weaknesses, that is good.

So just think of it like this. You have a string quartet. Sounds so much better, so much more richer, deeper, than one violin I think ever could.

You have more instruments playing. And then burden sharing. Caring for the whole church is a burden God has not intended for one man to bear alone, unless that man is Jesus Christ.

[21:59] Since none of us are Jesus Christ, we cannot carry these burdens alone. And so even the most faithful, gifted pastors need help from godly men in order to pay careful attention to himself

and to the flock of which God has made him an overseer.

no one man should carry all the weight. And just to make this more personal, I would hate to do this job alone.

I need iron sharpening iron. I need help and encouragement to do the right thing even when it's hard. I'm not good at everything, but no man is.

No man is. Every pastor can say that. And so no man can do it alone. Not really. Or at least not ideally. Not ideally.

Now, does that mean, this is really the question, or one of the questions that comes out of that.

Now, does that mean that we should get as many as you can?

[23 : 09] Get as many elders as you can? If two is better than one, isn't as many possible better than less? Well, the answer is yes and no.

We want as many as God has gifted and called. So, yes. Do we want as many as we can? Yes, if that's what you mean. If you mean we want as many as God has gifted and called here.

So, again, to put this in our context, because we don't want to just talk theoretically, we want to talk about grace fellowship. Pastor John and I's hearts are not set on two, just us two.

We want as many as God has called and gifted to hear, to want as many as God has called and gifted, for all the reasons I've already said.

We sometimes do feel it's good to have other perspectives, another voice, more wisdom. Two are better than one, Ecclesiastes says.

[24 : 08] One may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. But then it says, a cord of three strands is not easily broken. He's building up there.

Two is better than one, but in many cases, three are better than two. So you get the picture. So how many pastors or how many elders?

Well, as many as God has gifted and called. But then I ask the question, does that mean as many as you can get? Just try to get as many as you want or you can get your hands on.

Should that be the mindset when you're looking for pastors or calling men? Again, the answer is no. 1 Timothy 5 says there's a different danger to worry about.

I mean, there is a danger of having one man, but there's a different danger of the other direction. 1

Timothy 5.22, do not be hasty in the laying on of hands and do not share in the sins of others.

[25 : 14] Keep yourself pure. In 1 Timothy 3, he laid out the qualifications for an overseer, for an elder.

Now, a little bit later, he says, but don't be hasty about this. Don't be hasty. Timothy, this is not something that you should rush into. He said, if a man desires to be an overseer, that's a good thing, but Timothy, don't be too hasty about this.

Some men's sins are obvious. This is what Paul says to Timothy. Some men's sins are obvious, but others trail behind. So, some people, some men, you could say, you see their sin a mile away, and you say, you know what?

They're disqualified because of that. But some, you only find out after a while. Some men sins trail behind.

They come behind them. They're there, but their sin hasn't showed itself yet. Sin is like body odor. Sometimes you smell it before that person gets here, but sometimes it takes a while to build up, and it's the second one that Paul is now concerned about.

[26 : 35] He's saying this is why you shouldn't be hasty, why you can't be hasty. That's why time is necessary, testing is necessary, proving is necessary, because there's nothing to be gained by pressing ahead, and there is a lot to lose.

You'll share in their sin. That's what Paul says to Timothy. You'll take them into leadership when their sin hasn't shown themselves, if they haven't been tested, and their sin will come out, and in some way, what Paul is saying, their sins will become your sin.

You'll share in that. The problems that they're causing will partially be your fault, Timothy, so be careful. Be careful. Don't be hasty.

God. So, here's where I want to give you just the first practical application, and that's pray for godly leaders.

Pray for more godly leaders. Pray for more workers. Even pray for those workers here. We pray that God would raise up leaders in other churches.

[27 : 41] You can pray the same thing for Grace Fellowship Church. church. They come from Jesus Christ. He gives them as gifts. And so, address him.

Address his throne as the head of the church and ask him for our good, for your good. So, we've seen their titles. We've seen their numbers. And now I want to look at their work, the work of an elder.

elder. And that's what we're going to focus on, this aspect of as an elder, why that title, how that fits into their work. They're called elders.

Elders in ancient Israel, in Israel in Paul's own day, elders were experienced, wise men who led the community. Usually that meant they were older, but not necessarily.

So, they were experienced, wise men who led the community. Age is not the first priority, but you'll see some of the qualifications that fit these men.

[28 : 50] Now, the first time the title is used is all the way back in the days of Moses. You remember Moses, God brought them out and into the desert, and then you remember his father-in-law, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, shows up, and I imagine they had a nice party, they had a nice celebration, Jethro's there, and the next day Moses has to go to work, and he sits as a judge for the people.

And so people are coming to him with their arguments. He stole my goat, no I didn't, he did this, he did that, I did that, I didn't do that, you did that.

And so it says from morning till evening, Moses is at this. And apparently when Moses came home that night, Jethro has watched all this and says basically, what are you doing?

Why are you sitting alone as a judge? Now, we don't really know much about Jethro, but I really like him, he seems to have some long miles on him, he's got a practical sense of what's right and what's smart, and he says, Moses, what are you doing?

Basically, Moses, what you're doing is kind of crazy. Why are you doing this all by yourself? And then he takes 80-year-old Moses and he gives him some advice and listen to the kind of men that he says, now this is who you should call, select capable men from all the people.

[30 : 26] So men who can do the job, they've got the gifts, they've got the skills, capable men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy, who aren't going to be bribed and appoint them to judge.

And those were the men that are called elders. You can read about them, about 72 of them, filled with the Holy Spirit.

In Numbers 11, filled with the Spirit to help discern and decide difficult situations. That was their gifting, the Holy Spirit.

He came upon them. And who is the Holy Spirit? He's the Spirit of counsel and of wisdom. So elders were men who were marked by capabilities and men with wisdom, with practical personal wisdom.

They were good at solving problems. They were good at helping people resolve difficult personal situations. They were men who could give wise advice when you weren't sure what to do.

[31 : 36] In Ezekiel 7, God is announcing judgment on the people. And he's saying, judgment is coming.

Terror is coming. so you know how you feel when you're afraid. Sometimes when you're really, really afraid, you're groping around, you're looking for help wherever you can find it.

You're trying to find someone that can help you in this situation. And Ezekiel chapter 7, he says, you're going to be so afraid, you're going to be groping around looking for trouble And this is what it says.

They will try to get vision from the prophet. A vision from the prophet. So what is a prophet for? It's a vision. To give you a vision. To give you a word from God. And it says they will try to get a vision from the prophet, but won't get it.

They will try to get teaching from the priest, but it will be lost. No one will be able to find this teaching from the priest. As will the counsel of the elders.

[32 : 36] You see the primary role, the emphasis in Old Testament Israel? That these are the men who can give you counsel. This is one of the primary roles of an elder.

He gives wise leadership. He leads with wisdom. And so, if God has given these men to have wisdom, to lead, then what should we do?

What should you do? We should listen to them. Listen to them. I know that kind of can sound self-serving, but that's what the Bible is teaching us.

And that's what you see in the New Testament. So we've been talking about the Old Testament.

When you go to the New Testament, it's very much the same kind of idea.

You can read Acts 14 and 15. And in that situation, if you know your Bibles, Acts 15, that's where the counsel of Jerusalem happens. There is all of this debate, stress, going on between the Gentiles and Jewish relationships.

[33 : 52] What about the law? What about circumcision? What about circumcision? What about different food? There's a lot of things going on here. And the gospel is at stake.

But this isn't just a doctrinal issue. This is an issue that's weighted down with tons of personal and historical significance. It really matters to a lot of people.

And it is a sticky situation. And you know when things really matter to people. And we're talking about the gospel. And you put that all together. It's a dangerous situation.

What do you need? You need wisdom. And Paul and Barnabas, this is what it says. They go down to Jerusalem. And this is what it says. To see the apostles and elders about this question.

So here's Paul and Barnabas. And they're in the middle of this. And this is all going on. And the church says, you know what? Paul and Barnabas, go down to Jerusalem and ask the apostles and the elders what they think.

[34 : 55] So who decides these hard questions? Well, it's not just the apostles. I found that interesting. It's not just Paul. He doesn't say, I'm an apostle. I know everything.

So just listen to what I have to say. Here's my answer. But it's the apostles and the elders. Now, if you go back, we're not going to turn there.

We don't have time. But in Acts 15, you know who takes the lead in answering the question? It wasn't one of the apostles. It was one of the elders. James says, listen to me.

This is my judgment. And they make a decision. And they send it out. And the apostles sign off.

They say, we agree with this. And all the churches listen to them. And just think of that. Think of the wisdom that they had. We still read about it.

[35 : 53] Not so long ago, Pastor John preached on Acts 15. We're still learning from their wisdom. And that's one of the things that being an elder is about.

It's about giving wise leadership to God's family, to his household. Now, you see the very same thing in Acts 21. And again, it's all the same sort of situation going on.

Paul has just showed up in Jerusalem. And it's very interesting. The elders come out to Paul. And the elders say, Paul, we have a problem.

People are saying, you are telling the Gentiles to turn away from the law. And they're going to hear that you're in Jerusalem. This is not a good situation. This is dangerous. This is tricky.

So do what we tell you. So the elders come and they tell Paul, brother, listen to us. Here's our wise advice. And Paul listened to them.

[36 : 59] And he says he did what they said. God given wise leadership.

So here's my second practical application. Pray for our wisdom. Pray for Pastor John and I. Pray for all the men who have any sort of leadership in this church.

But pray for us especially. And what kind of wisdom am I talking about? Well, the kind of wisdom James, James, the James that we were just talking about, the kind of wisdom that he said we should have.

He says in James 3, the wisdom that comes from heaven, is first of all pure, then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. He contrasts that with wisdom that is from below.

[38 : 12] There is a wisdom of this earth. And he says it's about selfish ambition. It's about being driven by envy. It's about being driven by envy. We don't want that kind of wisdom.

We want wisdom that learns to be submissive. First to God. But submissive. Earthly wisdom is good at getting what it wants.

Heavenly wisdom is humble and patient. And it makes peace. And that's the kind of wisdom that we need. That's the kind of wisdom I'm talking about. That's the kind of wisdom I'm saying, would you please pray for us?

Go to James 3, 17 and 18. And take that passage and pray it back to God for us. Say, this is what we're looking for. You say, you'll give wisdom.

You'll give wisdom to all without finding fault. So we need it. That kind of wisdom. We're more than wise enough about getting what we want. We're more than wise enough about vanity and things like that.

[39 : 19] We want the kind of wisdom that is from heaven. That doesn't say, but I want this. And I want it now. But it's humble and merciful and considerate and loves the peace.

And so I'm asking you, will you pray for us that we would have that kind of wisdom? Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for your wise counsel for us.

You are the God of wisdom. And understanding your wisdom and understanding no one can fathom. And we just see how wonderfully intelligent and creative you are in just the way that you've structured the church and who you've called into leadership, the kind of men that you're after.

And so we say thank you for this plan. We say thank you for your word that is a light to our path, that shows us the way to go. And that in walking in your ways, we don't stumble, but we walk in the light.

So thank you for your word. Thank you for the things that you have commanded us. We do pray for more godly leaders here.

[40 : 40] And we pray that you would give us much wisdom. Lord, you have been so faithful to us. We thank you that you have unfailing love for us.

And so because you have unfailing love that will meet us tomorrow and the next day, we trust ourselves to you. We ask that you would do us good. Do us good for Jesus' sake.

Pray this in his name. Amen.