

## Setting Things in Order

*Beautifying the Bride, p.3*

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Grab your Bibles and let's go to Titus 1 as we pick back up with our preaching through this New Testament epistle. It's one of the pastoral epistles. I call it "Beautifying the Bride." I guess part 3, because 1 Timothy was part one and, excuse me, 2 Timothy was part 2, and so this is the third of the pastoral epistles and, um, Paul is like with 1 and 2 Timothy writing to Titus to pick up where he left off with Titus as Titus is ministering on the Greek island of Crete. Quite a large island. Uh, very likely a number of Jews were converted at Pentecost who lived on Crete and so they took their faith back to Crete and Paul also preached and probably other early church leaders preached there, and local churches have popped up in about every city, it seems like, and so it's very important that the churches be ordered aright, um, and so we talk about the local church being his bride, that's what the Bible says we are, and she's to be beautified by having certain forms and certain functions according to the Master groom, Jesus Christ.

So we come to Titus 1 as Paul is writing to Titus about his work on on Crete and he says this in verses 5 and 6.

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.

I've read with interest sometimes you may find this strange, but if you know me a little bit you may not think it's so strange, but as a little boy, I loved to sit for hours and read the encyclopedia, uh, Encyclopedia Britannica or the World Book Encyclopedia. Just stuff to learn. You just read and keep learning stuff. And, um, I did a little bit of that this week and I I was kind of impressed again with Douglas MacArthur. Douglas MacArthur was the supreme commander of the Southwest Pacific area in World War II. He not only led the fight to defeat the Japanese all across the Southwest Pacific, but then from 1945 to 1951 he oversaw the rebuilding of the nation of Japan. He rebuilt their economy. He, uh, rebuilt their country by modernizing it, and he established democracy in that land. In essence, he stayed in Japan after their defeat to set things in order, get things right. Sometimes we might think of the war effort being different from this rebuilding of nations, but it's all one thing. You you can't separate the two because who knows what

might have happened to Japan if we didn't stay there and set up a modern democracy. May have been at war with them again. But they've become quite an ally since that time. In like manner, here the Apostle Paul has been on the island of Crete with Titus. He's been attacking and defeating Satan's kingdom of darkness. Local churches are now established all across the island, but there's much work left to do. To set things in order, these churches must be properly structured and ordered. This is a part of the overall missions effort, so I've entitled this section of our exposition, "Setting Things in Order." Paul writes to Titus and says, "Titus, let's get with it now. Let's get these things set in order, things we didn't get through with."

Well, I, note the global strategy. The global strategy. I couldn't avoid this. It just kept jumping out at me at me as you look at verse 5, Paul writes to Titus, "For this reason I left you in Crete." Now I left you in Crete for a reason, and he's going to give us the particular specific reason in just a moment. We'll look at that, but there is a reason behind that particular reason and the reason behind the particular reason he left him in Crete was his global strategy. Paul knew there were too many pressing needs around the world, people who needed the gospel and new churches who needed also to be set in order and established and built up and structured properly, too much to do to leave the firepower of Paul and Titus in one region.

So he leaves Titus in Crete. Let me add this, that helping established churches become healthy and what we might call true churches, sometimes I use the phrase biblically, spiritually healthy churches, is not not missions. It's it's not something separate from missions. It's all one thing because healthy churches are like any healthy organism, a matured or healthy organism reproduces, and so to have greater effects on missions you need sound and solid churches. So Paul continually as he toured and preached the gospel and planted churches, he went back continually to strengthen and mature those churches because mature churches help missions. It's always been that way. It always will be. So leaving, uh, Titus on Crete was a part of his overall strategy to not have a wasteful duplication of manpower in one area, let's get it spread out. So he's leaving, uh, Titus in Crete and then he goes on to spread the gospel other places. Matter of fact, this was Paul's commission as he outlined so well in his letter to the Romans in Romans 1 through 5, verse 5, rather. He says, "through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake."

Now first of all, it says I I I have this apostleship. In other words, an apostle is one sent out under the authority of another. He said, "I've been given that. I've been sent out by Christ. I'm under His authority to do His work, His way, for His glory, and then in my particular case," Paul says in Romans 15, he said, "my apostleship is to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles." Notice among all the Gentiles, that's quite an astounding task. "I'm to preach so that those who are, as we studied earlier, who are God's elect among all the Gentile nations, will come to faith in Christ." So he had to have a strategic mission strategy, a strategic strategy for missions so that he could fulfill this commission God had given him.

So that's everyone outside of Israel is his mission field, you might say, and then the last part of Romans 1:5 he says those four keywords, "for His name's sake." Paul said, "That driving purpose and the driving motivation of what I'm about on the earth is doing something for His name's sake," that is, bringing him glory. You might be surprised to find out that Paul was glory of God focused. Have you heard that phrase before? You thought I came up with that? No, look, I haven't come up with anything. Everything I've ever taught you is at least 2,000 years old because the Bible is. So Paul says, "What drives me, what keeps me going, the reason I have this strategy to not waste manpower and reach the most people, build up the most churches, preach to the most unreached areas, is for His name's sake. I want my God and His Son Jesus Christ to be honored, worshiped and glorified among the most people." And that's what's driving this whole thing.

Now, well, how was Paul supposed to get that job done? At risk of excessive redundancy, let me say again, he did a few very simple things and that's all he did, he preached the word everywhere he went, he established, planted new congregations, and then he built up those congregations so they could help him do it still more. That's what Paul did. Then he did again and again and again. There wasn't any unique spins or twists to Paul's ministry. It was all excessively, exclusively, redundantly local church-centered work. Preach the word. Establish churches. Build them up and do it some more. That's all you find in the New Testament, all to the end of Christ being honored and glorified.

Now back to our text, verse 5 and the phrase, "I left you in Crete." Again, he strategically places his associates where they need to be so that the most work could be accomplished for the greatest number of people. Now that's I. So we just see Paul's global strategy jump out here as he leaves Titus behind to take care of things in Crete and he goes to other territories to do more work. Now, II., structure and order is needed in the local church. Structure and order is needed in the local church. It's not very hard at all to find professing churches, i.e. Christian congregations all over the place who give very little effort to structuring and organizing themselves because everything is centered on the experience you have at the event you have on Sunday, and everything is kind of built on kind of like a, a, a Christian, or rather I should say a country music concert or something or some sort of entertainment presentation. If you leave stirred and blessed and and encouraged, then, well, that was a great week, that was a great thing to do. Well, I'm not saying there's anything wrong to being blessed and encouraged, certainly not, but how are you being blessed and encouraged and what is it that's blessing you and encouraging you? That's very important. And and by the way, brothers and sisters, coming to a service on Sunday doesn't make you a part of the church anymore than being parked in a garage makes you an automobile. This is an essential part of what we do, but we are the church. We belong one to another and corporately to Christ. It is it is this the whole family life and family life if it's going to be anything more than chaos, has to have some structure and order. Dad does certain things. Mom does certain things. The kids do certain things. There's routines. There's structure. There's reasons. There's order. And a church must be the same way.

So verse 5, he tells us why he particularly left Titus in Crete. He says in verse 5, "For this reason I left you in Crete," here it is, "that you would set in order what remains." That you would set in order what remains. You could say you that you would set in order what is wanting. I think Paul is saying, "Titus, you know, we got to a lot of things while we were there but, my goodness, there's some very important parts of ordering structuring the churches that we just didn't get to and I've got to go somewhere else so, Titus, you stay here and get this work done." Now, just kind of tongue-in-cheek. My staff, we enjoy picking at each other and playing with each other and so I I kind of see that perhaps Titus and Paul were human too and maybe they liked to picky at each other. I can see Titus saying as Paul left, "Thank you very much. You know how ornery, worldly and difficult the Cretans are, and you're leaving me with this by myself? Well, I appreciate that, Paul. Have a good time wherever you're going." It was a daunting task.

Well, "Titus," Paul writes to him, "You you set things in order." The the Greek scholars tell us the the Greek terminology of the original words used here have a sense of urgency like this is very important. Also, the idea is setting in order, the same phrase would be used if you were taking a broken bone and setting it back aright, fix what is defective, in other words. And then specifically, "Here's where you're to start, Titus," look at verse 5, last part, "Titus, appoint elders in every city as I directed you." That brings us to III, the critical importance of leadership. The critical importance of leadership. Now, the first thing you notice here is that the churches existed but there were no pastors, no elders. Different terms for the exact same office. Some people use bishops, some use elders, some, uh, use overseer, some use pastor, but they're all interchangeable. It's not separate offices in the church. It's all different terms to describe the one office of pastor in the church.

Now, under the critical importance of leadership, notice A) elders were essential for a church's well-being. Elders were essential for a church's well-being, and here's what I was about to bring out a moment ago. So we note that the churches already exist, but there are no pastors over the churches and that is that elders and pastors are not essential as to the being of a church but they are essential for the well-being of the church. So there's a lot to get done in these churches, a lot of maturing, a lot of structuring, a lot of ordering of things, and Paul tells Titus, "So the very first thing we've got to do is get God-called overseers to oversee the work of these local churches." So again, pastors or elders are not required as to the being of the church but they are essential as to the well-being of a church.

We have church plants and the one in Iowa always comes to my mind, Grace Life Church of Ankeny, IA, and I I think about all the times I flew out there and met with six or eight people and they didn't have a pastor, they didn't have anything. They were watching our our service on the Internet as their service and then as things went along later on Seth Channel who was a member of our church here called to preach, we sent him out there, uh, more or less with instructions, "Now, Seth, there's a lot I didn't get to when I was flying out there and talking to these folks. So you go on out there, Seth, and you set things in order." And, um, he's been doing that. That's kind of what Paul is doing with Titus here.

So the first thing Titus is to do to get the church properly structured is to establish the structure of leadership in the church, and it hit me this morning, I may have to add another spoke to the wheel. Do y'all have the wheel back there anywhere that you can put on the screen? There's people out there and they push all kinds of buttons and sometimes, speak and it shall come to pass. I'm thinking as far as the structure of the church, the hub of the wheel is preaching the word, congregational worship, and then one spoke that comes out from that local church-centered missions, personalized strategic world missions, the bottom spoke, home-life discipleship, just the idea that it's gotta be real at home. You gotta take the church home with you when you're taught and preach the word. Take that home, dads, and talk about that with your families through the week. And then the spoke on the upper right side, every member minister through small groups. But probably need another spoke that says biblical leadership. Now that's assumed, and I've always viewed it that way. Now that's understood and assumed, but I'll be honest, I think where Titus was in Crete and the absolute overwhelming majority of the churches, there's great work to be done in establishing leadership. And so now I know what my staff is saying, "Pastor, you you critique this all the time. You make these changes. We have to go through all of our literature and all of our stuff and we have to update it all. And now you've added another spoke." Well, that's job security, brothers. Pretty soon you're gonna have the whole Bible in the spoke or in the wheel. That's the goal, is it not?

So now notice how you words here in verse 5, "appoint elders in every city," that is that there would be one local church in each city, and the people in this day, they really lived together in little clusters and villages and town. Uh, one of the main reasons for that was protection. When you guys so graciously gave Miss Pam and I that trip to Greece, and by the way, it exceeded all of our expectations, it really, we wanna, we've talked so many times we wanna go back. It so blessed us to walk those roads where Paul walked and ministered. I probably walked right in front of where Aquila and Priscilla had their tent making store, and Paul stayed there with them 18 months. I mean, I was probably within five feet because we walked down the agora, which was the marketplace, but they would always build their towns, well, their major towns and cities, by usually it was a solid rock kind of mountain. We'll it'd be small to be a mountain, maybe a big big hill so they could build a big wall around that, uh, outcropping, if you will, that hill and that would be for safety, and if an an enemy was attacking, they would leave the the the the town area where they did their trade and commerce, and they'd run in there and protect themselves on that, in that walled fortress, so to speak. And so in every city they would have a local church and they used to establish elders in each local church in all those cities.

Now B in our III under the critical importance of leadership: elders must be established according to biblical criteria. In other words, we don't just get to do what we want. We established elders in God's church. God's got a way he wants to do it and that's why he gives these very simple but very important words at the end of verse 5, "as I directed you. As I charged you. You could say as I ordered you to do. I laid out for you," Titus, "how this is gonna be done." Now for my staff out there, in other words, guys, don't become a Gehazi. You don't get to do it your way. Paul was an apostle. He penned in Scripture how it's to be done. We have that for all time. So we don't get to do it our way. We don't have

to have a independent spirit or we must not have an independent spirit about this. So Titus was to follow the apostle's orders in the matter. There was no room for doing his own thing his own way. God revealed to Paul the truth and Paul gave the dictates he received to his subordinates like Titus, and Titus was not to go to his own thing, his own way. There's never going to be a "Brother Titus Ministries." There's only one ministry, that's preaching the word, establishing churches and building up churches. That's it. "Do as I directed you, Titus." This was the divine pattern that God divinely revealed to Paul, and there is no Plan B. Acts 20:28, uh, talks about how the Holy Spirit made you overseers. So as Titus does this work, he's got to discern who has God worked on, who has God called, if you will, drawn into this work, this office of being pastor or overseers of the church. So again, Titus was to do as Paul "directed." I like what another Greek scholar said, he said this idea is to arrange thoroughly. "Titus, go to these churches and thoroughly arrange the leadership structure just as I directed." But he's to do that while discerning the Holy Spirit's guidance so that he can find and appoint God's elders in God's churches.

Now this leads to us, third subpoint that's not spoken of in our text though it's understood and it's certainly in the balance of biblical truth, and that is, C) that apostles are no longer in function. When you talk about leadership in the church, it's important to know that Paul and his associates like Titus appointed pastors or elders or overseers in all these local churches because the apostles were moving away from the scene and for time immemorial now pastors will lead the churches under the dictates left by the apostles, which is our New Testament. Okay, see how that works?

Now this is why we reject any notion of apostolic succession. In other words, there wasn't the first generation apostles, and then that was handed down to the next generation of apostles and then the next generation of apostles all the way down to today. And we have, I don't know if y'all, when Christian radio used to to have this guy on there who was the Apostle Johnny Washington. Any of y'all remember Johnny Washington? I loved to listen to him because he never read the Scripture. He had a guy that would read for him, be like David sitting out here and he'd say, "Read," and David would start reading and then he'd stop and preach a little bit on it. I just thought that was the coolest thing. I guess you gotta be an apostle to do that, though, so I've never tried it. But nevertheless, we reject that Johnny Washington was an apostle or anybody else. That office was in the first century, those men were primarily used to establish the gospel, the doctrines once for all delivered to the saints, and now pastor/teachers take their truth they receive from God, and we continued to bless and build the church with it.

Now a few Scriptures here. I'll run through these really quickly to show you why we believe that office of divine revelation and divine authority has passed away and now pastor/teachers take their truths, New Testament, and teach it and lead the churches by it. Ephesians 2:19 through 20, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of," Christ not first, "the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone." That's pretty interesting, isn't it? And I thought church was built on Jesus. Of course it is but Jesus mitigated his truth, might not be the best word there,

superintended his truth through the apostles. He taught them. He revealed to them the truth. Of course he preached it himself, but after he ascended to heaven, he left those men then to go out and preach the gospel, establish the faith once for all delivered to the saints, and that's what the church is built on, Christ being the cornerstone but he superintended it through his apostles who wrote the Holy Scripture.

Ephesians 3:5, "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." The Spirit of God spoke to these men and led these men in ways that no other men have ever been spoken to and led. And notice "been revealed" is past tense. I believe that it mentions or emphasizes that it's not being revealed today. Brothers and sisters, if people are still receiving divine revelation and apostolic authority, then in essence the Bible would still be being written and we'd need to run all over the earth and find these guys and find out what the latest truth was. You don't think God left us like that, do you?

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!  
What more can He say than to you He hath said,  
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled"

The apostles, the first generation, were given these divine special gifts and divine revelation for that purpose and it's settled.

2 Peter 3:2, "that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles." It was given through them for the church, for all ages.

Hebrews 2:3 and 4, "how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them," not necessarily today doing this but he testified with them, who? Those early apostles, "both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." That's why we do not believe that these signs and wonders and miraculous gifts are normative in today's church because God was affirming the men who had the foundational face of, faith of our truths rather of our of our faith, and they were testified to by the signs and wonders and miracles. Now there's no longer a need for that because they're not being given divine revelation today or no one's being given divine revelation today.

Jude 1:17, "But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Jude 1:3, "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation," in other words, it's not one salvation for you and one faith for you and one doctrine for you, and another one for somebody else. It's all the same. How did it get to be all the same? "Our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for," definite article, "the faith," that body of doctrine, "which

was once for all handed down to the saints." It's not still being handed down. We had apostles in the first century of the church. They handed down the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. There's no longer a need for apostles, and there's no new direct revelation from God.

That's why Paul said in Galatians 1:11 and 12, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul said, "I directly receive this divine truth of God that I preach from God Himself." And God is not still doing that today.

So we talk about the importance of church leadership, we're talking about primarily Paul's talking to Titus specifically about local church pastors, and like, um, early Baptist church father in America, Pendleton said, quite the contrary from there being one pastor who oversees several churches, in the New Testament we see a plurality of pastors overseeing singular churches.

Now let's be gracious to our forefathers because as the gospel is moving east to west across our country in the early days, there were a lot of what we called circuit circuit riding preachers and churches were lucky to get a preacher once a month, so they had no choice but to share, a preach a pastor, so to speak. But that was just out of necessity and need because believers were springing up and churches were springing up faster than they were pastors to pastor them.

I don't want to go into this, but there's a substantial, consistent evidence that in the New Testament and in the clear teaching of Scripture that though there is a plurality of pastors in the church, there is a leader among those equals and that's based on calling and gifting. I've humorously said, maybe not humorous to some, but it's humorous to me because I know me, you don't want 12 Jeff Noblit's on your elder body. No, no, no. One of me is plenty. For me, vision and leadership and casting a strategy to fulfill a vision is just, I just do that. I'd probably do that in the second around, I don't know. But if you had more than one of me, you'd just, we'd just be fighting all time. So it's obvious that God's gonna put a variety of giftings in a in an elder body, and we certainly have that, and then there's a leader, what I think is the pastor/teacher role, Ephesians 4:11, among those equals. But when we're in a room, everybody has one vote and we function on unanimity. We have to be united and all agree before we will bring anything of any major importance to the church, and I have one vote in everybody else has one.

All right, now we move to qualifications for elders and character counts most. As God says, "Okay, Titus, stay here in Crete. Let's set these churches in order and the primary thing, the foundational thing is we've got to get true elders appointed in every church, and now here's the kind of guys you must look for." Verse 6, "namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion." So the qualifications of elders start with a man's character. Character is the primary thing. Not skill. Not charisma. Not personality. Not he's humorous. Not he's fun. Not everybody loves him. Character, that's what matters.

Now the qualifications that Paul gives to Titus here are very, very similar to the ones he gave to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3, but in 1 Timothy 3, it seems to be written more to the man who's aspiring to the office, and then in Titus, it's more written to Titus and the churches who are looking for the man to be in the office. The same thing but maybe two sides of the same coin. I was thinking about this this week, that the phrase is often used the man shouldn't seek the office, the office should seek the man. Well, that's not biblical. Not when it comes to elders. Paul told Timothy if any man aspires to the office, that's a good thing that he's aspiring to do. That doesn't mean that he's going to become an elder but if you feel like God's led you and drawn you that way, you have a responsibility in the appropriate way and time to make that known to the church and then the church can go through its procedures following biblical guidelines and biblical standards to see if indeed that's God's will because if the church didn't affirm it, then it's not God's will. Ah, you didn't get divine revelation. This is the divine revelation that critiques everybody and everything. But character counts the most.

So it begins in verse 6 with that phrase, we've looked at it many times in the past, "any man who is above reproach," or you could put blameless. Ah, this is also a requirement for deacons in the church. They must be above reproach. Two very, very different works, the work of a deacon and the work of a pastor/overseer. Pastors and overseers carry an authority that's what overseeing means, and deacons are the unseen servants that keep down things so that the work of preaching the word can go forward unhindered.

The word or the phrase "above reproach or blameless" means that which cannot be called to account. You cannot be called to account for a charge because the charge is unfounded and it has no credibility. Your lifestyle proves it to be unfounded. Your lifestyle proves it to be without credibility. So a man has to be, Paul says to Titus, above reproach.

Now there's a lot to be said here, so let me get some practical things here about a man being above reproach, in other words, no charge can stick because his life and his consistency repels it, if you will. It's like water rolling off a duck's back. First of all, all of God's men who lead his churches will suffer under false and malicious accusations aimed at destroying their reputation. Now that's challenging, okay? If he's got to be above reproach and it's just comes with his office that Satan's gonna make sure he's accused and demeaned and slandered and undermined, then how do we view that? Well, we have to be aware of that because Jesus promised us this was going to happen. And remember, they called our Lord himself the devil and the son of Satan himself. And then he told us in Matthew 5:11, "Blessed are you," not if, "blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you," and here it is, "falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me." Now when he says "because of Me," he said, "because you're trying to follow My word, My truths." But Jesus said, "It's going to happen to you. They're going to say false things to accuse you of everything."

Ah, John 15:20. Jesus says, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also." So as we're talking about ministers and they can't have a

charge against them that seems credible at all, that doesn't mean there's not going to be a lot of charges. My goodness, as we've kind of gotten over that Bell curve in our community, if you will, and I think people have gotten tired of saying things about us, maybe about me in particular, to be honest, but my, as we helped these churches who are trying to turn their churches to biblical health that's the one thing that's really so, so very hard for these pastors is, "Man, the things they're saying about us. The things they're saying about me." And I have to remind them, "Well, that's proof you're on track. You can still be above reproach even if people are trying to bring charges against you."

Well, a second thought here about this, because of this fact that slanderous, false things will be said against the man of God, the Bible requires two or three credible witnesses before you're even to hear an accusation against an elder. You're not even to hear a charge against your pastor unless there are two or three credible people who can say, "We know this is fact." Note the words credible people. 1 Timothy 5:19 and 20 Paul writes to Timothy, "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning." He says first of all, "Don't even listen if there's not two or three credible witnesses and if you talk to the brother and it is true and they don't repent and they go on in that sin, then rebuke that elder in the presence of the whole church, and let the whole church know that you're not above being called in account for your sin, even if you're pastor or a church leader."

A third thought about he's got to be above reproach. Now listen to me carefully and don't take out a balance what I'm saying. Past accusations of even a public or serious nature may not always disqualify the man if his repentance has outshined his past sin. We run into this sometimes. Sometimes it's a brother who had some sort of known sin thing in his life before he was converted as maybe a teenager or a young man, and now he's 40 or 50 and he's had decades of sterling reputation. I don't know of any church or anybody anywhere that thinks you ought to go back to when a boy was 10 and look at all of his life and see if there's anything. Well, he stole something at the store one day when he was 12. You know, that kind of thing. And by the way, these are patterns of sins that the text is referring to because there are no sinless elders and every time we preach on this, I lose all my elders every time. Every time I've ever preached on this in our next elders' meeting, the guys all pretty much in unison say, "Look, man, I I I struggle and I fail like others and if I'm not qualified, I'll just resign." And I say, "Well, it's not a fact that you're a repentor and you're striving to overcome sin, there's no pattern of willful behavior that is known in your life that disqualifies you."

So there can be something in a person's past that there's been a long season of time for their humble repentance to be much, much a greater factor than that past failure and they may be qualified for elder. Each case is independent and unique, and you have to look at all of them. So number 4, fourth thought about this blamelessness: sinlessness is not the qualification here but rather the absence of an obvious pattern of sinfulness. That's the requirement if we're blameless.

Now he goes into specifics and we'll just start this and then I'm going to close down and we'll pick it up next week, Lord willing. He talks about some domestic things. The husband of one wife comes out first, "namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife." Now the older scholars put a lot of emphasis on polygamy and they said almost every Jewish guy had two or three wives. So that had to be cleaned up and if that hadn't been cleaned up, he's saying in our churches the men may be generally converted but that that's just not gonna go well for church leadership. That's got to get fixed. But it means more than that because the phrase there literally has the idea of being a one-woman man or a one-woman sort of man. He has a long standing reputation of having only eyes and affections and devotion to one woman. He's not a womanizer. He's not an adulterer.

Now it doesn't mean that you can't be a single man. The Apostle Paul was single. Titus and Timothy may have very well been single men. It doesn't mean that if your spouse dies, uh, that you can't marry again and then be considered an elder. It doesn't refer to that, surely it doesn't. It doesn't absolutely rule out a previous marriage or previous infidelity. Note my words carefully, it doesn't absolutely rule out a previous marriage or a previous infidelity because that's not the text. He could easily have used the word divorce. It does not use it, it says he has to be known, have a long-standing reputation of being a one-woman man.

Now I believe it would be exceedingly rare if a man with a known immorality, adultery or divorce becomes an elder, but I can't tell you from the text that's absolutely required. I'm being as honest as I can with the biblical text. Now different local churches have different things. They just draw some lines and I think that's appropriate. For us, we have since our beginning had the conviction that no divorce of any kind would be permissible in a man's life if he's to be considered for the office of elder. That seemed to be the simplest thing, but I can't promise you that that will be that way forever. Um, the elders have haven't even ever even discussed that issue but that's our policy at this time, all right?

So we, the first domestic qualification character quality he's gotta have, he's gotta have a sterling reputation as a one-woman man. All right. Secondly, he says here in verse 6, "having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or of rebellion." In other words, he's got to run his household well. Now I agree with the Greek scholars who say the word "believe" here isn't the same thing as believing on Christ for salvation. It's used in a different way, and it's used in a different way at other times in the biblical text. Um, so it's not referring to saving faith necessarily. We know God is sovereign in that. God has his elect and the Spirit of God works on the children and like he does all people and you can't time that out. But I like the concept that the word is also used signifying reliability or trustworthiness. I think it's the idea that children respect their father and they obey their father, and they believe in their father so they are the kind of children that are faithful to him. Matter of fact, this word in verse 9 is used to talk about the faithful word, so it's not certainly used of saving faith there but being faithless. The children are faithful under their father's headship and obedient in their home.

Now he amplifies what these children living at home must not be like if he's to be considered an elder, "not accused of dissipation," that's rioting or excess, that's the idea of abandoning self-control and giving in to youthful lust. Now in this culture and this day, there was flagrant gross immoralities practiced especially by young men. Uh, all of the Greek gods, well, I shouldn't say all but many of the Greek gods they worshiped, worship was, uh, uh, celebrated in drunken orgies with prostitutes. It was a filthy and vile environment. So the point is, if a man hasn't gotten his children who live at home, uh, living in such a way that they're not for taking in that, then he's not qualified. He's not ready to be an elder in the church.

So not accused of dissipation, and then he also uses the word rebellion, verse 6, "not accused of dissipation or rebellion." This is the idea of can't be controlled, insubordinate. Same idea, a little different aspect as being not accused of dissipation. So it's, um, it's translated sometimes as contradict. They can't be children who their very lifestyles contradict what the father says he stands for. Now so his children, while under his roof, are subordinate and obedient and not a public scandal. I do not believe this applies to adult children who are no longer living in the household. That may be some consideration, but that's not what is said here because if a man cannot manage his home, he cannot be entrusted to manage the church of God.

All right, real quick, I want to close with some conclusions for practical application. These are rather obvious and they'll not be on your screen, but let me reel them out and I want to focus a little bit on the third one, but the first three or first two, rather, we'll just more or less mention. We should be biblically strategic in missions. Notice how Paul over and over again talks about how he was careful to make sure he appointed guys to certain areas that the most manpower could be used in the most effective ways for church planting and building up the churches.

Um, secondly, churches must be properly structured and have proper practice. That's the phrase when he says, "set in order," whether it's leadership, small groups, world missions, home life, discipleship. And then of course, we have seen as the foundational structure of the congregational meeting and the preaching of the word, these must be set in order and done right in God's church.

Then the third one is character counts for all. You gotta understand, these qualifications for elder are not just for elders, these are qualifications for being a real Christian. You're you're not let off as somehow being okay if you don't manage your household well. You're not let off the hook if you're unfaithful to your marital vows and say, "Well, I'm not gonna be an elder." No, that's not what he's saying. Character counts for all.

And I thought of something that, um, I say off and on through the years because I've lived the reality of it and I've seen it work in this church often, and that is brothers and sisters, it's almost always the flesh that emphasizes one's skill or one's knowledge or one's ability. We don't hardly ever run into this, but in in the old days it was quite common. Somebody would come into the church and they would announce as they join, "I can do these ministries. I am gifted in these areas." Now it's right to join a church and let people know

what you think your gifts are and how you might can help, I'm not saying that's wrong but they would say it in a way like, "And if I don't get to do it, I'm gonna be upset. I came in here to build my kingdom and you better let me." That's a lack of character. Character is when you say, "What needs to be done? I'll do it."

Here we are with about 750 members and up to 200 people that off and on visit with us and come to worship services, how in the world are we gonna let everybody just run do what they feel God's leading them do without total chaos? No way we can really care for one another and do the ministry the Scripture requires if we don't have some way of measuring and ordering this thing and for there to be a measuring and ordering and a structure of this thing, it's going to require the character of selflessness. It's going to require the character of, "I may have this gift, this gift, and this gift, but you don't really need that right now. I'll do this over here. It's not what I'm most comfortable with, but it needs to get done and I can do it." Man, the first eight years I was here on the staff, I did lots of things that weren't my gift and I was uncomfortable doing a lot of them but my pastor told me to do them and I did them.

I remember, um, when we bought the building next door here that was the skating rink. You know, the ice storm crushed it in. I forgot how much they wanted for it, but it was hundreds of thousands of dollars and we thought, "Well, we can't afford that." Then the ice storm crushed it in and we got it a lot, lot, lot less than what they really wanted for it. And, uh, our pastor at the time, my authority, wanted his own private office with his own private bathroom and shower and that's pretty common, especially in larger churches. And but to get the bathroom way over in this end of that building, you had to run, you had to burst up the concrete probably at least 40 yards maybe. And so some professional contractors came through and cut the concrete, took the concrete out, then you had to dig the dirt down at least a foot or so to put the electrical and the water lines in there. And so me and Bob Pittman got our shovels and we dug that ditch all the way from where the water line came in all the way back to the corner so he could have a bathroom and a shower in that office. Well, I probably am gifted for that kind of work, just to be honest. I'm thinking that's not my gift, but I guess it might be my gift. I've always worked like that, and so we dug that thing out. I never dreamed honestly at that time that one day that would be my private bathroom and my shower which I never, never, never use. But it's there.

But I'm convinced brothers and sisters, if we're not willing to dig the ditch, we'll never find our niche. You got to be willing to dig the ditch if you want God to give you the place in the church you ought to be. Sarah is a great example in the Bible. She humbled herself, called Abraham Lord and was a faithful and godly wife and today she's honored among all generations as the role model of the godly woman. But she had to be subservient, had the character before God gave her that high honored position.

So I've always challenged you go to your small group leader and say, "What needs to be done. If I can possibly do it, I'll do it." And you keep building character and then one day you'll find your place in the church but it always comes through the hallway of character before you get to the room of physician. I'm real skeptical of guys who start out in the

ministry and they start out on top. I'm very grateful and I'm just being totally transparent, your pastor, Jeff Noblit, needed those eight years under someone else's authority to say, "Yes, sir and, no, Sir." It doesn't matter how menial the task, that's what I needed to do. Character counts for all of us and that's how you find your place of service. So when Paul writes to Titus says here's the kind of men I want you to look for, look for those men that when the church needed a sewer line dug, they showed up with their shovels the next morning. That's the kind of guys that might be elder material in God's church.