

I have a copy of the scriptures. I would invite you to turn with me to Titus chapter 1. Titus chapter 1. We're looking this morning at verses 5 through 9. The book of Titus was written by divine inspiration by the apostle Paul. And he wrote this letter to a man named Titus. Titus and Paul had previously been doing ministry together on the island of Crete. However, we learn in verse 5 that Paul has left this island of Crete and Titus has remained on the island. And so Paul writes this letter to Titus as something of a divinely inspired instruction manual for Titus, telling him essentially this.

This is how, Titus, you need to do ministry on the island of Crete. These are the things you need to be doing. And when Paul had left the ministry there, the churches were still in a good bit of disorder. And so the first thing Paul tells Titus he needs to do, and we'll see that this morning in verses five through nine, is Titus needs to appoint elders. And why does he need to appoint elders? Because things are in disorder and the elders are meant to help put things into order.

So with that in mind, let us pray and ask God to bless the reading and the preaching of his word. Our heavenly father, We cannot adequately articulate the wonders of Your Word such that they automatically have the intended saving or sanctifying effect on our lives. But Your Spirit can. And so we pray now, O God, that You would send forth Your Spirit through the reading and preaching of Your Word, that all of us here today would know more fully who you are, and what you desire for your people. O God, we pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. This is the word of God, Titus chapter 1, beginning in verse 5.

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife and of, my Bible turned two pages, I apologize, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination, for an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain. but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine, and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Amen, thus ends the reading of God's word. May he bless now the proclamation of it to our lives. In our section of Scripture today, you see that the Apostle Paul orders Titus to appoint elders in Now, this might seem like something of an unimportant matter, the matter of appointing elders, the matter of church government. You might hear these sorts of things and say, well, get to the good stuff. Why are we talking about appointing elders and church government, which is what Paul is writing about in this section this morning.

Before we jump to those sorts of conclusions, let us step back for a moment and think about who loves the Church the most. The one who loves the Church the most is God, Christ Jesus. God loves His Church. God sent His Son to shed His blood that He might purchase His Church. So we know God loves the Church.

And God is the author of scripture. And he tells us not only does he love his church, not only did he send his son to die for his church, but he also, because he loves his church so much, has given a certain structure or order to his church. And that is what we call church government. And so while we might at first glance think this isn't so important, remember, God thought it was important.

God put it in his word, and God loves his church. Just as, ideally, the civil government helps to order society, so the church government is intended to help order the church. This is why, as Paul writes this, he is urging Titus to appoint elders to help order the church. But notice that Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders. and that that word elders is in the plural, multiple elders. This is what we call a plurality of elders. God does not intend that his church be led by a single elder. In the New Testament, we have no evidence of any church being led by a single individual. It is elders in the plural.

So, for example, in Acts 14.23, Paul and Barnabas appoint elders in every church. They appoint multiple elders to each of the individual local churches.

And you see the same sort of thing in Acts 20.17. Paul calls for the elders of Ephesus to come to him. And so the evidence of the New Testament is that there is to be a group of elders leading each local church. So in verse 5 of our text, he is to appoint elders.

But how many elders should Titus appoint to a particular church? Should he appoint five elders? Should he appoint 20 elders to each church? If a church has 500 members, should he appoint 30 elders? And if a church has 50 members, should he appoint three elders? How many elders is he supposed to appoint to each church?

Well, Paul says in verse six, if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and so on. That word if is important. as many as are qualified in each church. It's as many as have these qualifications. The church could be a hundred men, a hundred people, and there could be two qualified elders.

Well, that's going to be a lot of work for two elders. Should Paul go ahead and appoint, or should Titus go ahead and appoint ten? I mean, it's going to be a lot of work for those two elders. If it's a hundred people, no. should appoint as many as are qualified. It's as many as are qualified.

It could be a lot of men in a church or it could be a few men in a church, but as many as have these qualifications are to be appointed as elders. But what exactly are these qualifications? And this is where we really want to spend our time this morning. What are the qualifications?

And we're going to consider this question of the qualifications of an elder underneath three headings. We see the family life of the elder. Second, we see the personal life of the elder, and third, we see the doctrinal life of the elder. So we're going to consider the qualifications of the elder underneath these three headings. The family life of the elder, the personal life of the elder, and the doctrinal life of the elder. So first, the family life of the elder, verse six.

If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery. Well the first qualification here of the elder in relation to his family is that he be a man who is above reproach, verse 6.

What does it mean to be above reproach? Does this mean that the elder is to be a man who has attained moral perfection? Well, no, it cannot mean that because if a man must be morally perfect to be qualified to be an elder, then every person is disqualified from being an elder because no one reaches moral perfection in this life. So what does it then mean to be above reproach? Well, to be above reproach really just means that in each of the items that will be listed after this, he is to be commendable.

He is to exemplify these sorts of things. He is to exemplify love for his wife. He is to exemplify godly fathering. He is to exemplify these sorts of qualities. And if he were brought up on charges, it should be the case that he would be on a fair trial above reproach. He would be not a failure. And so these are the sorts of things that are intended by this word above reproach. He's commendable.

Now in his family life, it is said that he is to be the husband of one wife. Now what does it mean that he is to be the husband of one wife? Well, some people say this simply means he's not supposed to have multiple wives. Well, surely the elder ought not to have multiple wives. But is that really all that Paul means here when he says to the elders to be the husband of one wife? Well, it can literally be translated, he is to be a one woman man.

I think really the idea here is that he is to be a man who is devoted to his wife. He loves his wife. He sacrifices for his wife. He cares for his wife. He gives himself up out of love for his wife the way Christ has given himself up for him. He is to be a man devoted to his wife. And then it mentions the children of the elder.

It says, his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. Now this word believers is a bit tricky because when you read that his children are to be believers, it at least on the surface of it certainly gives the idea that every single child of an elder must be a Christian.

They must be a believer. They must be converted. For a few reasons, I don't believe that's the right way we should interpret this qualification for the elder. For one reason, I don't know that it should be interpreted as they must be Christians, they must be believers. For one reason is because this word believer is quite often in the New Testament simply translated faithful. And actually, if you look at a number of different translations, it's fairly well split between believer and faithful. And those are different things.

If a father is trying to encourage faithfulness in his child, he can do that. He can, not that he can make his child obey, but he can help produce an environment that encourages faithfulness in the life of his child. But no matter how hard he tries, he can't even begin, really, to convert his child. That's outside of his prerogative. He can't make his child be born again. That's something only the Spirit can do.

So many, including David Strain up the road, when I listened to his sermon on this text, he, among many others, suggested perhaps faithful would be a better way to think about this word here. Additionally, faithful more adequately sums up the next couple of statements, and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

And so what Paul is really getting at here with this call to the elder is that the elder is to be a man, the father is to be a man who is appropriately, lovingly, and caringly dealing with his children. He is to be a man who is making a real effort to love his children and to discipline his children in the ways of the Lord. Not that he's perfect in all these things, but it's evident to all observers that this is a man who is sincerely rearing his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And if he's not doing these things, and it's patently obvious to any objective observer, then that man is not fit to be an elder.

So these are the qualifications in relation to the family. And the reason Paul begins here with the home is because if a man cannot lead in his own house, He has no business leading in the house of God. And holiness really does begin in the home. It's far easier to put on the appearance of holiness in front of people in a church building than it is to really pursue holiness behind closed doors in your own home. And so holiness, the qualifications for an elder, really begin in his own home. And it's like that for all of us. The Christian life really begins in the home.

But secondly, the qualifications, the personal life of the elder is the second set of qualifications. The personal life of the elder, verses 7 through 8. Verse 7, for an overseer as God's steward must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. Now as the Spirit begins to bring about these personal qualifications for the elder, having moved from the family now to the personal qualifications, The Spirit begins by saying, for an overseer. Now this is an interesting thing to note that now he starts to talk about overseers in verse 7. He had been talking about elders at verse 5 and now he starts talking about overseers.

Are these two different groups of people. You have the office of elder and the office of overseer. Well, no, what's going on here is he's talking about elders and then he starts to talk about one of the functions of the elder. An elder is to be an overseer. His office is the office of elder. But as an elder, one of the things he is to do is he is to function as an overseer, as one who cares for the spiritual needs of the flock of God entrusted to him. So the overseer and the elder are not two different offices. The overseer is a function of the elder.

You see this same pattern in Acts chapter 20. In Acts 20, 17, Paul calls the elders of Ephesus to come to him. And while he's addressing the elders of Ephesus, In Acts chapter 20, verse 28, he calls them overseers. They're one group of people that are sometimes called elders and sometimes called overseers in scripture. And that's exactly what's going on here in Titus chapter 1. In verse 5, he calls them elders. In verse 7, he calls them overseers.

You know, when I worked in lawn care many years ago, I was a lawn care worker. I like to think of that as my title or my office. And as a lawn care worker, sometimes I functioned, most often, as a weed eater. That was my particular function. But I was always a lawn care worker. So I don't know when I picked up the weed eater, I ceased being a lawn care worker. I was just a lawn care worker who, in that moment, was functioning as the weed eater. And so with the offices of the church, this is how I've thought about it for years.

It's been helpful for me. You have the elder, that's his office. And as an elder, he has some functions that include being an overseer. That's one of his functions, but there are not two offices, one office with this particular function. Well, as we go to unpack these personal qualifications of the elder, he says, As an overseer, he is to be God's steward. He is to be God's household manager. Just like he is to be a manager over his own house, so he is to be a

manager in the household of God. And he is to do this as one who is above reproach. Verse seven. Verse seven there reads, for an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach.

That means in all the things he's about to list, The elder is, or the overseer, is to exemplify these traits. And what are these traits? He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. And the list of traits we've just read in verses seven and eight, there are five negative traits listed and six positive. traits listed.

And notice these are not optional for the elder. Well, you know, I'll choose to kind of pursue some, I'll pursue not being arrogant, but I'm going to just go ahead and give myself over to drunkenness. No, he's not allowed to pick and choose. These are all musts. He must not be arrogant. These are all imperatives. These are, these are, these are things that he must be part of who he is. It's not just something he does, it's really who he is, it's who he must be. And he's only gonna be this way as he gets to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ. This is an outflow of his relationship with Jesus Christ. They must not be arrogant, he says.

This means they are not to be self-pleasing, always trying to get their own way and filled up with themselves. Instead, they're to be trying to please God. The opposite of arrogance isn't trying to please other people. The opposite of arrogance is trying to please God, not doing things for yourself.

In other words, a man who lacks humility should not be an elder. Quick-tempered, or not to be quick-tempered. You know, a person who's marked by having a quick temper has no business being an elder. Why? because their God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. If they are quick-tempered, they do not resemble their God. And the elder, more than anyone else in a church, ought to look like Jesus. And Jesus was slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. It doesn't mean there's not a place for righteous anger. That's another topic for another time. But the point is, he's not to be quick-tempered. A drunkard, he's not to be a drunkard.

One of the reasons drunkenness is so evil is because in, for example, Ephesians chapter five, I believe it's verse 18, but drunkenness there in particular is contrasted with what? Do not be drunk with much wine, but be filled with the spirit. Drunkenness controls you. It fills you, it's comprehensive.

And the elder is to be a man who is comprehensively filled and controlled, not with the substance of alcohol, but with the Holy Spirit. They are to be a spirit-filled man. That is what controls them. The Holy Spirit is the one who is shaping their decisions, is influencing their desires, not some sort of substance like alcohol. Now the spirit here in our text is not prohibiting drinking alcohol, the spirit is prohibiting drunkenness. Now violence, he says, or not to be violent. This literally means a man who's a striker, a man who likes to fist fight, a man who likes to settle their problems with their fists and that's not to be the elder.

Greedy for gain. not to be greedy for gain. The elder must not be pursuing the ministry for their own namesake, either for power or for money or for any sort of authority or worldly pleasures. That's not why you become an elder. That's not a man who's qualified to be an elder if that's their motive.

Paul says, for what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord with ourselves as your servants for Christ's sake, 2 Corinthians 4-5. Paul was an apostle for the sake of proclaiming Christ and serving others. And the elder should want to be an elder, not for himself, but for the sake of proclaiming Christ and serving others.

I've often thought to myself, men go into the ministry, and a lot of times, and I know I'm young, but still, I've seen enough. Men go into the ministry a lot of times and they say, I didn't expect it to be this hard. I'm like, well, did you read the New Testament? So when you go to pursue being an elder you don't pursue it for selfish gain. If you pursue that sort of a thing for yourself then you've got the wrong attitude. The attitude is I just signed up to die and I'm going to give myself up out of service for others. That's what the elder is to do. But positively there are traits listed here. Hospitable.

Now, of course, this does mean at some level having people in your home, we can acknowledge that, but it's also much broader than that. And maybe we miss that sometimes in the way we think of hospitality. I hear the word hospitality in my mind immediately goes kind of exclusively to people in your home, which that is appropriate, but it's also broader than that.

It's a general attitude of being welcoming to strangers, to having an attitude of, I want to welcome people. If somebody visits Second Presbyterian Church, We want them to feel welcomed, and the elders especially should be the first ones to want to show that hospitality, to make sure they do feel loved and welcomed. Now, of course, we know in our day and age that people use this word welcome for all sorts of anti-Christian ideas. People use the word welcome to say you're going to affirm somebody in rampant ungodliness. That's not welcoming then, okay, that's not loving them. But a general attitude of I want to care for you, I want to love you, I want to get to know you, that attitude should be one that is especially exemplified among elders.

A lover of good is another trait. What a great one this is. Not only that they're doers of good, but they're lovers of good. And what is good? Good is what God says is good. And that's very important. To be a real lover of good is not being a lover of whatever you might want or whatever other people might say. Being a lover of good is really wanting and desiring and seeking after what God says is good. That's a lover of good.

They're to be self-controlled. The elder is to be a man who exercises sanctified common sense, is what Patrick Fairbairn said about this. Self-controlled, exercising good balance and keeping himself in check. And then finally, these last three traits here for the personal qualifications. They are to be upright, holy, and disciplined.

It's been observed that this really covers the whole of every relationship because upright has to do with your relationship with other people. You ought to be upright in your relationship with other people. Holy primarily has to do with your relationship with God. You ought to be someone who is determined and set on getting to know and live for and love your God. And then you ought to be disciplined. This has to do with your relationship to yourself. You ought to be a disciplined individual. But thirdly, let's look for a moment at the doctrinal life of the elder. The doctrinal life of the elder. And this is verse nine.

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. The elder, it says, must hold firm to the trustworthy word. To hold firm is

to be devoted to. And it's the trustworthy word that is the Bible, and at the core of the Bible, the gospel, that God saves sinners by no merit, no work, no anything that the man does, but by his sovereign mercy in Christ Jesus, our Lord. That is the firm sorts of truths to which he is to hold. He is to love the Bible, hold firmly to the Bible, because it's a trustworthy word, you see. And how do you know it's a trustworthy word? Well, do you remember what verse two said about the character of God? What was verse two?

That he never lies and it could literally be translated he cannot lie. It is impossible that God could lie. This is the word of God. It's impossible. that it not be true. It is trustworthy. You hold fast to it. Every elder must hold fast to this, and every Christian really ought to be following that example, holding fast to the Word of God.

And for what purpose? Well, it says, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. In other words, he's to hold fast to it. in part so that he can help promote what is right, but also so that he can rebuke those who contradict it. He can speak to those things that are wrong and rebuke those who have gone astray. John Calvin, commenting on this verse, has this great line, the pastor ought to have two voices, one for gathering the sheep and another for warding off wolves. Well, as I want to start to draw our time to a close, I want to bring some applications to us from all of this.

It's interesting as you consider verses 6 through 8 of these qualifications. These qualifications in verses 6 through 8 that address the family life of the elder and the personal life of the elder. When you consider verses 6 through 8, it is all about the elder's conduct.

It is all about his character. It is all about his life. And then, and only then, in verse 9, does it cover the elder's doctrine. It's in verse 9 that Paul, writing by divine inspiration, starts to speak of the doctrinal life of the elder. There's a movement then from his character in verses 6 through 8 to his doctrine and his beliefs. in verse 9.

What does this teach us? The elder, and really every Christian, does not need to only have his doctrine in order. The Christian is called to have his life in order. It's not all about having doctrinal precision. That is important. It is very important as well that you have a life that preaches the doctrine you proclaim. You should preach right doctrine, sound doctrine, but you should also live out right doctrine.

If your doctrine is not impacting your life, there's something wrong with your application of that doctrine. Your doctrine could be right as good, But if it's not impacting your life, you really don't understand the purpose of the doctrine at all. And that's actually exactly what Paul said in reverse order back in verse one. He talked in verse one about how the truth, which accords with godliness, your doctrine should promote godliness. Your life should promote sound doctrine and your doctrine should promote a sound life. Leaders in the church need to not only know what is right, but they need to live it out.

No one cares if your doctrine is totally right when your life totally contradicts it. It's just a fact. Nobody cares. When a person's life totally contradicts their doctrine, people go, well, I know what I'm not going to believe, whatever that guy believes, because his life is a train wreck and there's no evidence that it has any real impact.

There's the old saying, and maybe you've all heard it, but people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. And we could probably all sit back, or maybe some of us could, and we could talk about how that has errors in it and how it's not as, you know, it's a little cliché saying, and it does have a lot of truth in it, and let's acknowledge it. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

And so as, not just elders, but every Christian here this morning, There is a call from this type of a text that says unto us, let your good doctrine be reinforced and promoted by your sound living. And let your sound living also be increasing and helping you to come to sound doctrine. I'll close with just this brief illustration probably have said this before. I know I've said it to some of y'all in pastoral visits, but I may have also said it from this pulpit, I don't recall. But when I was serving as the RAF intern at Belhaven University, if you know anything about Belhaven University, it attracts a lot of people who have grown up in the church.

Good, it's a good thing. And so they'd have all these kids gathered around, and you would have, typically it'd be a Baptist over here, and then a Presbyterian over here, and they would just be going at it over predestination, arguing with one another why predestination was right or why it wasn't right, and they'd be arguing with him, bickering and so forth. And I would just sit there, and I would never say anything, and then eventually somebody would say, well, what do you think? Because, frankly, it was very obvious they all wanted me to give my two cents because they knew that I was kind of something of a leader on the campus.

And I would say, well, I believe predestination is biblical. And I wouldn't really even get into it but I would say this but I would pretty much rebuke the Presbyterians usually. I would say that here's the thing Paul talks about predestination from Romans chapter 9 through Romans 11. And when he gets to the end of Romans 11, after speaking about predestination, for three chapters, which is, in my view, is clearly biblical, because he's been discussing it for three chapters, and he talks about it, he affirms it.

But then he says this, oh, the depths of the riches in wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments, and how inscrutable are his ways. Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? For from him, through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. And I would look at him and say, you haven't understood predestination if it hasn't humbled you. If predestination has never made you worship, you haven't understood predestination.

Because clearly Paul is saying that this doctrine is supposed to drive a man to his knees, and worship, and gratitude, and thanksgiving, and all these other sorts of things. And so that's the sort of idea that Paul is getting at here in the qualifications for the elder.

His character in his life is to be overflowing with godliness in his home, in his personal traits. And his doctrine needs to be right, and it needs to be enforcing that. It should have an implication for his living. And so how is it with you this morning? You might have a lot of really good doctrines here this morning, and that's good. Praise the Lord. Okay, doctrine, and my point is not to minimize doctrine. But my point is, does your doctrine get lived out in your life? Because the elder, and by extension every Christian should have doctrine that is lived out in their life that proclaims that it is true. Let us pray.

Almighty God, we do praise you and thank you for a text like this that does encourage us to live a godly life that is in accordance with the doctrines we have learned. Paul did not launch into verses five through nine out of nowhere. He began by explaining the riches of the electing love of God that is for eternity from a God who cannot lie. And he talked about the grace and saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the wonder of what God you have done for us. And then out of those glorious truths, which we saw last week, he says, In essence, will you live like it's true?

And God, I pray that we would. And where we do fail, and all of us do, we pray for the gift of repentance. We pray that you would help us to see that, and we would say, Father, I've known this doctrine, and I've lived like it's not true. Will you forgive me? And in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have every confidence and complete surety that you do and you will. And we thank you for being that way to us. Praise you for Jesus, our Lord and Savior. It's in his name that we pray. Amen.