

A little over 31 years ago... I was completing the pastorate of my very first church. ... I received a call from the general director of an association of churches – which our church had not been a part of. ... He informed me that he was encouraging one of the churches that he oversaw... to contact me. (They needed a new pastor.) ... He described it as a troubled church... and that he thought I might be able to help straighten it out. ... We checked each other out... and I believed that the Lord wanted me there – so I went.

I knew (before I got there) that this church had a 30-year troubled history. (This is the same church that I mentioned a few weeks ago... where the former pastor came to church one morning and heard them announce to the church that they would be having a retirement party for him... in a few weeks. He didn't know that he was retiring... but they decided that it was time for him to leave.)

That church had an authority structure of influential leaders in the small town where it was located. They were successful in the world's eyes: (doctors... wealthy ranchers... businessmen... the city engineer... and a recently retired school teacher – Bill - who had ruled the church for 30 years.) The biblical qualifications for church leaders that are in 1st Timothy and the biblical qualifications for Church leadership listed *in the passage of scripture that we come to today* – had very little to do with who was on the board. Bill would usually make a few phone calls and leadership was all set.

Too often... churches seek the wrong qualities when choosing their leaders. ... They want people with an impressive résumé that demonstrates certain level of status... and influence in the community. (These people will

make the church move forward! – it is assumed.) ... While corporations may want shrewd business minds (full of charisma and wielding powerful sway)... we will see in our passage today that the Lord wants men who conform to a different standard.

Well... in time (at my former church)... we were able to attract new families to the church... who had strong desires for knowing and applying what Scripture teaches... to their lives. (With more frogs in the pond... the croaking of the old guard were not the only sounds in the pond.) ... Bill... the former school teacher... pursued retirement pleasures... and the church was able to have biblical elders appointed to lead the church. – One of them... was the former pastor who had been forced into retirement.

The doctors... wealthy ranchers... businessmen... and retired school teacher left the church and started a new one. Our church had an immediate financial strain... but we were able to pay all of our bills... and we never had to cut any staff.

I served as pastor there a total of 12 years. But I am going to be honest. I let my guard down (I became lax) in an area that I am going to ask for diligence from you... and it is directly concerned with our passage today. (You see) merely having elders in place is NOT ENOUGH. We are about to see... that there is no way a church can have qualified Biblical elders – without the congregation constantly holding them up in prayer. (Your prayers are the greatest need for our church!) God has to give these men His enablement – every day - to manifest the qualities that are described for an elder.

Whoever is leading the church (whether you call them “elders”... “deacons”... “presbyters” – it doesn’t matter) THE CHURCH MUST BE LED BY A TEAM WHO LAY ASIDE THEIR OWN DESIRES AND DILIGENTLY SEEK CHRIST’S WILL FOR THE CHURCH.

When my family and I candidated here in La Pine... in order to see if God was calling us here... I was asked what type of church government I preferred. This church did not have elders at the time. In fact it had experienced an awful church split... when a former pastor tried to change the church into being “elder-ruled.”

I told them that I believe the Bible best supports a church government where elders are appointed... and why I believe that. BUT (and this came from seeing that having elders is not any church’s ultimate answer)... I added... “as long as the church is committed to listening for what Christ – Who is the Head – wants... then I can work with any type of church government.

You see that is what I discovered... in my former church... and that is what our passage today teaches. Church leaders **MUST** be people who can listen... and do listen... to Christ! We will recognize them by their character.

Obviously... I was given the call to come here 19 years ago. When I arrived... our association of churches announced that all of its churches in the Northwest will be “Elder-led” churches. *“Uh... Oh! This church deeply divided over it and many hard feelings still exist among the people about having elders.”* My first sermon series here in La Pine was in Timothy and Titus... because I thought the congregation needed to see what God says

about elders. ... Eventually the idea of elders was accepted... (in fact they were seen as Biblical)... and we changed our constitution here.

We have come a long way in 19 years. My goal extends beyond merely showing you that the idea of having elders is biblical. My hope (today) is to impress upon you the need to pray for your elders. It is a very high standard that our verses set. I thank God for the men that He has raised up as elders for our church. It is a privilege to serve with them. But please pray that we will: always have the right character... listen to God... and implement only what HE wants for our church. We are nothing more than **UNDERSHEPHERDS** for Christ to this church.

Titus 1:5

Perhaps you know (now) why I introduced today's passage the way that I did. ... I can identify (somewhat) with Titus (here.) Paul gives two reasons why he left Titus in Crete. First, "*to put what remained into order.*" ... "*Put in order*" or "*set straight*" comes from the Greek term *orthoō* (which medical writers used to describe the process of setting and splinting broken bones. We get our words "*orthopedics*" and "*orthodontics*" from this word.) "*Straighten out the situation there in Crete, like an orthodontist straightens crooked teeth. ... Make necessary changes, Titus!*" ... This may be a little bit like what the general director had entrusted to me... with my former church.

Second... Titus was left in Crete "*to appoint elders in every town*" as he had been commanded or "directed." Titus was supposed to complete the unfinished business that Paul was not able to complete himself.

Crete was evidently a pretty bad place... and the people were not very good people. Paul himself says that they were liars... and that is certainly the thing for which they were noted in that day. There was a Greek word... *kretizein*... which means to speak like a Cretan and was synonymous with being a liar.

The isolated Christians of Crete struggled to develop stable... productive fellowships. ... Unfortunately... the heavily populated island — known to ancient writers as “*the island of a hundred cities*” — required more time than Paul had to give. ... He initiated the work... and then handed the assignment over to Titus... charging him with two tasks: “*set in order what remains*” and “*appoint elders in every city*”. Titus had been entrusted (by his general director) with a HUNDRED “troubled churches.”

Titus 1:6

Although the list (as it stands in this... and the next verse)... may appear daunting by modern measures... it could have been made far more intimidating. ... Notice that among the Christian leadership qualifications... there are no mountains to climb... no alligators to wrestle... no pilgrimages to make... no prophecies to utter... no ancient manuscripts to decode... no visions to conjure... no tortures to endure... and no miracles to perform. ... The standards for Christian leadership strictly relate to one's example before others. Let's take a brief look at each exemplary matter.

Above reproach - means (literally)... “blameless”... or “without accusation.” ... This is not a requirement for sinless perfection or a pristine past. It's a general assessment of a man's maturity and reputation. ... John Calvin paraphrased this idea as “not marred by disgrace.” ... Any

accusation that is brought against him... must **not** be found to have any substantiation. (I can hear my Southern Baptist preacher friend... Ed Bedrosian... say: "*Mud don't stick to a clean wall!*" ... An elder's life must be above reproach.

(Now) each of the following descriptions in verses 6-8 clarify what "above reproach" means. Elders should be "blameless" (no mud sticks to them) in each of these areas of their life... and the first area is their marriage and family life.

The husband of one wife is a qualification that I took a lot of time on... when we saw this qualification in 1st Timothy. I believe this one is so misunderstood. ... I almost did not become the pastor of this church... because one man on the pulpit committee (who was a graduate from the same seminary that I graduated from)... had a different view than I do on this qualification. He adamantly believed that a man is disqualified for being an elder (by this verse)... if he has any divorce in his life.

Before I candidated here... we debated it vigorously. Finally I asked: "*Why do you want to water-down this requirement... by saying it means he must have no divorce in his life?*" And why are you lifting THIS requirement away from all the others (which are clearly CHARACTER qualifications)... and trying to make this qualification mere a HISTORICAL qualification...? Seeing this as merely a historical issue sets the bar very low.

A man can be a womanizer... lustful... deep into pornography... and even an adulterer... but if he does not have divorce in his marriage history... he meets the qualification – according to your view. But if we see this as a CHARACTER qualification (the SAME way we view all the others on this list)... now we say the man cannot have any of those activities... but

instead... must be perceived as living in honesty... faithfulness... and devotion to only one woman - his spouse. (This is a much higher standard.) It says the elder must consistently live in faithful commitment to one woman. He (even) must be careful about what he puts into his mind and thinks about. ... That is what the phrase Paul used (literally means) – a “*one-woman-man*.”

Men who have suffered divorce (if they meet all the other qualifications... and currently have the character of being devoted to ONE WOMAN) – I believe – can be elders of a church. Let’s not lower this standard.

“His children are believers”... (We are not finished with controversy about these qualifications!) ... Let’s face it. ... Many of the very best Christian families have a child who goes astray (at least for a time.) ... Should the patriarch of (an otherwise) “believing household” be disqualified for having a prodigal child...? ... What are the implications of this qualification in a situation where a son or daughter (as an adult who no longer lives in their household) turns away from the Lord...? Is the father still accountable for his adult child’s decision...?

Let me begin by saying that I do not believe that **“His children are believers”** is the best translation. The problem lies in the meaning of the Greek word “pista.” “*Pista*” can either mean “having believing children” or it can just as easily mean “having faithful children.” (Faithful to what?) Their father’s instruction and discipline. ... You see the word Paul used for “children” in this verse (“tekna”) is only used for **young** children – who would still be in the home... and under the father’s rule.

Paul probably means that the elder's children are to be faithful in obeying the head of the house... when they are still in the home. ... He has the right amount of love and discipline and it shows by their faithfulness to him. (He has figured out how to rule well.) He will need to earn people's faithfulness as a church leader... with the right mixture of love and discipline. ... This makes best sense to me.

Titus 1:7

The first thing to notice is that it is a stewardship.

A steward does not own... but manages all that his master puts into his hands. Perhaps the most famous steward in the Bible is Joseph... who had complete control over all of Potiphar's business and possessions. ... The most important characteristic of a steward is *faithfulness*.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 (ESV)

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

He must use what his master gives him for the good and glory of his master... and not for himself personally (as we see in the parable of the Talents in Luke 16:1-13).

(You may have heard me say this before)... but at our Elder meetings... you will not hear anyone say... "*This is what I want!*" ... Do you know what you are likely to hear... if one of our elders says something like that...? It would probably be responded to... starting off with a little shame... "*So what? Who cares? ... And then... Now... tell us what you suppose Christ*

wants!" ... (You see) It doesn't matter what any one of us want. We are only stewards. It only matters what Christ wants... and we had better be willing to lay aside our own agenda for His.

In order for this to work... exploration must be immediate into what are the Biblical principles that pertain to the matter being discussed. (It doesn't matter what we want. We are just stewards.) It matters what our Master wants. Our job is to discover what that is... and to be His instruments in seeing that it is implemented in HIS church. ... [P A U S E] ...

Next we see (in rapid-fire succession) Paul list 11 character qualities of an elder... growing out of his blameless life... as a God-called steward. The first five listed in verse 7 are negative. The following six in verse 8 are positive.

He must not be "arrogant" (or self-centered and self-interested.) This describes someone who is a proud self-pleaser with no regard for God's will or the needs of others. It is the opposite of being Christ's steward. They act as though they are the owners of the ministry. This is a person who is pushy... and will not take other people's suggestions and criticisms. They try and make sure that they get their own way.

Next... **he must not be quick-tempered**. There is a righteous anger against sin. (Eph. 4:26 tells us to be angry but do not sin.) ... But... you know what...? ... So much of our anger is unrighteous and directed against **people**... instead of sin. ... A righteous man ought to get angry when wrongs are done. Someone has said, "*Temper is such a wonderful thing that it's a shame to lose it.*" Wise counsel, indeed.

Also, **he must not be a "drunkard."** This refers to someone who is given to drink... causing him to lose his mental sharpness and sound judgment. This would also include being high on drugs...

Closely associated with having a quick temper... **he must not be violent...** either verbally or physically abusive or hurtful. ... And the last negative rapid-fire qualification is that **he must not be greedy.** Money... fame... status... are not his motive.

Titus 1:8

"Hospitable" means a "lover of strangers." They help those in need... whether friend or stranger... believer or unbeliever. ... Race... social status... even lifestyle... does not prevent us from loving and helping others.

What sometimes passes for hospitality today (the entertainment of friends and church members... often with the expectation of a return invitation)... is a rather dim reflection of the New Testament concept. The practice of hospitality among Christians was often urgent... sacrificial and risky: urgent because Christians might be forced from homes or jobs with no one to turn to but fellow Christians; sacrificial because material goods were often in short supply; risky because to associate oneself with those who had been forced out meant to identify with their cause. ... Thus hospitality required sacrificial sharing and stretching. ... It was a very practical expression of love - not a source of entertainment.

"A lover of good"—particularly loving virtue or what promotes good for others. ... A man is a good man because he has a good heart and surrounds himself with good things.

"Self-controlled"—controlling drives that lead to impulsive and damaging behavior. "Disciplined" is a synonym. He is disciplined with his time... money... mind... and other resources. ... He must control his eyes... ears... tongue... flesh... appetites... and thoughts - watching where he goes... what he does... says... thinks... eats... hears... looks at... and desires.

There are two additional positive qualifications:

- **"Upright"**—refers to behavior in relation to *people*.
- **"Holy"**—refers to behavior in relation to *God*.

To be "upright" is to be innocent like Christ... even as a sufferer of injustice. An upright man seeks fairness for others but rarely for himself.

To be holy is to cultivate a consistent walk with Christ in which he remains open to change, is ready to sacrifice his own way, and is sensitive to the Spirit's conviction and encouragement.

Titus 1:9

What I see here... is exactly how John Calvin summarized it: An elder needs two voices: one for gathering the sheep... and the other for driving away wolves and thieves.

Pastors must fulfill a positive... and a negative function... in handling the truth. They must encourage by teaching... supporting... and reinforcing people as they follow the truth. ... But Christian leaders must also confront and refute false ideas. They must be confident leaders with plenty of backbone... courage... and doctrinal conviction.

So the elders have a twofold ministry of God's Word: (1) building up the church with "healthy" doctrine, and (2) refuting the false teachers who spread unhealthy doctrine.

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His research made him famous - Max Sherman (a scientist who studies energy efficiency in buildings.) He had examined the effectiveness of various sealants for heating and air conditioning ducts. ... He came up with a startling conclusion (first reported on the Web and then rapidly picked up by the *Wall Street Journal*... the Associated Press... and a host of broadcast media.) ... Sherman's news was that most of the duct sealants on the market work well - with one notable exception - duct tape! ... In just a few days after its application... reported Sherman... duct tape "*failed reliably and often catastrophically.*" ... News show interviews with Sherman contained exchanges such as this:

- Interviewer: "*How did duct tape get its name?*"
- Sherman: "*I don't know.*"
- Interviewer: "*What can you use it for?*"
- Sherman: "*Anything but ducts.*"
- Interviewer: "*Do you use duct tape?*"
- Sherman: "*All the time ... just not on ducts.*"

What made Sherman's duct tape discovery newsworthy (of course) was that the product that our society jokingly refers to "*as the force that holds the universe together*" (while good for many functions)... could not fulfill the one purpose for which it was designed. ... [P A U S E] ...

God has gifted and given to this church men (who I believe) He has designed to be elders. ... Today (after seeing what the qualifications are)... my hope is that God will deeply impress on your heart to pray for us... because we cannot fulfil His purpose for which we have been designed – without His continuous enablement! We will only be good for some things – but not what we were designed for.

The greatest need for our church... is to have elders who God continuously enables to meet these qualifications. Please pray that for us. ... (And) would you (also) pray that we would be men who demonstrate that the Gospel has REAL power...? ... Would you pray that His power would be evident in and through our lives...? ... And (third)... please pray that we would exemplify a life of dying to self that affects others to make it their own way of living...