

Titus 1:9-16 - The Work of the Elder - Part 1

Introduction: We are continuing on in our series on Bridwell Heights Presbyterian Church's mission statement - the section: "strengthening individuals and covenant families." Individuals and covenant families are strengthened through the use of the means of grace that come through biblical worship. The lost are saved by the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, and the saved are sanctified through the exposition of the Word of God with Christ as the center of all biblical exhortations. The means of grace are dispensed in the church through the teaching and ruling elders. We had a sermon on the biblical basis for a presbyterian form of church government. And we've thus far had two sermons on the qualifications of elders from 1 Timothy 3:1-7. It was heavily emphasized last week how great a need there is for the individual members of local churches to have a thorough understanding of these qualifications *because they are the ones who both nominate and then elect their own elders*. The Biblical way of church government is not hierarchical, it is from the ground up! Who will be your pastor and who will be your elders - and your deacons? *It is up to you*. And thus, your responsibility as members of the local church is *very great*. The future health of the church is very much tied up with your ability to apply the biblical qualifications to the men in your church and to make wise, informed, and biblical decisions about who is nominated and elected to serve in these all-important offices.

This morning we begin an exposition of the duties of the office of elder. Once you have men who meet those qualifications - they are godly, approachable, hospitable, peaceable, able to teach, and manage their homes well, ***what are they supposed to do in this office?*** That is our subject now as we begin by walking through Titus 1:9-16.

1. A Defender of The Faith - V9-11; 2. A Defender of Biblical Godliness - v12-13;
3. A Defender of Christian Liberty - v14-16

1. A Defender of The Faith - V9-11

[9] 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.

Point: The ruling or teaching elder must "hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught."

This means he cannot be forgetful or rusty in his knowledge of Scripture and of our Confession of Faith. The term translated: "Holding fast" is being used here in the same way Jesus used it in this passage:

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will **be loyal** to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Application: There must be that kind of loyalty and attachment to the "faithful word" he was "taught."

Point 2: The purpose for this loyalty is made clear in the second part of the verse (9), ***that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.***

Illustration: Why is doctrine and theology so very important? Why is it important enough to make a man take 106 semester hours, write answers to 136 essay questions, endure 2 hours of questions from an examinations committee, and then 90 minutes of questions from every minister and some ruling elders in a presbytery? **Answer:** *Because what we believe and teach will determine whether or not we and our hearers go to heaven or hell - there is nothing more important about you than what you believe about God, man, morality, destiny, sin, grace, salvation, justification, and the purpose of history.*

1 Tim. 4:16 Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

Illustration: What do you say to a professing Christian who says, “Ya know, I just don’t really get into all this doctrine and theology... it doesn’t really interest me.” To say that you have no interest in theology or doctrine is, in effect, to say that you don’t have any interest in God.

Application: Think about how serious it would be if there was a man nominated to be an elder in the church - and we found out later that he did not believe in the full deity of Jesus Christ? What if the guy is just the nicest, warmest, most hospitable man with a well-run family, a great marriage, and a very zealous prayer and evangelistic life. **But**, he doesn’t think Jesus is fully God and does not affirm the biblical doctrine of the Trinity?

Application 2: He must be able to teach sound doctrine - and to teach sound doctrine you have to *know and believe sound doctrine*.

Application 3: He must also be able to *convict or refute* people who contradict sound doctrine. He must be good at apologetics - defending sound doctrine against error.

Why *must* the elder hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught that he might be able, by sound doctrine, to exhort and convict those who contradict? V10-11 tell us:

[10] For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, [11] whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.

Point: False teachers and purveyors of false doctrine are everywhere all the time. Notice, there are “many” who do all the things described here. “Especially those of the circumcision.”

Point 2: Who are “the circumcision” - Jewish believers in Jesus as the Messiah who added circumcision to faith in Christ as the means of justification before God. Paul, in inspired Scripture, in the book of Galatians, is very angry and gets at points downright ugly in denouncing them as being under the very curse and eternal condemnation of God for this error.

Application: The correct knowledge of God revealed in Scripture is always in need of defense. As I’ve said before and will emphasize again now, the single greatest danger that the church of Jesus Christ faces at any moment is not persecution or harassment from without, it is **deception**.

Application: Paul warned the church at Rome:

Romans 16:17-18 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. [18] For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech **deceive** the hearts of the simple.

Point 3: Notice from v11 - “whose mouths must be stopped” - the elders must silence them by “refuting” their false teaching from God’s Word. “Who subvert whole households” - false teaching destroys not just individuals, but who families.

And so, the elder’s duty is to hold fast to the truth - he must be a Bible-man and a sound theology man. He needs to always be reading good theology - reviewing the confessional standards of the church - reading good books on theology - and reading, memorizing, and praying through God’s Word on his knees. Why? So he can exhort the sheep of Christ with sound doctrine, and also refute and silence those who bring false doctrine.

2. A Defender of Biblical Godliness - v12-13

[12] One of them, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” [13] This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,

Point: Among these “insubordinate, idle talkers, and deceivers” were some who said (v12

above).

Point 2: Although it may be a bit of a harsh and a blanket statement to make about Cretans, v13 tells us that this testimony is true.

Point 3: Remember, Titus had been left in Crete among these people to set in order the things there and to appoint elders in each city as Paul had commanded him. So, Titus was ministering in an area that was filled with moral vices like the ones described here.

Point 4: There is such a thing as moral heresy. Gross immorality must be “rebuked” by the elders. Remember, these are the duties of the elders - to rebuke those who are liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.

Matthew Poole comments: “Epimenides, a Greek poet, thus spoke of the people of this country, whom he calls a prophet, because he was a poet, and wrote something about such divine oracles as they had. Said, The Cretans are always liars : the Cretians were famous for lying and falsehood, so as it became a proverb. He called them evil beasts, either for their cruelty or treachery. Slow bellies; a lazy, idle people, that had much more inclination to eat and drink than they had to work in any honest labour. From all this the apostle would infer, that Titus had the more need be watchful in his place, and faithful in the discharge of his office, being amongst such a people.”

Application: What are the vices of our day, our society, our culture? These are things we must be aware of and be willing to rebuke and encourage people to rise above them.

⇒ **Pornography**

⇒ **Laziness** - we have the highest percentage of people on welfare right now that we’ve ever had.

⇒ **Sexual immorality and perversion** - our culture is saturated with it and thus it is a problem

⇒ **Divorce** - we must uphold and speak as highly as we possibly can about the sanctity, privilege, and dignity of marriage.

⇒ **Rejection of children** - America is at the lowest birth rate ever. 1/3 of children conceived on American soil are aborted and now we’re seeing a shortage of children for people wanting to adopt.

⇒ **Mental laziness** - entertainment has almost completely ruined our ability to sustain a thought about truth for more than 5 minutes at a time.

⇒ **Feminism** - the rejection of biblical gender roles.

Application: Couldn’t we say about Americans in 2013, “They addicted to immorality, they don’t like to work hard, they have little respect for marriage and their gender distinctions, little desire if any for children, don’t like to read or think hard, and are awash in a vast sea of feminism...” Therefore - Elders - rebuke them sharply!

It is from these vices that Christ has delivered true believers - we are no longer slaves to sin but slaves to righteousness. Elders must, in their pastoral care of the congregation, be always reminding people of their new position in Christ - and rebuking wickedness. And here again is why elders must *themselves* be exemplars of godliness, piety, devotion, self-control, and righteousness. Earlier in (the elder must be)

Titus 1:8 but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, **just, holy, self-controlled,**

⇒ Seriously, just go home and meditate on those three things: “just, holy, self-controlled.”

And remember Peter’s exhortation to the elders - 1 Peter 5:3 “nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;” We must exemplify the life that everyone around us is aspiring to live!

Encouragement: In ourselves, we fail. But we will overcome in Christ. Philip. 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Application 2: We tend to emphasize the need of elders to be theologically and doctrinally sound, but don’t always see the need for the elder to teach sound morality and to rebuke and

help church members overcome immorality.

Application 3: Remember how Paul exhorted Timothy in the passage quoted earlier? 1 Tim. 4:16 “Take heed to yourself [i.e. to your moral conduct, how you live] and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”

Application 4: The qualified ruling elder has the duty to make sure he holds fast the faithful word that he might be able to exhort and refute *both* 1) the doctrinally unsound **as well as** 2) the morally unsound.

3. A Defender of Christian Liberty - v14-16

Point: And here we come to the third leg of the great tripod of what the elder is called upon to defend - the faith, righteousness, and now Christian Liberty of Conscience. What is this and why is it so important?

In the Institutes of the Christian Religion, John Calvin, after his long treatment of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, has an entire chapter on Christian Liberty. He says:

We must now discuss Christian freedom. He who proposes to summarize gospel teaching ought by no means to omit an explanation of this topic. For it is a thing of prime necessity, and apart from a knowledge of it consciences dare undertake almost nothing without doubting; they hesitate and recoil from many things; they constantly waver and are afraid. But freedom is especially an appendage of justification and is of no little avail in understanding its power.

Indeed, those who seriously fear God will enjoy the incomparable benefit of this doctrine...

What is Christian Liberty? The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 20 is on this specific topic. The key point of the 4 points in that chapter that illustrates what Titus 1:14-16 is addressing is point 2:

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

[14] not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.

Point: The godly elder is a *Sola Scriptura* man - he does not accept as authoritative Jewish fables or commandments of men who turn from the truth. No, he holds fast the “faithful Word” as he was taught. He does not deviate from it and he proves all things by it - just as Jesus taught us in Matthew 15 and Mark 7 when He was confronted with the Jewish *Corban rule* which claimed to be a divine revelation.

Point 2: He is wise and discerning and will not bow to arguments which would seek to overthrow the Scripture’s clarity, sufficiency, or *exclusive* God-breathed authority.

[15] To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.

Point: By “pure” he is talking here about believers. To the believer, *all things are pure* - meaning, all foods. There are no longer dietary restrictions upon us at all. Christ has fulfilled all that the dietary laws pointed forward to, and yet there were still those among the Jews who were extremely cautious about observing those things - and Paul is saying that such observances are useless.

Point 2: We have been purified by faith - i.e. we are justified and pronounced righteous before God - just as all foods have been pronounced clean.

Acts 11:1-9 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also

received the word of God. [2] And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, [3] saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!" [4] But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying: [5] "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. [6] When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. [7] And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' [8] But I said, 'Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.' [9] But the voice answered me again from heaven, **'What God has cleansed you must not call common.'**

Application: Notice v15, "... but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled."

Application 2: Elders must protect the church from legalism - from congregational blue-laws - and from any commandments of men that might seek to bind people's consciences.

[16] They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

Point: Notice how rough God's Word is on individuals who teach fables as truth, commandments of men as commandments of God, and dietary laws as if they are pious. "abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work."

Point 2: When such individuals say they know God, *their own works deny Him*. They deny God by undercutting of the authority of God's Word and Law.

Notice - Denying the exclusive authority of God's Word is the same as denying God Himself!

Application - to undermine the authority of scripture is to undermine Gos Himself.

==>* The elder is the defender of the exclusive authority of the Word of God over and against all man-made fables, rules, laws, and teachings.

Sola Scriptura! I would encourage you to go back and listen to the two sermons on Sola Scriptura and how vitally important that great biblical truth is!

- 1. A Defender of The Faith - V9-11;**
- 2. A Defender of Biblical Godliness - v12-13;**
- 3. A Defender of Christian Liberty - v14-16**

Jude 1:24-25 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, [25] To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.