

The Need of Godly Men in the Church

Part 1 - Titus 1:5-8

What can make a person sick or unhealthy?

If you are like me you probably think about that question the most when you are sick.

All kinds of things can make us sick.

Viruses can do that. Anybody catch a cold in the last six months?

Runny noses, headaches, and sore throats are no fun.

Bacteria, bad food, mold, stress, pollution, and many other things can make us feel under the weather.

When you stop and think about it there are so many things in the world that can make us sick it is amazing that any of us enjoy good health for sustained periods of time.

That is especially true when we consider that our health is also affected significantly if we are lacking certain things as well.

If we fail to take in enough food and water we will quickly become malnourished and dehydrated.

We can become sick if we don't get enough sleep.

According to the National Heart, Lung, and blood institute sleep deficiency is linked to many chronic health problems, including heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, obesity, and depression.

None of that sounds very good and it happens because human bodies are designed to need things and when we don't get the things our bodies need we become unhealthy to one degree or another.

Just like the human body needs a number of things to be healthy, so does the spiritual body of the Church.

That is what the book of Titus is about. The Apostle Paul is writing to his disciple, co-worker, and friend who he had left on an island to minister among the churches there.

He is writing Titus, intending this letter to be read publically in all the churches, to establish the framework for healthy churches.

Very importantly, the letter begins with calling Titus' attention (and ours) to God. It is the LORD Who establishes and sustains the church; therefore, if a church is to be healthy in a biblical sense then it needs to conform to God's design.

That is important for us to have in the front of our minds because it is very easy to fall into the trap of changing God's design for the sake of conforming to the culture around us.

Over the years I have heard several times people say things like, "We can't do that anymore because the world has changed and if we don't change with it then the church will cease to exist."

The reason people think like that is because their beginning point for religion is humanity and that is a recipe for destroying the church.

God does not call His people to conform to the world in fact in Romans 12:2 He specifically says “*Do not be conformed to this world.*”

Knowing and believing that God is the One Who builds and sustains the church frees us to strive to do what He says and in so doing establish spiritually healthy churches.

[Having called Titus’ attention to God Paul proceeds to give instructions about church leaders. He begins with the office of elder. In the bible the terms elder, pastor, and overseer (which some translations call bishop) are interchangeable terms. The position of elder is one of spiritual leadership and authority, the elders are those who are responsible for the spiritual well-being of the church, maintaining sound doctrine, and the authoritative teaching and preaching in the gathered congregation. The apostle makes it clear here in Titus 1:5-16 that having qualified elders is essential to having a healthy church. There are at least six important lessons for us in these verses and I have decided to preach this sermon in two parts. This morning we are looking at **verses 5-8** which give us the first three lessons about the role of elders in the church. Lesson one is this...]

Point #1 – Healthy churches need godly men as elders. (Verse 5)

God has given to believing men the responsibility of spiritual leadership in the church and we will see He has set the standard very high for those who would enter into such a position; therefore, it is the responsibility of every Christian man to pursue holiness with passion.

I know the idea of the position of elder/pastor being restricted to qualified men runs counter to the culture in which we live and so I know that some people, perhaps a number of people, have a hard time accepting this.

I further know that men have often fallen short in leadership throughout the centuries of church history.

On top of that there are many examples of men abusing positions of authority and that has caused a great deal of harm to women and children in the church.

So I appreciate why some might hear God’s instructions on these things and hear it as a means to keep women down.

If that is you this morning I would humbly ask you to make every effort to give this a fair hearing and to try your best to see the goodness of God’s design free from the failings of sinful men.

With that in mind let’s begin together in **verse 5**.

Crete is an island in the Mediterranean Sea that is almost due south of Greece.

The only other time the island is mentioned in the Bible is when Paul is on a ship headed to Rome to make his appeal before the emperor and Luke doesn’t say anything about Paul going ashore and ministering to the people.

So we have very few details concerning Paul’s ministry on the island.

Whenever the ministry had happened it would seem that it was both brief and fruitful.

It must have been brief because Paul says here that he left Titus to ‘put what remained into order’.

The sense of the original language here is that there were things lacking in the churches on the island. Essential things that are necessary to the life of the church but that Paul did not have time to personally establish.

One of those things, likely the most important thing because it is specifically mentioned here, is the appointing of elders.

Notice it says, that Titus is to appoint elders in ‘every town’ which means there has been more than one church established on the island which means people had believed the message of the gospel in multiple places.

While Paul’s ministry was fruitful in producing converts he knows full well that healthy churches need more than new converts, they need to have people to take on the responsibility of spiritual leadership in the church.

That takes some time to develop and that is especially true when all the church members are relatively new believers.

That is why Titus has to stay behind to continue the process of discipleship and to see who would be well suited to lead in the church.

It is also important to notice here that he says to ‘appoint elders’ plural rather than singular.

The bible says there is wisdom in a multitude of counselors and so it is with elders in a church.

When multiple godly men work together and agree together it is good for the health of the church.

If the church has no godly men to serve as elders its health will be poor.

[How many of you have ever heard of something called scurvy? It is a sickness that was fairly common among sailors in centuries past because they would have to go long periods of time without fruit or vegetables. Scurvy happens when your body is running very low on vitamin C. It can cause anemia, exhaustion, spontaneous bleeding, limb pain, swelling, and sometimes ulceration of the gums and loss of teeth. None of that sounds very nice and it all happens because there is the lack of an important vitamin.]

That, I think, is the apostle’s concern for these churches.

They are like boats that are starting out on a long journey and if they don’t get what they need the people are going to end up in a really unhealthy place.

I believe this is extremely relevant for our own day.

Our culture in many ways has devalued the role of men in our society which in turn encourages immaturity and irresponsibility and at least some of that has worked its way into the life of the church.

It is impossible to have a healthy church if men are unwilling to strive for maturing in their faith and holiness.

It is impossible to have a healthy church if men are unwilling to take on their god given responsibilities.

[One of those responsibilities is eldership. Someone might be thinking, “Wait a minute there is nothing in verse five about the office of elder being the responsibility of men in the church so why are you saying that pastor?” Well as we get into the qualifications it seems pretty clear Paul is saying this is the responsibility of men and if we look at other passages in Scripture like 1Corinthians 14 and 1Timothy 2-3 it becomes hard to see it any other way without disregarding what God has said in His Word. My sincerest hope is that we would have eyes to see the goodness of God’s designs. He does not intend these things to keep women down, but like all He designs He intends this for the good of all. That is very clear as Paul gives to Titus the qualifications for being appointed an elder in the church. In verses 6-7 we see this qualification...]

Point #2 – Godly elders lead godly homes. (Verses 6-7a)

Christian leaders, particularly elders, are to be consistent in every area of life and should be happy to have that examined by the people of God.

Verse six begins with the words, “If anyone is above reproach...”

That means being able to have your life put under a thorough examination and have no reason found that would disqualify you from serving as an elder.

The first place of examination is in the home.

Look with me at what it says. It says the individual must be **“the husband of one wife.”**

There are several opinions on how to take this phrase.

Some take it to exclude single men from serving as elders. That is probably unlikely given that Paul himself was single and actually celebrates people who are single and wholly devoted to the service of the gospel.

Some take it to exclude anyone who has been divorced for any reason.

It definitely excludes men with more than one wife or men who kept concubines which happened more frequently in the ancient world than it does today.

Likely, the best way to take the phrase is as an expression of sincere faithfulness to the covenant of marriage being between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Because this is likely a general phrase, I have to concede that Paul is probably not intending this to cover every imaginable scenario for divorce and remarriage.

For example, if a man is divorced before he even becomes a believer, but following his conversion is an exceptionally godly husband for a long period of time is he qualified to be an elder?

This phrase may leave open a possibility like that, but we need to be clear here that the apostle is not looking for exceptions.

We must be deeply concerned about our society's expendable view of marriage making its way into the church. If we treat divorce and remarriage as no big deal for the sake of filling positions of leadership we are in big trouble as a church. We should not be looking for reasons to explain away the high standard put down for us here.

Ephesians 5 says that marriage is a picture of Christ and the church, so it stands to reason that an elder's faithfulness to God's design for marriage is critically important to the life of the church.

If you are not faithful to your wife, you will not be faithful to the bride of Christ.

Next, he speaks of children in the home. (**Verse 6**)

Again this phrase has generated all kinds of opinions among commentators.

Does this mean an elder's children must be professing believers? Does it apply to adult children or only to children living under the roof of their father?

The word translated "believers" can also be translated as *faithful, reliable, or trustworthy*.

Since saving faith is a work of the Holy Spirit and because it fits better with what Paul says at the end of this verse as well as the qualifications for an elder given in 1 Timothy 3:4 I'm inclined to think that Paul is saying that an elder must be a good father who is leading his children toward godliness and good behaviour rather than a guarantee that they possess saving faith.

In other words he is loving and leading his family well.

Why would that be a requirement? He tells us in **verse 7**.

A 'steward' is someone entrusted with the possessions of another person.

It is the job of a steward to manage and care for what belongs to his Master.

In this case it says that the 'overseer'/'elder' is God's steward.

Paul is rightly seeing the church as God's household and he is seeing the elder/pastor/overseer as someone God is entrusting with His people.

The reason why he looks to a man's house is because a Christian man should see himself as God's steward in his home.

A man's wife does not belong to him, nor do his children.

They belong first and foremost to the LORD and God cares very deeply about how they are treated, just as He cares very much for His people in the local church.

If a man is serving God well at home there is a good chance he will serve well in the church and if a man's home life is a disaster he has no business leading in the church.

[Back when I was an electrician working for a fairly big electrical contractor in the city of London I happen to have a conversation with my boss about people he liked to hire. He said to me if he saw 'farmer' on a resume he would hire them immediately. I asked, "Why is that?" He said, because

farmers are usually hard workers and they are good at figuring stuff out. He could see that the qualities necessary to work on a farm transferred well to the construction site.]

That is the idea here.

The qualities that make a man a godly husband and father are the same qualities necessary to care for God's people in the church.

No elder/pastor should be fearful of his wife and children being interviewed about the kind of man he is.

If there are problems and failings at home no man aspiring to live a godly life should want to plunge himself into church leadership.

It takes a great deal of courage to say, you know what I have to get my house in order before I can be considered to be an elder.

It is the height of foolishness for a church to gloss over concerns simply to fill a position and it will lead to nothing but heartache and turmoil.

[I believe one of the greatest needs in the church today, if not the greatest need, is for men to love their wives and children in a Christ like way. Men, if you are a husband and father God has placed a glorious call on your life and by His grace depending on the Holy Spirit you can answer it to the glory of God. Many of you are striving for that and I praise God for you. The Lord needs to kick some of you in the pants and I pray He will because your family needs you and so does the church. You might say ok, I want to answer the call what does it look like? That is a great question and we are given the answer in the next verse and a half as we are given a third lesson about elders in the church. The lesson is that...]

Point #3 – Godly elders demonstrate moral excellence. (Verses 7b-8)

Every believer is called to think, feel, do, and say what is right in every circumstance of life and it should be plain to all that leaders in the church have made significant and sustained progress in doing so.

The list we are given of moral qualities here are divided into two lists.

The first list gives us what the pastor/elder/overseer should not be (**verse 7b**)

No doubt we could think of several other sinful behaviors that would disqualify someone from serving as an elder, but the ones listed here are enough to give us a sense of the moral standards that are required.

An elder should not be 'arrogant', the NAS translates this as 'self-willed'.

The idea here is to think that you are above correction, that no one else has the right to question you, or challenge your authority.

No pastor should ever utter the words, "who are you to question me?"

Everyone has that right and an elder should have humble confidence in what he believes and teaches, he should be willing to set before the church at any time his convictions on any matter and be open to correction from the scriptures.

He should not be 'quick tempered'.

This is someone who is easily provoked and quick to get angry.

This is more than an occasional losing of one's cool (although that is certainly not good) this is consistent pattern of behaviour.

That is a form of intimidation, it is a way to try and control people through fear and it not the way of a godly man.

Not a 'drunkard'. This, I believe, applies to any mind or mood altering substance. A godly man does not surrender his self-control to drugs or alcohol.

Not 'violent'. A godly man uses his strength to protect people not hurt them.

Of course there may be occasion when protecting people means having to physically restrain or even physically harm someone intent on harming someone else, but the intention there is saving people not harming them.

Not 'greedy for gain'. Being motivated by money robs a man of his integrity. Jesus teaches us that a man cannot have two masters and a godly man will consistently seek first the kingdom of heaven.

In verse 8 he gives us another list of what the pastor/elder should be. Again not exhaustive but enough to let us know what we should be striving towards.

'Hospitable' someone who welcomes and cares for people wherever possible.

'A lover of good'. This is someone who sees and enjoys the goodness of God's ways. He pursues righteousness because he wants to out of his love for the LORD rather than fear of punishment or an attempt at self-justification.

'Self-controlled'. A man who can govern the desires of his sinful flesh and not easily give into whatever temptation passes through his heart or mind.

'Upright'. A man of integrity. Someone who tells the truth and does what is right even when it is costly and hard.

'Holy'. A man who understands he belongs to God by faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

A man who sees himself as being set apart for the glory of God.

'Disciplined'. A man who works at pursuing God in a determined way.

Hopefully, most of us are saying, "Hold on a minute, aren't all Christians supposed to be not doing the things forbidden here and doing the things commanded?"

Yes we are! Paul's point here is not to say that only elders have to be striving for these things, he is saying that elders have to demonstrate their lives are actually characterized by these things.

[Imagine for a moment that you are selecting a team to run a relay race of five legs at 10km each. If you want to do well in that race are you going to pick a team of people who have watched a bunch of 10k races on youtube or a team of people who have actually run a bunch of 10k races. Of course you are going to pick the runners because they are the ones who are going to get you to the finish line.]

That is what this text is driving at as it concerns elders in the church.

How can a man lead other believers to a place he himself has never been?

If we preach a life changing gospel and the preacher is not changed by it then how can he help others?

You say, "Wow the bar is pretty high!"

Yes it is and we will see next week there is more to come and every man in this room who loves Jesus should be aiming for it!

Too many of us will look at this text and say, "I could never do that so I'm not even going to try!"

Don't think like that! That is how godless and faithless men think.

The Christian man sets his heart on things above and trusts the LORD with the outcomes.

It is true not every man will be an elder/pastor/overseer, but if every Christian man was striving to meet the qualifications our homes and our church would be far better off.

Imagine what it would be like if every man who claimed to love Jesus pursued these qualities with passion!

I ask you, does that sound like a group of men out to keep women and children under their thumb?

Not at all. Instead it sounds like men who would lay down their lives in the service and protection of everyone under their care to the glory of God.

Listen brothers, this is possible! Each and every one of you by the grace of God can grow in all these things and if we do the world will see and know more of the glory of King Jesus.

There is a great need in the church of every age and ours is no exception. In fact, I think a case could be made that we have as great a need in our own time as in any other in the history of the church.

The need is for godly men. If we have godly men as elders the church will be healthy because it will mean men are leading godly homes where wives and children are loved, served, protected and provided for. It will mean that men are striving for moral excellence which benefits everyone.

I long for the day when there is an abundance of men qualified to be elders, what a great day that will be.