

## Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

*Titus | Gospel on Display*

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In 1980, after sensing an irresistible call of God on his life, John Piper became the Senior Pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church. In the decades that followed, Pastor John was faithful to God's call, and God used His servant to do extraordinary things for the Kingdom – not just as Bethlehem, but all across the world! However, what most people don't know is that, shortly before Piper began his ministry at Bethlehem, he called a friend of his (named Tom Steller) and asked Tom if he would move to Minnesota and minister alongside of him.

So, in 1980, Tom Steller moved to Minneapolis, and for the past 42 years, he has served alongside John Piper in a number of different capacities. For the past 42 years, Tom has been preaching the gospel, teaching the Word, serving the church. He developed the educational programs that eventually became Bethlehem College & Seminary (which is the seminary I graduated from in 2021). And now, he is spending his retirement years working with TLI (as the Director of Theological Education in Cameroon, Africa).

The world doesn't know Tom Steller (they know of John Piper...but not Tom Steller). Yet, the way that Steller has served alongside Piper for four decades has been more valuable to growth of God's Kingdom than this world will maybe ever know.

Why do I share this little tidbit about a man that none of you know or will probably ever have the privilege of meeting? I mention Tom because this letter reminds me of him! Paul is writing to a close friend & ministry partner named Titus. And there are a number of similarities between **Paul & Titus** and **John Piper & Tom Steller**.

### TITUS

- Spent years of his life ministering with Paul (**2 Cor 8:23; Titus 1:4**)
- Titus has never been famous like Paul, but (from what Paul says about Titus in his letters) it seems like Titus was a significant part of Paul's ministry...and a great friend to Paul.
  - He served **the local church** in Corinth w/ Paul (**2 Cor 8:6, 16–17**).
  - He did **missionary work** with Paul (**Titus 1:5**).
  - God used Titus to confirm Paul's Gospel work among the **Gentiles** (**Gal. 2:1–3**).<sup>1</sup>
  - Titus was with Paul during his second **Roman imprisonment** (**2 Tim 4:10**).
- Organized **compassion** ministries for Christians in other parts of the world (**2 Cor 8:10–24**).
- When Paul was writing this letter, Titus was doing **pastoral missionary work** on the island of Crete.

For this reason I left you in **Crete**,  
That you should set in order the things that are lacking,  
And appoint elders in every city as I commanded you...

~ *Titus 1:5*

<sup>1</sup> This just means that he wasn't a Jew like Paul (Gal 2:1–3).

And **Crete** was not an easy place to do missionary work!

- Crete is an island in the Mediterranean Sea,<sup>2</sup> and when Titus was there in the first century, the people were notorious for untruthfulness and immorality.
  - If somebody was accused of “*acting like a Cretan*”, everybody would have known what that meant: it meant, *that person was a liar*.<sup>3</sup>

One of them, a prophet of their own, said,  
“**Cretans** are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.”  
This testimony is true...  
~ *Titus 1:12–13*

So, Titus is doing pastoral-missionary work on an island full of liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons! **Not easy!** And Paul is writing this letter to help Titus “*set things in order*” (1:5).

**Q.** What is this missionary-pastor to do to “*set things in order*”?

1. “**Appoint elders**” (1:5) || **Church Leaders**

**ELDERS**<sup>4</sup> || We learn a lot about biblical eldership in this little book.

- **What:** a *team* of elders (1:5).

First, we learn that God means for there to be a plurality of elders in the local church. The Greek word for elders (*presbuteros*) is **plural**. Here, at the very beginning of his letter, Paul reminds Titus to **appoint more than one elder** for the local church in every city. **Why?** For a number of reasons: accountability, wisdom, balance, burden-sharing, safety in numbers...

I recently heard a statistic about **the strength of two lions**. If a tiger attacks a single lion, the lion has a 60% chance of winning (*which means he has a 40% chance of losing*). That’s almost 50-50. However, if there are **two lions**, they can take on **six tigers** and win **100%** of the time...because they know how to fight as a team.<sup>5</sup>

Elders are called to care for the church and to protect the flock from false teaching because we have an enemy that is prowling around, looking for people to devour (**1 Pet 5:8**). When a single pastor attempts to guard the flock by himself, he is prone to all kinds of attacks and susceptible to all kinds of casualties; but when godly leaders stand together (*in the Word of God, in prayer, in the power of the Holy Spirit*), the enemy doesn’t stand a chance (e.g., James 4:7).

<sup>2</sup> Crete is 156 miles long and up to 30 miles wide.

<sup>3</sup> 😊 Similar to how Minnesota is known for “**Minnesota Nice**” = being polite to people to conceal what we really think about them.

<sup>4</sup> **What is an elder?** An elder is a spiritual leader in the local church. There are several different titles in the NT referring to the spiritual leaders in the local church: **elder/presbyter** (πρεσβύτερος), **pastor** (ποιμήν), **bishop/overseer** (ἐπίσκοπος). But these are simply different ways of describing the same role (e.g., Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7). This is similar to how **the President of the United States** has a number of different titles while he is in office which describe different responsibilities of his presidency: *Commander-in-Chief, Chief Executive, Chief Administrator, Chief Diplomat, Chief Legislator, Chief Citizen*, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth heard this from a homeschool co-op seminar speaker, but I can’t track down any reference to verify its accuracy.

So, what does it take to be an elder in the local church?

- **Who:** godly men (1:6–9).

This is the second thing about elders that we learn from Paul’s letter.

- It *doesn’t* require a seminary degree. It *doesn’t* require a college education.
- It *doesn’t* require a high IQ. It *doesn’t* require business skills.

There are essentially **two requirements** for the men who are called to lead and to protect the church:

1. to be an example to the congregation of what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

People should be able to see what it looks like to be a joyful follower of Jesus just by looking at the elders in the local church.

We should be able to point to our elders and say, “*This is what it looks like to be a Christian who...*”

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| a. is a loving and devoted spouse  | (6) |
| b. is faithful in raising his children   | (6) |
| c. doesn’t lose his temper [ <i>not quick tempered</i> ]                               | (7) |
| d. isn’t addicted to <a href="#">alcohol</a> [ <i>not given to wine</i> ] <sup>7</sup> | (7) |
| e. is <a href="#">gentle</a> [ <i>not violent</i> ]                                    | (7) |
| f. is content [ <i>not greedy for money</i> ]  | (7) |
| g. is <a href="#">hospitable</a>   | (8) |
| h. loves what is good  | (8) |
| i. is just (fair, honest, doesn’t cheat or manipulate)                                 | (8) |
| j. lives a life that is set apart for the glory of God [ <i>holy</i> ]                 | (8) |
| k. is self-controlled  | (8) |
| l. is holding onto the faithful Word of God  | (9) |

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<sup>6</sup> See also **1 Timothy 3:1–7**.

<sup>7</sup> A word regarding the use of **alcohol**. [Paul doesn’t say that an elder must be a teetotaler](#). There are many examples in the Bible of alcoholic drinks being **a good gift from God** (e.g., Deut 7:13; 11:14; 33:28; Psalm 104:14–15; Prov 3:10; Isa 24:6; Amos 9:14, etc.). We see numerous examples of wine being **a healthy part of the joyful Christian experience** (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34). **Jesus’ first public miracle** was changing water into wine (John 2:1–11). In the same letter where Paul tells Timothy that an elder must not be “given to wine” (**1 Tim 3:3**), he actually encourages Timothy to drink wine to help with a stomach condition that Timothy had (**1 Tim 5:23**). In fact, up until the [temperance movements](#) in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, wine was a regular part of the local church’s experience as they celebrated communion together. Paul was very clear in his first letter to Timothy that if somebody forbids others to drink alcohol (as a moral faith principle), that person is actually holding to a doctrine of demons” (**1 Tim 4:1–5**). So, the issue that Paul is addressing here is **not the wine**; it’s **drunkenness** (**μη πάροινον**). For an extended article regarding the use of alcohol in the Bible, see Kenneth Gentry, “[The Bible and the Question of Alcoholic Beverages](#).”

The Bible is crystal clear that **drunkenness is a sin** (e.g., 1 Cor 6:10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:18; Isa 5:11–12, 22). How can you love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength & love others as yourself (Matt 22:37–40) when you no longer have control over your mind and over your strength (Prov 20:1; 31:4)? Therefore, the command for **every** follower of Jesus is not to be drunk with wine, but rather to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18). This is what Christians need to see when they look at the spiritual leaders in the local church; they need to see men whose lives are controlled by the Spirit of God, and not by anything else – including alcohol.

2. to protect the church from false teaching by (a) knowing what the Bible says and (b) being able to teach it to others.<sup>8</sup>

Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught,  
that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict  
those who contradict.

~ Titus 1:9

The local church doesn't need men who are savvy in business (though that can be very helpful). It doesn't need men who know how to read Greek and Hebrew (though this can be extremely helpful). It doesn't need men who are shrewd with finances (though this can be really helpful).

When it comes to its spiritual leaders, the local church needs men who know their Bibles and who *desire* to impart God's Word to others:<sup>9</sup> both in what they teach & in how they live.

Q. Why is this so important?

Q. Why do elders need to be able to carefully & consistently teach & live the truth of God's Word?

A. Because false teachers and false teachings are everywhere.

This brings us to the **third thing** we learn about elders: *why do we need them*.

- **Why**: to protect the church from false teaching (1:10–16).

There are always two extremes when it comes to false teaching: **legalism & license**

- **LEGALISM** || Broadly speaking, legalism is when people teach that salvation comes from God's grace **PLUS** our works.

On the island of Crete, there were Jewish teachers (“*those of the circumcision*”, 1:10) who were telling people that there were things they needed **to do** to be saved.<sup>10</sup>

This testimony is true.

Therefore, rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,  
Not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.

~ Titus 1:13–14

But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law;  
for they are unprofitable and useless.

~ Titus 3:9

“*Commandments of men*”, “*strivings about the law*” – this is the kind of legalism that Paul despised and that he exposed everywhere he went.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See also 1 Timothy 3:1–2.

<sup>9</sup> “If a man *desires* (ὀρέγεται) the position of a [spiritual leader] (ἐπισκοπή), he *desires* (ἐπιθυμεῖ) a good work” (1 Tim 3:1).

<sup>10</sup> See Paul's warning to the churches of Galatian (Gal 5:1–6).

<sup>11</sup> Gal 5:1–6; Col 2:16–19.

- **LICENSE** || Broadly speaking, “salvation as a license” is when people think that Christians are free in Christ to live however we want. No rules.<sup>12</sup>

For we ourselves were also once foolish, **disobedient**,<sup>13</sup> deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures,<sup>14</sup> living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another...

~ *Titus 3:3*

**False teachers** either lay down a bunch of rules about what you must do to be saved, or they attempt to take away all rules and say it that it doesn't matter at all how you live or what you do. Titus had to deal with both in Crete.

This brings us to **the second thing** that Titus is to do to “*set things in order*”:

2. Teach the whole **congregation** how they are to live...

Paul spends the entire middle part of the letter (*chapter 2*) talking about what Titus should be teaching every member of the church so that everyone is living in accordance with “sound doctrine”.

- A. He begins by addressing “**older men**” (2:2)

- They are to be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience...

You don't get to “check out” when it comes to being a Christian just because you're old!

- Being old isn't an “excuse” to get angry with people.<sup>15</sup>
- It's **not an excuse** to always get your way...or to do whatever you want to do...or to believe whatever you want to believe.
- Rather, **it's an opportunity** to model Christian maturity to the generations behind you.

- B. The same is true of “**older women**” (2:3)

- Reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things
- Being an older woman is **not an excuse** to live however you want to live.
- Rather, being an older woman is **an opportunity** to model Christian maturity to the generations behind you.
- **AND** being an older woman gives you **a platform** to “*teach [admonish] the younger women...*”

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<sup>12</sup> **Adam Physician** did an amazing job helping us think through biblical freedom in his sermon on Galatians. It's not unbounded freedom to live however your want to live.

<sup>13</sup> As soon as children are old enough to know what rules are, they are pushing against them! **Asher** doesn't want to hold my hand when we are crossing the street. He doesn't want to brush his teeth at night. He doesn't want to eat his food. He doesn't want to play nice with the pets. He doesn't want to sleep past 6am. He doesn't want to ask politely for the things he wants. From the moment we are old enough to have critical thoughts, we are pushing against rules of any kind.

<sup>14</sup> Not serving God. Serving our various lusts & pleasures. What does this mean? It means rejecting God and doing whatever we think will bring us the most pleasure in the moment.

<sup>15</sup> “**Ahh, he's just an old grump!**” We shouldn't be able to say that of an elderly Christian man.

- C. Paul moves to talk about the Christian character of a “**younger woman**” (2:4–5)
- Love your husband (4)
  - Love your children (4)
  - Don’t parade yourself [discreet] (5)
  - Pursue purity [chaste] (5)
  - Make your home a picture of the Gospel [homemaker]<sup>16</sup> (5)
  - Submit to your husband’s God-given authority in your home [obedient] (5)
    - **Why?** “*That the word of God may not be blasphemed.*”
      - Young woman, the testimony of God’s Word is at stake in your life!
- D. From here, Paul moves onto the Christian character of a “**younger man**” (2:6–8)
- Sober-minded (6)
  - Displaying a pattern of good works (7)
  - Showing integrity when it comes to handling the truth (7)
  - Having sound speech (8)
- E. Paul even addresses “**bondservants**” (2:9–10)
- Obedient to the own masters (9)
  - Not answering back (9)
  - Not stealing [pilfering] (10)
  - Showing faithfulness [fidelity] (10)
    - **Why?** “*That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things...*”

So, Paul addresses the lifestyle of **both** the spiritual leaders **as well as** all the members in the local church **because** the life-changing message of Gospel was given for everybody.

That brings us to the passage that we read right before the message.

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<sup>16</sup> One of the greatest pictures of the Gospel is in the home. God intended the home to be the place where we see love & affection & forgiveness & security & family & growth & nurturing & healing & hope...and 100 other pictures of the Gospel on display. Therefore, to be a home-**maker** is a beautiful calling! While the husband is called to lead the home, the wife is called to make the home.

This does not mean that the wife is never allowed to work outside the home. The Bible offers numerous examples of faithful, godly women who appear to have worked outside the home – at least for a season (Prov 31; Acts 16:14–15). However, I think that something Paul would emphasize in our culture today is that being a homemaker is not a second class calling like the **feminism movement** (of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) led women to believe. You do not have to leave the home and enter the corporate workforce in order to do something incredible for the kingdom of God. If you love your husband, love your children, and spend your life making your home a picture of the Gospel, you will have lived a life that will be celebrated in the presence of God for all eternity!

For a great resource, see the book & documentary by Rebekah Merkle, [Eve in Exile](#).

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared **to all men**,  
teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,  
**we should live** soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,  
looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,  
who gave Himself for us, **that** He might redeem us from every lawless deed  
and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.  
Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

~ *Titus 2:11-15*

These are the two main callings of a faithful elder:

1. Teaching the Word of God “with all authority”
2. Character development. Helping God’s people live in a manner that reflects the Gospel.

The Gospel of Jesus doesn’t just impact our *eternity*; it impacts every part of our life right now.  
It doesn’t just affect **where we live** when this life is over; it affects **how we live** right now.

After working through the hope of the Gospel (**3:3-7**), Paul says,

**This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly that those who have  
believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.  
These things are good and profitable to men.**

~ *Titus 3:8*

Paul closes his letter to Titus by saying,

**And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs,  
that they may not be unfruitful.**

~ *Titus 3:14*

## CLOSING

How we live matters. It really matters.

The question is not simply whether we know what God’s Word says.

The question is whether God’s Word has taken root in our hearts so that it changes how we live.

Whether you realize it or not, the Gospel of Jesus is on display (**all the time – every day**) in the way we live our lives: from the way we love our spouse – to the way we honor our boss – to the way we raise our children – to the way we submit to the governing authorities – to the way we enjoy God’s gift of wine – to the way we make our homes.

Your life is a stage for the glory of God.

How awesome is that!

## PRAY