

Doctrine Works: Qualified Leadership Matters

Titus 1:5-9

Have you ever been given a task that was so big and broad that it almost seemed overwhelming to you? My first summer of college I was hired at my home church to work as a youth intern and my boss, the youth pastor gave me the task of “planning the summer ministry schedule.” This would include service projects during the week and major fun events almost every weekend. It was a huge task for me and he asked if I needed help with it. I very confidently said, no, I got this, left his office and went to my desk and sat there with an open calendar in front of me and thought, “What in the world do I do?”

Eventually I was able to put together a decent summer for the youth group, and with a few hiccups things went fairly well. But I’ll never forget sitting at that desk with an empty calendar in front of me pondering my 1st step on this journey.

I imagine there was something of that same sense of being overwhelmed that confronted Titus when he received his instructions from Paul in the book of Titus. This little letter was written to Titus, but was intended to be read publicly as a way of endowing Titus with Pauline authority to accomplish an important task. The task Titus had been given was ultimately for the growth of the church and the advancement of the Great Commission. What was his mission? Look at Titus 1:5.

Crete was an island off the coast of Greece and sort of in between Greece and Turkey in the Mediterranean Sea. Here’s a map. At some point in his ministry Paul had briefly done ministry on Crete with Titus. Paul had other urgent matters to attend to elsewhere, so he left Titus in Crete with this letter of authority and a mission in hand. His mission is two-fold. Look at the rest of verse 5.

So, churches had begun in towns or cities throughout Crete and there were many new believers. What would help to ensure the growth of these believers and the advancement of the gospel? Clearly the churches needed order and structure and one of the main ways to accomplish this was to install or appoint qualified leaders to guide and shepherd the church. You will notice that he says each town needs these elders. Crete was known for having small towns all over the coast and into the countryside. Titus was to move from town to town, get to know those in the

church, and appoint with apostolic authority, elders to shepherd and lead the new believers gathered together.

This is an important and challenging task. Paul puts this up front because churches without structure and qualified leadership will not advance the mission of the kingdom. After telling Titus what he is to do, he describes what these leaders should look like and that's what we want to learn from this morning.

Now, before I jump into these verses, let me say that the application of this passage is not only intended for elders. It's intended for the entire church so that you will know what sort of men are to shepherd and care for you. It's also true that the qualities described here are mentioned throughout the NT as necessary for every believer, except for the expectation of teaching God's Word. All believers should be making progress in these areas, but elders must demonstrate these qualities. Keep in mind that the emphasis is not on leaders as the most vital piece of the mission. Leaders are important, but only to the end of God's church being cared for and fulfilling the Great Commission. Leaders exist to further the mission. So, this morning we want to look at **5 Qualifications of Biblical Church Leadership that promote God's Mission in His Church.**

1. Above Reproach (v. 6)

There are a lot of different qualities mentioned in these verses, some to acquire and some to avoid, but this first quality listed serves as the umbrella over all the rest. The rest of the traits are simply working out what it means to be above reproach. So, what does this mean?

The idea here is that to be an elder one must be blameless. Not perfect, because then no one could serve as an elder. But he must be a man who can't be accused of anything that would hinder his leadership. His reputation should be unblemished and he doesn't have a glaring moral weakness.

Notice that this quality is mentioned again at the beginning of verse 7 and there's a very clear reason given for why he must be above reproach. The word overseer is just another way of saying elder and his job of giving oversight is as God's steward. This word is speaking of a manager of one's house. The steward, or household manager oversees the property of the master.

We used to watch the show *Downton Abbey*, which is about this family in 1920's England who lived in a massive house with hired servants. One man was the manager of all the household staff and served on behalf of the family. The staff and house didn't belong to him, but he was responsible at the master's request.

The elder must be a man of integrity with no glaring moral weaknesses because he is managing God's house, the church. You don't give a key to your house to someone of questionable integrity and God doesn't give oversight of his church to those who can't be trusted. So, what does it look like to be above reproach in more detail? Let's move on to the next 4 qualifications.

2. Attentive to Family (v. 6)

The family serves as the proving ground for oversight in the church. If a man cannot love and care for his family, he won't be able to love and care for God's church. This specifically means his relationship with his wife and his children. Look at verse 6.

This phrase "the husband of one wife" has been translated a number of ways and people have said this means the elder must be married, must not be a polygamist, and can't be divorced. It's hard to justify any of those interpretations of this phrase and the simple meaning is closest to a "one-woman man." He's devoted to his wife and keeps himself for her. He only has eyes for his wife and he proves this relationally, sexually, and emotionally.

Beyond his wife, an elder must have an attentive and involved relationship with his children. Look at the rest of verse 6. There's often a discussion concerning whether or not this means an elder's children must be born again Christians. I am reading from the ESV and the word translated believers here could also mean faithful. And if you notice on the opposite end of the spectrum from this word is a child who is given over to debauchery or insubordination. Both of these are behaviors. So, I think it's best to understand this word to mean faithful. It's a lot to ask to require a man's children to be Christians since ultimately God is the one who saves by His grace and not the parent.

The picture being given here is a man who is involved in the lives of his children and he is able to lead the home in such a way as that the children will follow in

obedience. They aren't perfect and dad isn't perfect either. But they are actively involved in the discipleship of their children and are able to lead the home well.

Dad's, let me just encourage us here. It's easy to sort of shove off the responsibility of parenting and discipling our children off on our wives. God's plan for his church is for there to be men who take an active role in the training, disciplining, and discipleship of their children. If you aren't in the habit of taking the lead with your kids, let me just encourage you to find one area in which you can be intentional. Read with them, discuss the lesson from Sunday church with them, memorize Scripture with them, or teach them a biblical story that applies to a real-life situation. Find one area to be intentional. Start there. And let it grow.

So, the elder must be above-reproach and as Timothy says in a parallel passage, he must manage his household well. But he also must avoid certain habits of life. And this brings us to our 3rd qualification.

3. Avoids Self-Will (v. 7)

It's always interesting to see who kids will respond to. As we've observed our kids over the years, there's a common thread that our kids love to be with people who devote their attention to them. In other words, they like to be with people who show an interest in them. If we were to hire a baby-sitter and he or she came over, plopped on the couch, pulled out his or her phone and started texting away, we would question our choice of a baby-sitter.

One of God's key requirements for leaders in his church is that they not be driven by selfish passions and desires. They must be devoted to serving the good of God's people and not their own agenda. Here in verse 7 we have a list of vices that cannot characterize God's steward because the thread that ties all of these together is that they appear in the life of a selfish individual. Look with me at verse 7. Paul begins with the quality of being arrogant. Someone who is arrogant is stubborn and self-willed. They are unwilling to empathize and see the world from a different perspective than their own. Because of this stubbornness, this type of person is quick-tempered. It doesn't take much to get this guy emotionally charged. He cannot manage his emotions and this leads to frustration and outburst and tantrums.

Someone who is consumed by selfish passions will abuse alcohol to the point of drunkenness. Scripture clearly prohibits drunkenness and the one who will lead God's church cannot lose control of his mind through over-indulgence in alcohol.

Next, the self-consumed person will be violent or some of your translations might say pugnacious. This is the guy who has a chip on his shoulder and is always ready for a fight. He wants everyone to know that he is big and bad. And finally, a leader in God's church cannot be consumed by greed for material wealth. He must be content with what God has given.

You can see how each of these develops in the life of a man who has self on the throne of His heart. Rather than self in the drivers seat, the elder must have God and others as His goal. This brings us to our 4th qualification.

4. Aimed at Good (v. 8)

The opposite of a self-centered person is someone who is turned outward and wants to serve God and others. Tim Keller describes a person who is truly concerned with others as humble. Here's what he says:

"The thing we would remember from meeting a truly gospel-humble person is how much they seemed to be totally interested in us. Because the essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less." – Tim Keller

And I think that's the perfect description of what you get when you brings the qualities of verse 8 together. We won't walk through each of these in detail, but let me just show you a couple of these. First, he says the elder must demonstrate hospitality. He opens his home to others to show them kindness and make them the center of attention. The goal of biblical hospitality is to make the other person comfortable. It's a very tangible way of putting others first. It's a practice that turns my heart outward.

Next, the elder must be a lover of what is good. They must be focused on others, but that focus is aimed in a particular direction. So, in my relationships with others my goal ought to be to do them good and to see them move toward that which is good. It's like the piano teacher who loves her students and can see where they need to end up. Elders are to value what God values and help people move toward what God values.

Finally, you see all these qualities that finish verse 8 that make that happen. They have self-control and discipline, which leads to serving others and they relate to others with justice and to God in holiness.

This is the type of person you would put in charge of your house. John Piper gives a helpful definition of spiritual leadership and I think this gets to the heart of eldering.

"I define spiritual leadership as knowing where God wants people to be and taking the initiative to use God's methods to get them there in reliance on God's power."

– John Piper

So, how do elders actually serve others? How do they see where God wants people to be and use God's methods to get them there? That brings us to our last qualification in verse 9.

5. Able in the Word (v. 9)

Elders do not use their own wisdom or smarts. They serve others only in the knowledge that they don't have anything to offer on their own. Look at verse 9. An elder must be fully dependent and fully committed to God's Word. They cling to the teaching of the Bible because it is trustworthy according to verse 9. The view of reality that this book gives can and should be relied upon.

They cling to this book and then they do two things for others with the truths of God's Word. Look at the rest of verse 9. Both sides are there. Elders are responsible and should be able to teach sound doctrine. Sound doctrine is teaching that brings spiritual health and wholeness to the listener. It accords with the way things truly are and makes sense of the world around me and my experience. Our series is titled Doctrine Works because right instruction from God's Word will faithfully be lived out in real life.

But elders can't just teach the doctrines of Scripture as they are presented systematically. They have to know God's Word well enough to be able to refute false teaching. Look at the end of verse 9. This is vital because our world and the church are both filled with ideas and lifestyles that do not qualify as sound doctrine. Sound doctrine is good for the hearer and so shepherds must protect from unsound doctrine, which ultimately leads to harm. These are the

qualifications for church leadership and these are what help a church to be led well to fulfill the mission God has given.