

## The Need of Godly Men in the Church

Part 2 – Titus 1:9-16

Over the years I have spent a fair bit of time in the kitchen.

For a while we had a bit of a tradition of Saturday morning breakfast in our house.

I would make pancakes (at first from a box, but later on from scratch), sometimes waffles, and usually we would have some bacon and eggs as well.

I am also no stranger to making supper.

Tacos, pasta, stir fry, tuna casserole, and BBQ are staples in my culinary repertoire.

I have also been known to branch out into baking on occasion as well.

I've make some bread, pizza crust, cakes, and some pastries.

One of the things I enjoy about being in the kitchen is the process of following a set of instructions which produces a desired result.

There is just something satisfying about things going according to plan and having something enjoyable to show for it.

Sometimes though things don't always go according to plan.

On more than one occasion I have set out to make something to discover that I don't have all of the ingredients that the recipe calls for.

Has that ever happened to anyone else?

Because my knowledge of such things is fairly limited, when I run into a situation like that I turn to a small electronic device that sits on our counter and say the phrase, "Hey Google!"

I say, "Hey google what can I use as a substitute for..."

There are all kinds of substitutes for butter. You can use margarine, cream cheese, yogurt, mayonnaise, olive oil, and the list goes on.

For eggs you can use applesauce, tofu (never tried that one), buttermilk, cornstarch, and more.

Sugar can be replaced with honey, maple syrup, molasses, and alike.

On the occasions where I have been left trying to find a substitute for and ingredient I have learned that some substitutes are better than others.

Some things work fairly well and give a close approximation to the normal recipe and others produce something that is quite different from what in intended.

Some things have no direct substitute.

If you try to replace baking powder with just baking soda things may look the same but they won't taste the same.

What you find is that the further you get away from what the recipe calls for the further you will get away from the desired result.

That is a good illustration for what we are talking about this morning in God's design for the church.

We are continuing from last week's reflection on the need of godly men in the church to serve as elders/pastors/overseers.

We saw three lessons last week from Titus 1:5-8.

Lesson #1 is that '*Healthy churches need godly men as elders.*'

Lesson #2 is that '*Godly elders lead godly homes.*'

Lesson #3 is that '*Godly elders demonstrate moral excellence.*'

There is are no substitutes for these things and I believe it is the call of God on the life of every Christian man to strive for these things.

It is a high bar that the apostle sets for the office of elder/pastor, and though no man is perfect, the church ought to be able to see these qualities visibly present in the lives of its leaders.

[There is no substitute for these things and there is also more to be considered. There are three more lessons for us in **Titus 1:9-16** about the qualifications of an elder. These things are a package deal which is very important to see because it is tempting to tolerate failings in one area because of success in another. That is a huge mistake that we need to do all we can to avoid. I believe Paul places the need for godliness, the need to lead well in the home, and the need for moral excellence first because they lay the foundation for the next three qualifications. So without leaving those things behind let's look at the fourth qualification given to us in verses 9-11. This is the qualification...]

**Point #4 – Godly elders know, believe, teach, and defend sound doctrine. (Verses 9-11)**

The most important task of a pastor is to give the people of God good spiritual food from the word of God, which he himself loves, for the purpose of keeping them safe from teaching that leads to destruction.

Look with me at the beginning of verse 9 (stop at 'taught')

The sense of the original language of the phrase 'hold firm' here is a consistent and constant holding on to.

This is more than barely hanging on to something, this is a firm grasp with an understanding that holding on is extremely important.

[Think of it like falling out of a boat in the middle of the lake and being left behind with only a life ring. When you take hold of that life ring you hold on to it because you know how important it is to your life.]

That is the kind of holding that is in view here, but instead of holding onto an object the requirement is to hold on to ‘the trustworthy (some translations say faithful) word as taught.’

The word there is without a doubt the word of God and ‘as taught’ almost certainly means as taught by the apostles of Christ.

Listen, the bible is not a book open to any interpretation someone might think up.

God through His servants has been very clear on every major doctrine of the Christian faith which is essential to salvation and a godly elder is to hold those things firmly in his mind.

Now how can he do that if he does not know what they are? He can’t.

Therefore, knowing good theology is necessary to being an elder.

*Why is that important? He tells us in the next part of verse 9 (“so that...sound doctrine”).*

He needs to hold fast to the word taught so that he can teach it to others.

An elder ought to be able to teach people the important truths of the Christian faith.

He needs to be able to explain who God is, who we are, how people can get right with God, he needs to be able to explain the importance of Jesus life, what He accomplishes on the cross, what His resurrection from the dead means for us, the elder needs to show people that the Bible is God’s word and how to handle it rightly.

This says nothing about charisma or having a flashy or memorable presentation, the first priority here is to knowing and saying what is right.

At the end of verse 9 we are given a second reason for the elder to ‘hold firm to the...word as taught’. **(Verse 9b-11)**

*The need to ‘rebuke those’ who ‘contradict’ sound doctrine has remained steady down through the centuries and I am sorry to say that there seems to be an enormous supply of such people in our own time and our age of information and media has made it very easy for such people to gain a hearing from all sorts of people.*

The elder/pastor has to be able to recognize teaching that will lead people to spiritual ruin and rebuke it, showing from the scriptures why it is wrong.

[Did you know the Greek word we translate as pastor is the same word translated as shepherd? The job of a shepherd makes for a good illustration for the task of an elder. A shepherd has to know his trade to care for his sheep. He has to be able to feed and water his sheep and he has to be able to defend his sheep from things like wild animals and thieves.]

It has been my experience that most men see this as a stumbling block.

The thought of public speaking terrifies most people, myself included!  
According to multiple websites including Forbes magazine 75% of people have some level of fear of public speaking.

Listen, being afraid is no excuse for disobedience. Being nervous doesn't automatically mean you are unable to teach.

It is an easy out to say, "I don't have the gift of teaching" or "I don't know enough to serve as an elder."

That may really be true, but my guess is there are likely more than a few people who say that without ever having put any significant effort into trying.

*Men, leading our families and striving for moral excellence requires work.*

It requires work getting to know the word of God and to hold on to sound doctrine.

If you have been a Christian for many years and have put little to no effort into knowing your bible, I urge you to repent of that sin.

Everyone in this room should be reading through the bible cover to cover on a one to two year plan.

That takes fifteen minutes to a half an hour a day for 5 days a week and that is if you are a slow reader.

If you have thought of yourself as a Christian for many years and are still struggling with the basics of who Jesus is and what He has done for us, I want you to seriously ask yourself, "Have I been lazy regarding my faith?"

If the answer is yes, I am pleading with you to get to work.

Take a crack at reading some good books on theology and/or start listening to some good podcasts.

[I don't know if you will ever serve as an elder/pastor/overseer, but I do know that the Bible says, "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task." Don't begin with excuses, begin with effort and believe that however far you get will be for your good, the good of your family and the good of the church which is all for the glory of God. That brings us to the fifth lesson about godly elders which is...]

**Point #5 – Godly elders give no ground to godless culture. (Verses 12-14)**

Men who love and serve the Lord are unwilling to look past evil because it happens to be commonly accepted in the society that surrounds the church.

*Verse 12 into the first part of verse 13 give us a sense of what the culture on the island of Crete was like in the ancient world (Verse 12-13a).*

We know from other parts of the Bible that Paul had a substantial education in his younger years and through that he was exposed to some Greek writing and philosophy.

He draws on that knowledge here as he is advising Titus on how to deal with the situation on Crete.

Scholars are somewhat divided on who exactly Paul is quoting because more than one Cretan philosopher said something along these lines.

What is clear is that whoever said this was from the island and had become fairly well known in the academic world.

That means this reputation of the Cretans would have been widely known and accepted in the Greek world and it was not a good reputation.

“Always liars” which would mean the word or promise of the average person in this society could not be trusted.

“Evil beasts” according to commentator Donald Guthrie indicates that by and large they were a malicious and uncivilized in their dealings and morality.

“Lazy gluttons” speaks of their greed and selfish nature.

*Thinking about this description the image of a pirate came to mind and Paul agrees with their philosopher, he says, “This testimony is true.”*

This is a society that is living out the fruit of godlessness and churches have been planted in that society.

Knowing that is the case the apostle gives Titus this instruction (**verse 13b-14**).

He is unwilling to accept that the culture on Crete is just the way it is and the church should just go along with it.

These things may be acceptable as a Cretan but they are not ok as a Christian.

So he says to Titus and also those being appointed as elders to ‘rebuke sharply’ these culture norms because they are contrary to the faith.

That is really important to see here. The rebuke of a godly leader in the church is to come from a heart of concern for the wellbeing of the one in need of correction.

*There is no eagerness here to beat people down.*

There is no hypocrisy or self-righteous condemnation.

There is a recognition that bad things are bad for people and that giving ground to cultural evil puts people in danger of believing wrong things and it is impossible to believe wrong things without turning away from the truth.

Godly elders have to be governed by the word of God rather than cultural trends.

[About twelve years ago I was at a gathering pastors newer to the occupation that was intended to give us some helpful guidelines for ministry. In one of the sessions the leaders brought up the subject of pre-marital counseling. He said that the vast majority of couples he was counseling were living together as though they were already married. He just shrugged his shoulders and said, “It is not like it used to be, we just have to accept the way things are.” That was extremely disappointing to hear.]

The idea that we should accept godless behaviour because that is just the way things are is a terribly destructive lie.

It is a perspective of unbelief. It is a way of saying we don't believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to change the hearts of people.

It is better to not perform a wedding then to give into evil.

It is better to have people angry with you then to go along with things that are harmful to them.

The elder must do all he can to avoid being tossed back and forth by cultural norms, he must do all he can to stand on the word of God, by the grace of God, out of love for the people of God.

[I think it is fair to say that a Christian worldview and Christian ethics are increasingly out of step with western civilization. I also think it is fair to say that many churches have more in common with our culture than they do with sound biblical doctrine. This has not happened overnight, although I think it has been greatly accelerated in recent years. It has happened a little at a time, by accepting godless things as normal. We need to fight against that drift and make decisions based on the Scriptures rather than tradition or culture. That brings us to one more lesson about the need for godly men in the church. *Healthy churches need godly men as elders, godly elders lead godly homes, godly elders demonstrate moral excellence, godly elders know, believe, teach, and defend sound doctrine, godly elders give no ground to godless culture, and lastly...*]

**Point #6 – Genuine godliness comes from the heart rather than ritual. (Verses 15-16)**

Food, clothing, lighting candles, reciting memorized prayers, and alike are all powerless to make someone love and serve the LORD. Only a changed heart can do that.

*It is clear from Paul's mention of the “circumcision party” in verse ten and his reference to “Jewish myths” in verse fourteen that a significant part of the theological issues that the elders in the church would need to confront had to do with people using things that could be associated with Judaism to undermine the truth of the gospel.*

One of the big issues that the early church wrestled with is the issue of the rights and rituals in the Old Testament.

Circumcision was no doubt at the top of the list. A significant group of Jewish people who became part of the early church believed that the gentiles had to take the sign of the covenant of Abraham to be saved, but God made it clear by the

Holy Spirit indwelling gentile believers that faith alone in Christ alone is what makes a person right with God.

Even though the LORD had made that clear, there were those who refused to accept it and many went beyond the need of circumcision and were teaching people that they needed to adopt the dietary laws and the cleansing rituals in order to be right in the eyes of God.

If you read through the Mosaic Law you will find the words ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ used many times.

That is likely what Paul is referring to here when he uses the words ‘pure’ and ‘defiled’.

Being ‘clean’/‘pure’ means that a person is fit to fully participate in the life and worship of the community of the people of God.

‘Unclean’/‘defiled’ means a person is unfit to participate and needs to be isolated and needs to go through a cleansing ceremony before they can participate in the life and worship of the community.

*God gave Moses a very long list of things that make people ‘unclean’/‘defiled’ and detailed instructions on washings and rituals to become ‘clean’ again.*

If we are going to understand what is being taught here in verses 14-15 then we need to understand why God gave all those instructions.

He gave those instructions to give people a clear picture that He is holy and we are not!

He gave those instructions to show people that we need to be made ‘clean’/‘pure’, but no matter how much we do we can never solve our own problem.

He gave those instructions to point us to Christ and His the cleansing power of His blood shed for our sins.

That is why Paul can say at the beginning of verse 15, “*To the pure all things are pure*”

When Jesus makes you clean, there is no external thing that can make you unclean in the sight of God.

[One of the coolest examples of this is Jesus healing of a leper. Leprosy is a terrible disease that results in disfigurement. Leprosy and skin diseases made a person unclean according to the Law of Moses, and everything a leprosy person touched also became unclean. When a leper comes to Jesus and asks for healing do you know what Jesus does? He reaches out and touches the leper. That was unthinkable for a Jewish man because it would make him unclean, but with Jesus something else happens. He doesn’t become unclean, the leper becomes clean. What He does for that leper physically, He does for everyone who believes on His Name spiritually.]

Now listen to what is written here in **verses 15-16**.

Clearly there were people who were teaching the Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were not enough to make a person 'pure'.

They were teaching that things like food, clothes, and cleansing rituals are still needed to make people 'clean'.

Look again at what it says about that kind of thinking? It says for people who believe that, 'nothing is pure'.

Why? Because trusting in those things is rejecting the cleansing power of Christ and how can an action or belief be pure if it is showing contempt for the Son of God?

They say the "know God but they deny Him by their works."

*This is what Jesus is driving at when He teaches His disciples about 'clean' and 'unclean' things in Mark 7:18b-23.*

The problem is not external things, the problem is our hearts that desire evil things.

No amount of washing rituals, sacrifices, wearing the right clothes, or eating the right foods can do a thing cleanse us from evil and change our hearts.

Only the power of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit can do that.

When our hearts are changed, when we trust in Christ alone to make us 'pure', then we are free to pursue genuine godliness to the glory God and the good of others.

A godly man, one fit to serve as an elder, knows that down to the very depths of his soul.

He knows the transforming power of the grace of God.

*The church needs men like this.*

The church needs godly men to serve as elders.

Men who lead godly homes, men who demonstrate moral excellence, men who know, believe, and defend sound doctrine, men who give no ground to godless culture, and men know their need of the power of God to change their hearts.

May God in His mercy revive our hearts brothers so that we might enjoy the blessings of loving and serving the bride of Christ.