

Elders Teach and Apply the Scripture

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[0 : 00] And turn to Titus chapter 1. Titus chapter 1 and we're going to read verses 5 through the end of the chapter.

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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. 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.

For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those among the circumcision group. They must be silenced because they're ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach, and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

[1 : 32] Even one of their own prophets has said, Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true.

Therefore, rebuke them sharply so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth.

To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.

They claim to know God, but by their actions, they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good.

Let's hear God's word preached. Well, on these Sunday evenings, we've been going through the book of Titus, and tonight we have come to verse 9.

[2 : 34] And we just start with this question, what does every church, well-ordered church, need? Well, according to Paul, every well-ordered, Christ-honoring church needs elders, overseers, pastors, teachers.

The church in Crete, which is where Titus was, was unfinished. And Paul left Titus there to straighten things out, to put things back or put things where they need to be.

And the very first item that is on Titus' to-do list is to appoint or to ordain elders in every town.

Just as a way of review, we looked at this, these elders in Israel and in actually most traditional cultures, elders were generally older men who were experienced, who could give wise guidance to the community.

They knew how to live. They had wisdom for practical living and knew what to do. And so these men were not philosophers sitting in ivory towers with that kind of wisdom.

[3 : 49] But they had on the ground, in the trenches, the kind of wisdom that the people in Titus' day, in our day, need to live a godly life.

You remember what life was like in Crete, what the culture was like, the kind of people that lived there. We just read it. Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons. Paul is not saying that every single one was, but that was the general kind of culture that the Christian church was now planted in.

And there was all kinds of temptation. There was all kinds of cultural baggage. And so how are you going to live a godly life in that kind of situation? Well, it's not impossible, but we need elders, is Paul's point.

And then he says pastors are overseers. He uses the same word. It's the same group has this other title of overseers. They're stewards of God's household.

They're overseeing the family of God. They're making sure that all things, that everything that is going on in the family is going the way God the Father wants it to go.

[5 : 00] And so these overseers are not just wise men, but they have to be men who can organize. They have real God-given authority to lead.

And they're not afraid to use that authority, to set an agenda, to carry that agenda out, to make sure that things are getting done.

And I hope you saw, even if you weren't here for those messages, but as we read these qualifications for the elder, these men were not bullies, but they did have real authority.

Their character, their example carried this authority to take charge and to get things done. And so especially the church here in Crete, with everything that is going around, needed men who could say, this is the agenda, this is what we're going to do, and hold people accountable to it, to take charge.

I'm going to date myself and probably show you how uncool I am in this next illustration. One of my favorite country songs is from the 90s, because that's when all good music happened, apparently, is Lonesome Dove from Carth Brooks.

[6 : 19] And it's a song that tells a story. And the first verse goes like this. She was a girl on a wagon train headed west across the plains. The train got lost in a summer storm.

They couldn't move west, and they couldn't go home. And then she saw him riding through the rain. He took charge of the wagons, and he saved the train. That's an overseer, at least of a picture of an overseer.

There's the church journeying through dangerous territory. The storm is brewing. Things are unclear. There needs to be someone that can take charge and say, this is where we're going, and rescue this wagon train.

And that's the elder's Christ-given job. He can't ride along with everyone else and be a follower. He has to be a leader.

He has to oversee to take charge. And so he's God's man for this job. And if he's God's man, God's steward, then he has to have certain qualifications.

[7 : 30] He has to have established, known godliness. He has to have proven leadership in his family and in his marriage. Jesus doesn't want his church just following anyone.

Now, we talked about this. An elder, an overseer, doesn't have to be married. I don't think it's saying that. It's not saying that all of his children absolutely need to be saved. But it has to be clear that he's a godly man leading a Christian family.

And he is leading them. And they're following him. We saw all those qualifications. We won't do a review of that.

But we now come to the very last qualification in verse 9. What does this elder, what does this overseer, this pastor have to be? Look at verse 9. 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.

So how does this man primarily lead the church? How does he take charge and set the agenda and lead these people?

[8 : 45] Well, how does he exercise his authority? And what you see here is it's primarily through teaching, through having doctrine, which is teaching and presenting that to the people.

So he has a heart of a teacher. He knows his material. He loves his material. And he knows how to use it. And all of that is important.

And that's going to sort of be our outline for tonight. He and the first point there is what does the elder have to be? Well, he has to have this heart of a teacher. He has to be apt to teach.

He has to be given to teaching. And. You see that in verse nine, the whole reason that he has to hold firmly to the trustworthy message.

As it has been taught is so that he can use it so that he can use it. This man is not an ivory tower theologian.

[9 : 51] He's not an academic where he knows this material, but he doesn't know how to put it into practice. He can't use it in people's lives. He's not. Does he like talking in the abstract or is this all theoretical for him?

No, Paul is saying this is what an elder has to be. He has to have this doctrine. He has to hold it firmly and he has to know how to use it.

Because that's what the church needs. That's what the church is in desperate need of. That's the whole point here. Verse 10 and following talks about rebellious people, mere talkers, deceivers.

They are ruining whole households. And so we aren't talking theory here. We aren't just talking about systematic theology class.

We're not talking in the abstract. We're talking about households ruined because someone wasn't teaching what they should be teaching. The church needs men.

[10:56] Practical men. Practical theology men who know how to use what they know and not only know how to use it, but they see the importance of it.

They see the importance of this is what I'm called to do and this is what I'm here to do and this is what I'm going to do. And so he's not just out there giving sage advice, dispensing this wisdom. He's not an organizer or just a steward or something. He is a teacher and that is the way he sees himself. I'm here to teach. I'm here to instruct.

I'm here to help people understand. And we have to say he has to, it's more than that. He has to be pretty good at it too.

Good at teaching. Good at instructing. That's what you see in 1 Timothy 3.2 where Paul is talking to Timothy and he's giving him the same sort of criteria and qualifications.

[12:00] And he says an overseer must be able to teach. The idea is he's apt to teach. It's not that just he can do it kind of.

It's that he has real ability to teach. He's apt to do it. He is good at it. He has that aptitude. And so he has this gift of teaching.

He has this gift of teaching. He has the spirit given ability. It's not just from him. It is given by the Holy Spirit to teach. And he willingly uses it.

He's not unwilling. He's very generous with this gift of passing it out, passing it around. And when he gives it, people are blessed.

The church has helped and encouraged. And that's what I'm saying. He has to have the heart of a teacher. He has to say, this is important. And this is my livelihood.

[13:01] And this is what I want to do. And he's good at it. He loves his work. He loves teaching. And he loves when the light bulbs go off, so to speak, in people's hearts and minds.

And he loves his work. My U.S. history teacher in junior high and in high school, I could tell he really wasn't all that excited about being a history teacher.

And he'd done it for years and years. But he wasn't all that into it. How did I know? Well, he completely designed his class, so he never had to grade anything.

He completely designed his class, so he never had to have a discussion about anything. So nothing ever. We either graded our own quizzes or it was a Scantron, you know, a fill in the dot thing.

So one year I had him for seventh period. That was last period of school day. And he would literally stand by the door and wait for the bell to ring. And he would be out the door and down the hallway before we were able to get up and go.

[14:11] He was also my golf coach. And I can tell you, and if you played with me, you know he didn't teach me anything about golf either. He was there, I really think, because he got to play on the Plymouth Country Club for free.

And my point is, he didn't have a teacher's heart. All he wanted to do was coach basketball, and that's what he did, and he was really, really good at it.

Everything else seemed to be about the paycheck. But, you know, I'm sure you had some teachers like that, and you had other teachers. And you know those kind of teachers, too.

That they loved to teach. They loved their material. They wanted you desperately to understand it and to get it.

And so they pushed. They pushed us. They pushed you. And they could be the biggest grumps and the biggest cheerleaders. Because they really cared. And they weren't in it for the paycheck.

[15:16] This was their calling. And so they didn't miss days. They didn't call in sick. They really cared that their kids got the material.

Now, you know teachers like that, where the job is important. The teaching is important. And they care. And they want you to get it. That's a pastor.

That's a true pastor. A pastor's heart. He's not there for the paycheck. He is there to teach the material. To teach the truth. And he lives to see when his students, so to speak, get it.

So that's what they're given to. So Crete's a mess. The church is unfinished. There's false teachers everywhere. Families are getting ruined. And what is the answer, then?

The answer is we need good teachers. Teaching. Doctrine. Truth. Explained. Illustrated.

[16:19] Applied. With enthusiasm. That's the answer. That's what we need. So Martin Lloyd-Jones called it logic on fire.

Where does that fire come from? Where you are passionate about your material. You're passionate about the truth. And you want people to feel it for themselves.

Well, where does that come from? Well, it comes from seeing that what I am teaching, what this book is about, the gospel message, is essential.

It is the most important message that you will ever hear. You could go to lots of colleges and learn lots of things that won't have any eternal significance. But this message that the youngest can learn, the youngest can know, and the oldest can know and learn, is the only message that will save your soul.

The only message that will bring you to God. And so this is what this man has burning in his heart. What I am teaching, this truth, and the one I am serving is important.

[17:26] Woe to me if I don't preach. But you don't need a curse to threaten me to preach. This is what I want to do. So that's the first point. What does the elder have to have?

He has to have this heart of a teacher. And the second point, he has to know his material. He has to have the heart of a teacher, and he has to know his material. So he must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it's been taught.

So part of this holding firm is that he knows the truth that has been taught. He knows it. He's got it. He has more than a new or superficial understanding of it.

He's not one week old with some bare scraps of understanding. He knows it. He himself has been taught, and now he is to the point where he can teach others effectively.

So he's not an ivory tower theologian. He's not merely puttering along in the halls of academia where he just wants to talk about abstract theology or theology detached from people.

[18:36] He's not only good at reading books and writing papers. He's not just here to argue with people on the Internet. But that doesn't mean that he's ignorant.

He's holding firm, and he's got a good grip on it. He knows his material. He knows this trustworthy message as it has been taught. And so this man, Paul, is saying he's got to have a firm grip. It's not slippery on the edges. He's not almost ready to drop it. It's not like he's holding an ice cube. He's got it. And so he has this deep understanding of doctrine as the apostles taught it, what's in the Bible.

And so he knows the little stories. And he knows the big story that unites all the little stories together. And he knows the God revealed in the Bible.

And he knows him clearly, his attributes. He knows what the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ. He's not confused about that. He knows who he is.

[19:42] He knows why he came. He knows what he did. It's not fuzzy. It's not unclear. It's not uncertain. He knows it.

He sees it. He understands it. He knows those big words, those big theological words, like propitiation, expiation, and justification, and sanctification.

He knows what those words mean. And he knows how important they are. He understands them. And he sees how it all fits together.

None of this is saying that he doesn't have more to learn or that he's done. But he's got a firm grip on the essentials.

And that's why, just practically speaking, we are at Grace Fellowship, we have a fund to send men to seminary.

[20:41] That's not the only reason or the only way for men to have this understanding. It's not always even the best way. But it is a way because men need taught.

Men need time to be able to study, to learn. And so teachers need taught. And so in some way or other, this elder, this overseer, must have been taught.

It just might be in the church. It just might be the consistent preaching and thorough study. But he's got it. But there's even more than just having the heart of a teacher and knowing his material.

He has to love it. He has to love the truths that he's preaching. He has to love the truths that he's holding on to. Because every good teacher, every good teacher, every effective teacher loves their material.

They love their material. Whatever it is, you can think of the best teacher you've ever had. And you know that that teacher really loved what he was teaching, the content of it.

[21 : 53] And so this trustworthy message, hold firmly, it can be translated devoted. He has to be devoted to it.

That's talking about his heart. Not just his head, but he has a heart attachment to this truth. It can mean something like holding something to you or holding it like this so you're cleaving to it.

And so this trustworthy message, this gospel message, is not just for those people out there. This gospel message is for me.

It's for him. So you who teach others, do you not teach yourself? So this gospel, this truth about Jesus, the things I teach, they aren't just for people out there.

They're first for me. They're first for me. And so I need it. And I love it. And I want it. And I'm stuck to it.

[22 : 54] I'm devoted to it. And I have no interest. I have no interest in going anywhere else. I have no interest in learning some other way.

I have no need to go anywhere else. I find in this truth. I find in Jesus Christ something so soul satisfying, so soul filling that it answers everything I need.

And so I don't want to go anywhere else. I just read of a man. He's alive. He used to be a Southern Baptist preacher in Oregon. And, but he's not anymore.

Like I'm reading a book by this guy, a fiction book. And he mentioned he was in the clergy. And so I was curious about that. And I tried to track it down. And this is his story. He's the Southern Baptist preacher in Oregon.

But he's not anymore. He used to get up week by week. Playing his sermons carefully. Preach a generally evangelical gospel, I imagine.

[24 : 07] But something happened. I don't know exactly all the in-between parts. But something really crazy happened. And this is what he says.

Now all, this is what he has to say about that old way. That old gospel that he used to think and used to believe. He says it's brimful of misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia.

And now he says, I'm an agnostic atheist with Buddhist trappings. So how do you go from Southern Baptist preacher preaching every Sunday to agnostic atheist with Buddhist trappings, whatever that means?

Well, I'll tell you how you go from there to there. You go from there to there because the gospel never had a grip on that man's heart.

He never had a firm hold of it. When all you have is head knowledge. But this gospel, it's not your life.

[25 : 13] It's not your breath. It's not your salvation. It's not your everything. Then you can go from there to that.

That was not a logical problem. That was not an academic mistake. That was a heart problem in that man.

The gospel, he didn't have a firm grip on it. It didn't have a firm grip on him. The true elder is devoted. He's holding firmly.

The gospel isn't theory. It's not for everyone else. It's for him. It's his. And he doesn't want to let it go. And he can't let it go.

And that's why when we look for men, we don't just look for men who have graduated from seminary with a seminary degree.

[26 : 15] Because all a seminary degree says is that you've graduated from seminary. It doesn't necessarily say anything about your heart. It doesn't necessarily say that the gospel has a hold of you and you have a hold of it.

But that is where the best teachers come from when it flows out of you. When these things you've learned in your own heart, in your own life, in your own experience first.

And you know it and you love it and you feel its power and you know its truth. And so now you're ready to teach. You're ready to defend it. You're ready to encourage others with it.

Because now you aren't talking about just what's out there and what you've read about in books. It's the difference between looking at the Grand Canyon in a tour guide book.

And trying to explain someone to it, someone about it. And then actually seeing the Grand Canyon for yourself. So you aren't talking about mountains because you've read about them in a book.

[27 : 16] You've been there. You've been there. And I'm going back. And now I want you to come with me. I want you to come and see this. I want you to see the heights.

And I want you to feel the breezes that I felt. And I want you to see the view. This is what I want for you. And so he has to have this heart of a teacher. He has to know his material.

He has to love it. And he has to want to bring you along into it. And how to use it. And that's the last thing that we're going to look at. He has to know how to use it.

So in a certain way, if we go back to that illustration there about the mountain. And what I'm saying is, is this man has to be an effective tour guide.

He has to go down into the Grand Canyon with you. And he has to go up to the mountains with you. And he has to take you along and bring you there. So he has to know how to use it.

[28 : 11] Why must he hold firmly to the truth? The second half of verse 9 tells us so that he can encourage others with sound doctrine. We're going to get to the second half about refuting those who oppose it in a few weeks.

And kind of fits better with what follows. But just for today, why must this man have to hold firmly to the gospel?

And Paul's answer and Titus' calling is that he can encourage others with sound doctrine.

Encourage others with sound doctrine.

And so let me ask you, have you felt that encouragement in the last few weeks? Where the truth encourages you?

You've left the church, left the service encouraged. Maybe you came discouraged, but you leave encouraged. And it's not because we gave you some sort of pep talk.

[29 : 22] It's not because we were standing up here, rah, rah, being your cheerleaders. But because we told you the glorious gospel that is true about your salvation.

About something about Jesus. And now you're encouraged. And the cloud lifts. And your spirits rise. And there's strength flowing. And that's the way it's supposed to be.

That's something we've seen in Pilgrim's Progress. What did Christian need to do after that hill of difficulty? He spent time in the palace beautifully. He spent time with the church. And he was armed. And he was strengthened.

He was encouraged. And that's what a good pastor does. That's what teaching is half about. It's about encouraging. And this word, encouraging, it has all sorts of other ideas that kind of fit in with it.

It means exhorting. So there is this, come out, go out there and do it. You need to do this. That's exhorting. There's encouraging. There's comforting.

[30 : 23] It can mean to console. It means lots of things. But the main idea is that this man with sound doctrine is able to help people along. He's able to help them.

He can push them. He can pull them. He can help them. And so, are you hurting? Well, it helps you along the way. Are you tired?

You feel like giving up? Well, sound doctrine pulls you up. Keeps you moving. That word, sound doctrine, means, the word sound means healthy.

Healthy, whole, as opposed to damaged, or rotting, to sickness. And so, sound doctrine is healthy doctrine, which produces that spiritual flourishing, that spiritual health.

And I'm sure you've seen it, and I've seen it many times. I've seen it in my own life, and I've seen it in lots of your lives, where whatever is happening, you're depressed, you're languishing.

[31 : 35] Maybe it's like you haven't grown. And, you know, why don't children grow? One reason children don't grow is because they're not getting enough food.

And sometimes children eat nothing but junk food, and maybe they're growing height-wise just fine, but they're growing sideways, too. And that's not healthy childhood.

That's not flourishing. So, the wrong food, or too little of the good food, either way, what happens?

What happens? Well, in the Christian life, what happens is discouragement, spiritual sickness, disobedience, waywardness, confusion, and fear, depression, a lot of things.

But then the truth comes in. Have you seen that? Have you felt that? Have you known that in your life? The truth comes in, and maybe it's when they've come into this congregation.

They're not used to hearing consistent truth preached to them. And for the first time, they're getting it. And now they're growing. They're flourishing.

[32 : 51] Well, that's what healthy doctrine does. And sometimes it's just the Spirit of God opens their eyes to the truths that they have heard and known.

And He opens their eyes in a fresh way. And what happens is flourishing, health, spiritual prosperity.

So, I've seen it. I've seen it so many times. Well, they say doctrine divides. And sometimes that's true. But we can't miss it.

That on the other side, the only way to grow is to have sound doctrine. And that produces health. Paul wrote to the church in Galatia with a question.

He said, what happened to all your joy? What happened to all your joy? It's a good question for us to ask when we're discouraged. What's happened to all your joy?

[33 : 54] And the reason the Galatians had lost their joy is they had lost sound doctrine. They had got all sorts of wrong thoughts muddled up in their head. And right then and there, all of a sudden, their joy disappears.

Now they're depressed. They're joyless. And so, the question is, it's not necessarily the right answer, but the question needs to be asked.

Are you joyless? Maybe it's because you have this misunderstanding of the gospel. Maybe it's that. Maybe you're thinking wrong about something.

And do what you will. You won't get your joy back until you get that sound doctrine back. You won't get the joy back until you have the sound doctrine backing it up.

So, what's a pastor to do? What's his job? At least half of his job is to encourage. Courage with the old truth.

[34 : 56] We just read it, what, last week. Go back to the old ways. Go back to the old roads, the old paths. And that's what we need to do. So, go back and we need to say, let's look again.

Let's look again. Look at these promises. Look at these promises. There's now no condemnation in Jesus Christ. You need to remember that.

Look at these attributes. Look at your God. With him, there's forgiveness. He's a forgiving God. He's powerful. He's a present God. And you need to look.

He's full of graciousness and compassion and justice. You need to look at that. And then you need to look at these commands, too. This is what a pastor's role is to do.

Job is to do. Look at these commands. Aren't these commands good? You know, if you walked in these, you'd be happier. The Bible says the way of the righteous grows brighter and brighter.

[35 : 56] And maybe that's why things are so dark. If you just repent and start obeying, then the lights would come on that would get brighter. So happiness and blessing, spiritual joy are just on the other side of obedience.

These are things that we as pastors need to encourage you with. So with these promises and attributes and commands and what we try to do and what we should do and what we strive to do is look at Jesus.

Look at Jesus again. We don't have anything new to say. We just look at him again. Today we're talking about how he's risen.

He's risen. He's risen for you. He's risen for your justification. That's how Paul puts it.

And when God justified him, when God declared him righteous and raising him from the dead, he was paving the road for our justification. And as we come into Christ, we experience that same.

[37 : 06] It is finished. Well done. Everything is good between us. So my right standing with God hangs on Christ's right standing with God.

And when I see that and when I hear that, then that's where that assurance and that security comes in. So how secure are we? We hold on to Christ and he takes us through that, the fiercest droughts and storms.

And look at Jesus again. Rock of ages, cleft for you. Cleft, cut in half for you. Just like that rock in the desert, he was stricken, smitten.

And now living water flows out of him. And dear saint, dear Christian and dear sinner, there's no fence around this rock.

There's no fence. You need life. He says, come and drink. Here I am. You need refreshment. Come and drink. There's no fence. There's no lock gate.

[38 : 21] There's no, are you good enough before you can come? No. All I have. All my needs. All I have is my needs.

And that's what qualifies me to come to him. That's what faith looks at. Faith says, oh, I'm completely empty here. All I have is this need. And he has everything I want and need.

I love how Samuel Rutherford put it. He says, poor folks. And that's me. And that's you. Poor folks must either borrow or beg from the rich.

And the only thing that commends sinners to Christ is extreme necessity and want. And so. So Jesus says, you have no money.

Come and buy. Samuel Rutherford says, this is a poor man's market. How would you like that kind of grocery store? The kind of grocery store that you can only go to when you don't have any money.

[39 : 25] And then you can come and take as much as you want. That's Jesus Christ. And so. To encourage you again. You have a hundred needs.

He has a thousand treasures. He has a thousand things stored up for you. You have nothing at all to say. Here's why you should bless me. Here's why you should help me.

You have nothing to say. Well, that's good enough. Just saying that. He's a fountain open wide. And there's no fence.

There's no gate. There's no toll booth. There's no moral x-ray machine that was going to beep and block you from coming to him. You come just as you are.

However bad. And you come to him. Everything we need. He has. That's the good old story. That's the gospel message. And so, in other words.

[40 : 23] Be encouraged. Maybe not. Things aren't going so well. Things are bad. You're experiencing so much.

But you can still be encouraged. Because of who Jesus is. And how ready he is for you. How available. How open. How full he is for you.

And that's the trustworthy message that has been taught. Paul was able to. Or Peter was able to preach to those people in Jerusalem. There they are.

Full of guilt. Full of shame. Can't believe what they did. And he said, repent. Be baptized. Believe. In the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you'll be saved. Everything we need. Everything you need. He has. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you.

[41 : 23] That with you is this complete fullness. Of the Godhead. And so, coming to you. We don't find you empty. Or wanting. Or lacking. In anything. But.

For whatever grace. Whatever righteousness. Whatever thing we need. Help. Consolation. Encouragement. Even exhortation.

To get up. And to get going. We find it all in our Lord Jesus Christ. And it's. All of it is for our good. And available to us. So help us. As we leave here. That we would have a sense. A greater sense.

By faith. To see Jesus Christ.

As high and lifted up. Risen. And reigning. And living. And. And for us. And available to us.

[42 : 23] Please. Send us on our way. Without encouragement. Please keep us from being.

Distracted. Or confused. Or to believe any lie. That would pull us away.

From Jesus Christ. But help us with two hands. To hold firmly. To that trustworthy message. As it has been taught. Pray this in Jesus name. For his sake. For our good.

Amen. Amen.