

In nine more months Americans will be given another opportunity to choose a new President. There are still eight or more people who feel that they are worthy to lead this country. How will you choose? By their political party? By the promises they make? By the cute factor? Do you prefer a former governor or senator or will you opt for a businessman or a surgeon?

It would be nice to get some divine help on this one. God does not tell us which leaders to choose but He does tell us how to choose our leaders. One of the characteristics of a NT church is exemplary leadership. In Paul's instructions to Titus he implies that if there are no spiritual leaders there is no church. Titus 1:5 gives the reason why Titus is on the island of Crete - "To set things in order" specifically by appointing elders to lead the church.

Leadership is the key to establishing a God-honoring, Jesus-exalting, disciple-making, legacy-leaving church. Most unsolved problems in a church can be traced to ineffective leadership. Fortunately, we have a blueprint for identifying leaders in the church here in Titus 1:5-9. (p. 229 in NT) These 5 verses along with the instructions Paul gave Timothy in 1 Tim. 3, form the foundation of a biblical NT church. I want to go through these qualifications this morning because these qualities are to be found among all of God's people. Some are called to be responsible to lead others but all are called to be under the leadership of Jesus, our Chief Shepherd.

(Read the passage) There are two words for elder used here in these verses: Elder (v. 5) and Overseer (v. 7). Presbuteros is the word assigned to church leaders but episkopos speaks to function. It literally means "to look over" or oversee. There is one more word that is always associated with elders even though it is not in these verses and that is the verb, "to pastor" or "to shepherd." The role of the elders is to shepherd God's people.

Notice that v. 5 indicates that leadership in the church is always plural. There is no layered hierarchy suggested in the Bible. I am not "THE pastor." I am one of the pastors. I am subject to the elders of this church just as I am subject to Christ. As the apostles passed from the scene, it didn't take long before church leadership degenerated into bishops, archbishops and even a Pope who wielded unquestioned authority over the people of God. Loving leadership was replaced by power and privilege and the church suffered. This tendency toward corruption calls for mutual accountability.

I need to also point out that **Elders are men**. This is not because women are incapable of leading. If you accept the biblical account of creation, God created man independent of the woman and gave him a different role than the woman. The evidence for this is fairly convincing and scientific. Nearly 100% of all the people on the planet were given birth by a woman! But the Bible teaches that our biological role is not the only difference between men and women. God created men to lovingly lead their families. This does not imply superiority any more than God the Father is superior to Jesus, God's Son. This does however imply priority. God and Jesus are co-equal yet there is functional subordination within the expression of God's nature that we call the trinity. Jesus submits to the will of the Father without surrendering His deity and His supremacy over all creation. Men are called upon by God to demonstrate loving leadership over their family and, by extension, the family of God.

This servant function is born out by the word "steward" in 1:7. Elders are God's stewards or house-servants. The word literally means to manage a household. One of the tests of an elder is to observe how he manages his own household. In v. 6 we read, "He is to be the husband of one wife having children who believe not accused of dissipation and rebellion." Family life is the most probing analysis of a man's character. It is the proving ground for those who are called to lead the family of God. If you can't manage your own household how can you manage God's household. Elders are men who manage their households well. Paul says to Timothy, "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)." 1 Tim. 3:4-5

Elders are men of proven character. "Above reproach" or "blameless." (vv. 6-7) This does not mean flawless or faultless but it does mean that those who lead the church have a good reputation with MOST people. There is always someone out there who doesn't like you. There is much more emphasis on character than on talent.

The first character quality listed is "husband of one wife." Notice I said character quality. This is not a statement of a man's marital history but a description of how he treats his wife. The word means "one-woman man."

Paul goes on to list 5 "must not's" in v. 7 followed by 7 "musts" in vv. 8-9.
Not self-willed (arrogant) always having to have his way.

Not quick-tempered.

Not “addicted” to wine (given to wine).

Not pugnacious or violent.

Not fond of sordid gain. Not greedy or in it for the money.

Paul is telling Titus to make sure you don't have a bunch of proud, greedy, quick-tempered drunks who are always fighting with each other.

These “must nots” are followed by 7 “musts” in vv. 8-9. He must be:

Hospitable – lover of strangers.

Loving what is good.

Sensible (self-controlled) – makes people feel safe.

Just – righteous (objectively and subjectively) or upright in character.

Made right by the work of Jesus on the cross but on that basis seeking to do right in all my relationships.

Devout – understanding that all of life is sacred.

Self-controlled – disciplined.

Elders are men who “hold fast” the faithful word. Elders care for the church through the teaching of sound doctrine. (v. 9). They have to know what it is and what it is not. Care for the flock is not measured by hugs in the hallway but by the priority placed on a steady diet of the truth. You don't measure the effectiveness of a shepherd by how well he pets the sheep but by how well he feeds them. Jesus taught Peter in a dramatic way that love for the Shepherd always results in the feeding of His sheep. “Peter, do you love me? Then pastor my sheep.” (Jn. 21:16).

Elders will give an account to God for their work. “Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” Heb. 13:17

A church, much like a country, will only be as healthy as its leadership. Elders are accountable to God for their work. When they are careless in their concern for the souls of the congregation the testimony of the church is jeopardized. Likewise, when the congregation is careless in their recognition of elders or fails to honor and respect the work of the elders the resulting chaos weakens the witness of the church. It is for our benefit that the elders are honored and respected for their work. Pray for these men and their wives. Show your appreciation to them for their service to this body.