

# Eldership Is a Good Work

Titus 1:5-12 & 1 Timothy 3:1-7

10:30 AM Halifax: 26 February 2023

## Introduction:

In just a month from now, we will have our annual congregational meeting.

- Over the past few years, we have been praying that the Lord would give us more ruling elders.
- We are currently taking nominations as we look for faithful men to serve.
  - With Elder Ray Silver's relocation to South America, we are especially in need of more men to serve.
  - We were already in need of another man—now this is even more the case.

This being so, I thought it would be good to break from our sermon series in Hebrews and preach a couple of sermons on ruling elders.

- The first sermon will focus on the importance of men in the congregation desiring to serve in this way if the church of Jesus Christ is to flourish...
  - This ought to stir up you men to aspire to the office and it ought to stir you all up to pray more earnestly for God to give us elders.
  - I wonder if one of the reasons that we don't have as many elders as we would desire is because we have not earnestly prayed for it.
  - Does our Lord not say, "You have not because you ask not"? Did He not also command us to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send forth labourers into His harvest? Indeed He did!
- The second sermon (next week) will focus on the qualifications that a man must have if he is going to serve as an elder.
  - Besides the ability to lead and instruct others in the faith, the qualifications are really the qualities of basic Christian godliness that every man ought to have.
  - As we look at them, I hope that you men will be challenged to meet these standards.
    - This sermon will also help all of you in selecting elders, voting for men that meet these qualifications.
    - We will also consider how these qualifications pertain to the letter that Elder Alexander wrote to us related to the apostasy of his oldest child.
      - He has been a faithful elder over the years who has been dear to me, and we want to be confident that we are following God's word when it comes to his continuing service.

The Lord has been very gracious to provide us with ruling elders over the years.

- This is especially significant because in this congregation, we had no ruling elders when the mission began.
  - If I am not mistaken, all of the organised churches in our Presbytery had two or three ruling elders when they began because they were the result of a group of believers breaking away from a church that had become unfaithful.

- Here at Covenant, we had to rely on the Lord to raise up men who were new to the Reformed faith, and who in every case had not served as elders before.
- Our gracious Lord has seen fit to give us fewer than we would desire, but He has always provided us with enough to continue on.
  - We trust His wisdom and His goodness in so ordering our affairs.
  - But it is also our duty to continue to ask Him to give us more men to serve as we seek to do our part in advancing His kingdom in this place...
    - And it is good for you men to aspire to serve if you are so gifted.

We will look at Timothy and Titus where we are instructed about men coming in to the office of ruling elder.

- First, here is God's word from 1 Timothy 3:1-7:

**I Tim 3:1-7: This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. <sup>2</sup> A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; <sup>3</sup> not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; <sup>4</sup> one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence <sup>5</sup> (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); <sup>6</sup> not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.**

- And here is God's word from Titus 1:5-11

**Titus 1:5-11: 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— <sup>6</sup> if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. <sup>7</sup> For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, <sup>9</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. <sup>10</sup> For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, <sup>11</sup> whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.**

Thanks be to God for His holy and infallible word.

- May He convict us and give us understanding and delight as we consider these texts.

**I. I want to point out to you from the outset that there are some important differences between these two passages.**

A. First of all, there is the difference in the reasons these lists are given.

1. The church at Crete (where Titus was) was a mission work.
  - a. Many of the churches there did not yet have elders.
  - b. Therefore, Titus' job was to ordain elders in every city.

- Paul gave him a list of qualifications to guide him and the church in choosing these elders.
2. The church at Ephesus, on the other hand, was fully established.
    - a. Paul had left Timothy there to deal with false teachers who had gained a foothold in some of the churches there—and to deal with some of the problems they had caused.
      - This can be seen in 1 Timothy 1:3 where Paul writes:
        - **“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine.”**
    - b. Timothy had a tough job at Ephesus. He had to deal with men who were already serving as elders, but had become disqualified.
      - He is given a list of qualifications to guide him in determining who is no longer qualified.
      - In chapter 4, Paul reminds him:
        - **“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry,”** etc.
      - Timothy was going to have to deal with these false teachers.
  3. It is important to realise that *both* kinds of work are necessary.
    - a. While the work of bringing in new leaders is always the most pleasant,
      - the work of removing elders that have proven to be unworthy is essential to the life of the church and must not be neglected.
      - There is no such thing as tenure in the Christian church.
    - b. We should not be ashamed to remove elders when it is necessary.
      - 1 Tim 5:24 says:
        - **“Some men’s sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgement, [you see them from the outset] but those of some men follow later.”**
      - God has not called us to read hearts—
        - Just because a man becomes disqualified later on does not mean that we erred in ordaining him in the first place.
          - If he met the qualifications God has given us in scripture, it was right for us to ordain him and he may have served well.
        - But if the day comes that he *no longer* meets the qualifications, the error comes when we don’t remove him.
          - Ligonier does a study on the State of Theology every other year.
          - The results for the study they did in 2022 just came out.

- In that study, they found many concerning things:
  - They found, for example, that 65% of professing evangelicals believe that everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.
  - 56% said that God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.
- How do you think this happened? How did we get to this state?
  - One reason is because elders were allowed in the churches who denied the basic teachings of the faith,
    - just like Hymenaeus and Alexander that Paul mentions,
    - but they were not removed from serving as elders and so their doctrine spread like cancer.
  - Even Paul himself was not ashamed to “deliver these men to Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme”—
    - men that he himself had probably trained and ordained.
      - The Holy Spirit expects us to do the same.
  - Let me be clear: in preaching about this, I am not suggesting that we need to remove anyone, just stressing that if the time comes, we need to be willing do so.

TRANS> So we see that the first difference in Timothy and Titus has to do with the fact that Timothy was dealing with an established church and Titus was dealing with a mission church.

- The second difference I want to point out is also related to this fact.
- B. You will notice that in Timothy, qualifications for deacons are included, but in Titus, there is no mention of deacons at all.
1. The reason is because the need for deacons had not yet arisen in the churches in Crete.
    - a. The first order of business there was to ordain elders.
      - 1) In Titus 1:5, Paul speaks of the appointment of elders as a thing that was lacking at Crete. He says to Titus:
        - **“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.”**
        - These words suggest that if there are no elders, the church is not yet fully established. It is still a mission church.
      - 2) This same thing is seen in Acts 14 where it is recorded that Paul and Barnabas returned to the cities where they had begun to establish new congregations...
        - And what did they do when they returned?
        - They established elders in every church. (Acts 14:23)

- Until this was done, the churches were not yet planted.
2. Elders are essential for a church, but deacons are not necessary until later.
    - a. One reason for this is because the office of elder *includes* or *contains* the office of deacon.
      - It is a principle of scripture that the greater offices contain the lesser offices.
      - For example,
        - The office of apostle includes the office of teaching elder, ruling elder, and deacon.
        - That's why you have Peter referring to himself as an elder, and why he is seen doing the work of a deacon in distributing the church offerings to the needs of the saints in the early chapters of Acts before there are any deacons.
      - In the same way, the office of elder includes the office of deacon, so that an elder is both an elder and a deacon.
    - b. What we see at Crete—no deacons—is what we also see at Jerusalem in the early days.
      - 1) At first, the apostles and teachers at Jerusalem are the ones who are caring for the widows in the church.
        - They were the ones who oversaw the distribution of offerings to minister to their needs.
      - 2) But as the church grew, the task becomes too big for them.
        - So what did they do?
        - Listen to what it says in Acts 6:1-4
          - **“Now in those days, when *the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’”***
    - c. The church at Ephesus (where Timothy was) was different than the church at Crete. It had been established for some time.
      - Paul had laboured there for several years, and the work had flourished.
        - It is not surprising to find that deacons were needed there to help carry the load so the elders could devote themselves to the ministry of the word and prayer.
      - In time, deacons would be appointed at Crete as well, but at the time of the writing of Paul's letter to Titus, the concern was to establish elders first, so deacons are not mentioned.

- Currently, we are stressing the need for another elder because this is our greatest need, but we would be happy to have another deacon as well.
  - We are thankful that though Jason is no longer officially a deacon, he is still willing to do much of the same work unofficially.
- C. The third difference between Paul’s letter to Timothy and his letter to Titus about the qualifications of officers has to do with the prohibition of novices as elders.
1. In 1 Timothy 3:6, we have the words, **“not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride, he fall into the same condemnation as the Devil.”**
    - a. The word translated **novice** here literally means, “a newly planted one.”
      - It was used to refer to actual plants (olive trees for example), but here, Paul uses it figuratively to refer to a new convert.
    - b. The reason given in 3:6 is easily understood—
      - A new convert should not become an elder because of the danger of pride.
      - Here was the great church of Ephesus, planted by the apostle Paul—a church that was an example to many others—
        - There was here a venerable company of elders taught by Paul himself...
          - Is this a place for a new convert to assume the role of elder?
        - There would be a great danger that such a man would become proud!
        - He is not coming on to help out in a struggling new work that can barely keep itself alive—
          - He is coming into a well established, flourishing work!
  2. But this prohibition of a novice cannot be found in the list given to Titus!
    - a. And for good reason!
      - Crete was a mission church!
      - If novices did not serve at Crete, there wouldn’t be any elders!
        - The danger is not in elder novices among novices, but in elder novices among the mature!
    - b. Learn from this the need for flexibility in the church of Jesus Christ.
      - Not everything is always applicable to every situation.
      - When Paul planted mission churches, he did not wait for years before he appointed elders in those churches—novices were used in the early years.
      - Often, elders were ordained within a year.
        - Of course, they did often have some who were Jews that had already been elders in the synagogues, but that was not always the case.
    - c. Here in Halifax, our first elders were men where this was the first reformed church they had been a member of... and they were young men.

- They would have been novices in some of the churches in our Presbytery where more seasoned and experienced men were available, but among us, they were among the most mature members of our congregation.
- Rather than temptation to pride, they were more likely to suffer from discouragement for being insufficient for the task.

D. The fourth difference between Paul’s instructions to Timothy and his instructions to Titus has to do with Paul’s emphasis on the teaching qualification.

1. In Timothy, he simply says, “apt to teach...”
  - but in Titus he says (v. 9),
    - **“holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”**
2. Why is there so little emphasis on this important qualification in 1 Timothy 3?
  - a. You would think if anything there would be *more* emphasis because of the problem with false teaching that had afflicted the church there!
    - How can this de-emphasis be explained?
  - b. Well, rather than *explain* it, I would rather *deny* it.
    - True enough, the actual list in 1 Timothy 3 has little to say...
      - but chapter 3 is not the only chapter in Paul’s letter to Timothy!
    - The reason Paul does not say all that he said in Titus about sound teaching in 1 Timothy 3 is because he has already spoken about it in Timothy.
      - In fact, the whole emphasis of this letter is on the need to uphold sound teaching!
      - Just look again at his opening words in 1 Timothy 1:3-8
        - **“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm. But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully...”**
        - We conclude then that the need for elders to be sound in teaching is just as great (if not greater) in Timothy than it is in Titus.

TRANS> So you can see that the lists in Timothy and Titus are not exactly the same.

- You need to learn how to apply God’s word to a whole variety of circumstances, as Paul does here.
- There are other differences here too—even in the way Paul chooses to present his material.

- For example, in Titus, he emphasised that the elder is a steward, but in Timothy he emphasises that he does a good work...
  - And it is to this that we now turn—that this office is a good work.

## II. You need to see that the office of bishop is a good work.

- v. 1 **“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.”**

### A. Paul tells us that this is a *faithful* or a *reliable* saying...

1. He is quoting a secular proverb—a saying of Plato that is often quoted.
  - a. It was commonly understood in the Greco-Roman world that:
    - **“If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.”**
  - b. The word “bishop” simply means “overseer.”
    - It speaks of someone who “visits” in the sense of coming to inspect and then supply whatever is needed. He has authority to do this.
    - The word was used to refer to everything from governors who oversee a province to midwives who oversee the birth of child. Both were bishops.
    - And the proverb is,
      - **“If anyone desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.”**
      - Being an overseer is a fine thing to do!
2. In 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul is simply applying this proverb to bishops in the church.
  - a. A bishop, of course, is the same thing as an elder...
    - This important truth is brought out clearly in Titus...
    - There Paul uses the terms interchangeably.
      - In verse 5, he tells Titus that he left him in Crete to **appoint elders in every city**,
      - and then, in verse 7, speaking of the qualifications of the elders that Titus was to appoint, he says, **“For a bishop must be blameless.”**
    - So a bishop is simply another name for an elder.
  - b. So in 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul is saying, “I want you to know that serving as an elder in the church is a fine thing to do—it is a **good work.**”
    - Some of the false teachers had made it look like a wicked work—
      - Selfish men make leadership of any kind look like a bad work that no good man would ever want to do!
      - In our society, we have seen so many using offices for personal advancement that it can make us jaded and suspicious—and can cause good men to shy away from pursuing office.
    - Sadly, this was the case at Ephesus!
      - The false teachers and their wicked ways are described in 1 Tim 6:3-5 with these words:



- **“If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means of gain*.”**
- Paul, therefore, reminds Timothy that even though some had done it badly, serving as a bishop is supposed to be a good work.

B. Now I want you to consider how this is so!

1. First of all, serving as a bishop is a good work because it is not just a position, but a work!
  - a. This office is grossly misrepresented by those who look at it as little more than an honorary position!
    - One of the things that greatly contributed to the decline of the church prior to the reformation was the fact that men began to look at the *position* rather than the *duty*.
      - Like the Pharisees in Jesus’ day, they liked to go around with important sounding titles, wearing important looking garb, and doing all kinds of important looking things.
    - They liked to show up for special ceremonies and receive honour from men as they performed fancy religious rituals that God never even appointed...
      - They look silly with there paper hats, walking around gilded altars with smoking incense and bells and speaking unintelligible words.
    - What they didn’t do was the actual work of oversight of the flock!
      - They did not attend to the people’s needs in the church of Jesus Christ that He so dearly loves.
      - This happens in any church when the elders stop caring for the people—they are just playing elder.
      - They see being a bishop as a good position rather than a good work!
        - It’s like the man that wants to be soldier, but doesn’t want to fight.
        - He wants the position, but he has no interest in the work when a war begins! He says, “Hey! When I signed up, there was no war!”
  - b. The office of a bishop is a work the demands sacrifice.
    - An elder who is really doing the work of the ministry will agonise over people’s problems in the congregation as he searches God’s word for solutions, and labours in prayer.
    - He will cry when God’s word is not respected and loved and when Christ is despised and rejected.
    - He will spend hours labouring in the Word to bring it to the people.
    - He will face enemies who will despise him and who will use all manner of craft and deception to try to attack him and discourage him.

- He will do combat with Satan, and with the world as he stands guard over the church, fighting enemies from within and without the congregation.
- He will face situations that end in disaster...
  - He will plant churches that go completely astray...
  - He will have people who ask how they can be saved and who then turn and walk away when they are called to repentance.
  - He will train up Judases who will turn and betray him.
  - He will agonise over church discipline and then be criticized for how he handles it.
- On top of all that, he will know the burden of representing our gracious Saviour and knowing that he always comes short of His gracious love.

TRANS> Serving as an elder is a good work—because it is a hard work of sacrifice—

- Jesus told His disciples that they would be rewarded on account of the hardness of the work, and so, told them that they should not lose heart.
    - Paul instructed the people a Thessalonica to esteem elders very highly for the sake of their work.
    - The Lord is pleased with such work that is done for Him.
  - But of course not all hard work is good work—
    - Some thieves work very hard—especially when they find ways to avoid technically breaking any of man’s laws—but they don’t do a good work...
2. The work of a bishop is a good work because it is such a useful and important work!
- a. The bishop is called to shepherd the church of God that God purchased with His own blood!
- There is no work on earth that is greater than this work.
  - The glory of God the Father and of Jesus Christ is inseparably tied together with what He does with His church.
    - The bishop seeks to bring men and women, and the church as a corporate body, into sweet union with King Jesus, so that the members adore Him, follow Him, become like Him, and so that all they do savours of Him.
  - The bishop is responsible for looking after the church...
    - as a physician,
    - as a steward who distributes food to her,
    - as a manager who sees that everyone fulfils his or her calling,
    - as a guard who fights enemies and protects from enemy attacks that arise from within and without...
  - All this for the most important institution in the world!
    - A man thinks he does a great work when he gives oversight to some great corporation like Toyota or Apple,
    - But this does not compare with looking after the church of Jesus Christ that He purchased with His very own blood!

- b. It is indeed a very high calling, but that very fact is utterly misunderstood if it makes a man high-minded!
- When he realises that he has been appointed by Jesus Christ to (as verse 5 says so well) **“take care of the church of God,”** he ought to cry out like the Apostle: **“Who is sufficient for these things?”**
  - Rightly understood, it humbles a man and sets him to much prayer.
  - He must recognise that he is doing a work that is absolutely impossible for him to pull off without God’s help...
    - He cannot possibly take God’s truth and cause men and women to receive it in their hearts.
    - There is no way for him to bring the gospel of life to a dead man and make him live unless God breathes life into the dead.
    - Every day, he is labouring to accomplish things that are totally beyond his ability.
- C. And because this is such an important and excellent work, it is a work to which men out to aspire.
1. Some of you men have a serious problem. You don’t care about God’s kingdom and about the church of Jesus Christ.
    - Some of you ought to be elders by now, but you are content to remain in the shadows.
    - You have never risen up to take serious responsibility in your homes, to lead your wives and your children in godliness.
    - Sometimes, we even have to poke you about attending church and giving your tithes.
      - The kingdom of God has little importance in your eyes.
  2. The world has had a bad effect on you.
    - It tells you that your natural drives for sex, for taking dominion, for conquering, for pushing for victory—are all evil.
      - This has been drilled into you from your childhood.
      - So you channel your energies as knights of video games, or in sports or even worse in porn or destructive behaviour (like Absalom).
    - Instead of striving to be strong husbands and fathers and leaders in the church and in society, you settle for conquering fantasy worlds and fantasy women.
      - The worst thing of all is that you do not advance the kingdom of God by establishing and leading a wife and children, helping to establish and lead godly churches, and in taking dominion in service through your daily work.
      - Your God-given masculine strength is not used for God’s kingdom and you become either listless and empty or rebellious and destructive.
  3. Gentlemen, we are talking about the kingdom of God!

- We are talking about the calling of our holy God who destroys those who bury their talent and do not invest in His work.
- I have had to repent because in my ministry, I do not believe that I have emphasised the holiness of our God.
  - Our forefathers knew what it was to tremble before Him!
  - They knew that He was not to be trifled with.
  - His work is not a work to simply walk away from.
- The work of an elder is a fine work!
  - There is a desperate need for men to see the importance of this work and to stop dinking around.
  - The excuses need to stop and men need to start living holy lives.

D. What can you do if you have been slack like this?

1. Right here, right now, you can repent.
  - You can look at your sin and your neglect and you can turn from it in disgust.
  - And you can turn from that way of life our precious Saviour Jesus Christ.
2. You can remember what we saw about Him last week in Hebrews—
  - That He is *such* a high priest—Jesus the Son of God!
    - He is a priest with unlimited power, sitting at the right of the Majesty on high where He employes divine power to establish His kingdom and to work on behalf of all those who come to Him for salvation.
    - He is a priest who is the minister of the sanctuary—able to bring us together with our holy God so that we can be holy unto Him.
    - He is a priest who has offered the only sacrifice that can take away our sins—the offering of His own body and soul for our sins—and now He is able to save us to the uttermost because He ever lives to make intercession for us—so that God is glorified in saving us.
    - He is a priest who brings in a better covenant with better promises—the promise that He will write His law on our heart so that we will keep it—the promise that we will know Him and His Father—and the promise that God will forgive our sins and remember our iniquities no more.
3. Our God is a holy God!
  - That’s the reason we have a Saviour like Jesus. No other Saviour will do.
  - And that is the reason that every one of you needs to be serious about your godliness and about service to Christ and His church.
    - There is no place for idleness and indifference.
    - It’s time to run the race.

**Conclusion:**

- Next time we will look at the qualifications for this office.
  - And we will see that they are basically the qualifications of basic godly living.
  - We need to pray that men will rise up to this standard.

- We need to pray that the LORD will give us men to serve here and that He will also raise up elders all across Canada and all around the world.