

*In Everyday Discipleship for Ordinary People, Stuart Briscoe writes:*

*“One of my young colleagues was officiating at the funeral of a war veteran. The dead man’s military friends wished to have a part in the service at the funeral home, so they requested that the pastor lead them down to the casket, stand with them for a solemn moment of silence, and then to lead them out through the side door.*

*This the pastor proceeded to do, but unfortunately the effect was somewhat marred when he picked the wrong door to exit. The result was that they marched with military precision right into a broom closet, in full view of the mourners, and they had to make a hasty and embarrassing retreat.*

*This story illustrates a cardinal rule or two. First, if you’re going to lead, make sure you know where you’re going, and second, if you’re going to follow, make sure that you are following someone who knows where they are going and what they are doing!”*

This morning we are continuing in our study through the letter of **Titus**. If you recall from last week, the Apostle Paul and his young coworker Titus had traveled to the Island of Crete to organize and shepherd the churches already there, but there came a time when Paul had to depart for other ministries, leaving Titus to remain behind to continue the work they had started. It was a difficult and demanding work for Titus in Crete, and part of this work involved appointing leaders for the churches there – leaders who were first and foremost followers – followers of Jesus Christ.

To begin this morning, I want to read our focal passage in it’s entirety, I’ll make a few general comments, then we will dive into the details. So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Titus 1** and we will begin where we left off with **verse 5**.

**<sup>5</sup> 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, <sup>6</sup> namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. <sup>7</sup> For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, <sup>9</sup> holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.**

In this passage, Paul instructs Titus to carry on with the work that had been left undone. To begin, in **verse 5**, Paul tells Titus to **set in order what remains**, which suggests that Titus needed to straighten some things out in these churches, and I say that because the phrase “**set in order**” in Greek is a medical term applied to the setting a broken bone or straightening out a crooked limb. According to Paul, Titus needed to straighten out some things that were not right in the churches and one of the primary ways of doing that was to appoint godly leaders.

Titus was told to **appoint** elders in every city where there was a church, and just so you know, the title of elder, pastor, shepherd, and overseer are used interchangeably in the New Testament. Titus was to recognize God’s calling on certain Christian men as evidenced in their lives, and then to appoint them as spiritual leaders in the church. Normally, this task of appointing elders was something the Apostle Paul would do, but he’s gone, so Titus is to continue this task as Paul’s representative.

Paul called for **elders** – and if you notice that word **elders** is plural, and that’s important for us at Amboy Baptist. As our church grows, the body of spiritual leadership must grow with it. As the responsibility grows heavier, more shoulders are needed to bear it, and if not, the man who tries to do it all will crack under the pressure – and one of two things could happen. Either he will burn out from the stress or he will begin to believe he’s something he’s not and become a blind and arrogant dictator. Church leadership is not meant to be a one-man show, and in the future, it is my hope to add the role of elders to the church body to assist me in spiritual leadership.

Now, as you casually skim over these qualifications, you will notice that Paul says nothing about charisma, intelligence, education, influence, talent, skills, good looks, etc.... This list is a list of *character* qualities – these are *lifestyle* qualities, and there is something else I want to point out – and for all the men, this is very important.

At first glance, this passage appears to be a list of character qualities exclusively for an elder – for a pastor. These qualities appear to be solely for someone like me who serves in a spiritual leadership role in the church – but if you were to explore other Bible passages, you would come to realize that these qualities are actually marks of maturity for every single man who is a follower of Jesus Christ – every single one, and from these men who are well on their way to Christian maturity – exhibiting these qualities – from these men, they may be appointed by Titus as elders – as spiritual leaders in the church.

These are marks of maturity for every single Christian man *before* consideration to the role of elder – so men, I hope you pay attention to what Paul has to say and you see the man God really wants you to become, and as for the women – I hope you encourage the men in your life towards Christian maturity, for it will surely benefit you as well.

So, picking up with **verse 6**, Paul tells us what the character of these men – these potential spiritual leaders in the church should look like, and he begins with a general overarching quality that is the result of living out the other qualities. Paul says an elder is to be **above reproach**.

The Greek word for **above reproach** or **blameless** depending on your translation is “*anenkletos*” – and thank God it does not mean perfection or I would be in trouble and out of a job. Simply put, it means *without indictment, without accusation*, or said another way, there should be no legitimate grounds for charges to stick to an elder – to a pastor.

If you recall from last week, the Island of Crete was filled with a rough and wild bunch of men and Paul was concerned about the witness of a church whose leader had “*skeletons in his closet*.” For Paul, those in spiritual leadership should have nothing in their past and nothing in their present that might look badly upon a church. So simply put, to be **above reproach** describes a man of good character – a man with a good reputation – a man who is well spoken of.

Then Paul moves to a man’s home life and this is where the rubber really meets the road, for what happens in the home reveals a lot about a man, and if he can’t get it right at home, he’s not right for spiritual leadership in the church.

*In 1978, Reinhold Messner was the first man to scale Mount Everest without supplemental oxygen, however, written in a July 1995 article in the Buffalo News, it was reported that Messner was recovering in a hospital after falling off a wall at his home in Italy because he had locked himself out of his house.*

Here’s a guy who conquered the highest mountain in the world, and yet falls at home. In my days, I have seen my share of men who behaved like devils at home and saints at church. In the home, they were unloving and angry and over-bearing, and yet they walked into church on Sunday as if they were God’s guy.

A man who is **above reproach** cannot live one way at church but other way at home.

In his home life, Paul says the prospective elder should be **the husband of one wife**. In that culture, under Roman rule, affluent men may have had several women in their lives at one time. They could have a wife, they could also have a female slave who was considered their property, and then they had the pagan temples where prostitutes were available to them. Although completely foreign to us, that was an acceptable practice in that culture, even tolerated by the women, but for the prospective elder – you can't be a womanizer – you get one woman – and that's your wife.

And to be clear, Paul is not saying an elder must be married – it's just being addressed to those men who might be, and what he is saying to them is this: to be the **husband of one wife** is to be a "*one-woman-man*" – that's the Greek, meaning a man is to be devoted to the woman who is his wife. His relationship is exclusive – his love, his affection, his heart, and his *eyes* must be given to only one woman.

Now with that said, I know it's very possible for a man to be married to a woman and yet not be a *one-woman-man*, because his eyes wander and he has desires for another. Jesus spoke about this very thing when He said, "*everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.*"

Men, we live in a culture where we are bombarded with sensual stuff – it's all around us, but if we are going to be the mature men that God desires us to be, there are some things that are absolutely off-limits to us. We must avoid those situations that we already know will expose us to temptation, and dude, the internet is not your friend. Guard yourselves, discipline yourselves, be accountable to another Christian man, and if necessary, get some help.

As you can see, being the **husband of one wife** has more to do with moral purity than marital status. How a man conducts himself with his wife – how faithful he is in his marriage says a lot about how he will bear the responsibilities of spiritual leadership in a church. So, husbands love your wives just as Christ loves you.

Now, Paul continues in the home, for the home is the proving ground for spiritual leadership, and he says to Titus that the prospective elder – if he has children, is to have **children who believe** or in other translations they are to have children who are faithful. I wrestled with this a bit because it seems to put the responsibility of a child's conversion on the elder, which quite frankly is beyond his control for salvation is an act of God. Yes, the elder should model godly behavior – showing them what it looks like to walk with Jesus Christ, and yes, he should instruct and train his children, and yes, he should share and pray with them, but unfortunately,

that does not guarantee the salvation of his children. Maybe this speaks more about the relationship between the father and his children which creates an atmosphere for faith.

Continuing with the children, Paul says they should not be **accused of dissipation or rebellion** – words that describe living a wild and riotous and unruly life. I wrestled with this as well, and let me say that I don't believe Paul is referring to the normal and natural stages of child development which is often reflected in difficult struggles with parents and with authority. Yes, at times, a child's behavior can be totally inappropriate, but I don't think Paul is talking about that here.

Because of the wild and riotous and unruly living that Paul is describing, in that context, I think we are talking about older children – possibly adult children who are living under the roof of a prospective elder. If you recall, in those days, households were routinely extended and expanded where grown children and their spouses would build an addition to their father's house and move in, and so Paul is saying that whatever the home dynamics might look like, the prospective elder must first establish leadership in the home before he can have any leadership credibility in the church.

In many respects, the home is the hardest place to be above reproach. It seems easier to walk blameless among strangers than in one's own home, but if the home life is not in order – and I'm not talking about perfection, for there are no perfect families, then Paul would say a man's responsibilities should not be expanded to include the family of God.

So, we started with the home life, and now we are moving to the public life, and again I want to remind you that these are marks of maturity for every single man who is a follower of Jesus Christ. Beginning with **verse 7**, Paul tells Titus,

**<sup>7</sup> For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,**

This is a passage filled with *don'ts* and *dos*. Paul says that the prospective elder or **overseer** in this case – referring to one who watches over the flock, once again he must be **above reproach** – this time from a public perspective, a man of good character – a man with a good reputation – a man who is well spoken of.

Paul tells Titus the elder must be **God's steward**, meaning this man understands he does not own anything, instead he faithfully manages all that his master puts in his hands. This man knows that all that he has comes from God and must be used for God. His time, possessions, ambitions, and talents are all loaned to him by the Lord; and he must be faithful to use them to honor God.

Paul says the elder must not be **self-willed** – describing a man who is self-centered – a man focused on his rights, his feelings, and his interests – a man who is so preoccupied and pleased with himself that he cares to please nobody else. This guy cannot admit he is wrong, refuses to listen to others, insists on having his own way, and he should not be an elder.

To piggy back on this because it seems related to being self-willed, Paul says that the prospective elder should not be **quick-tempered**. Everybody gets angry. God created that emotion in us, and there are times when we should absolutely get angry, but the man described here is one who has a *short fuse* – one who regularly “*flies off the handle*” – where their anger gets so out of control that things are said and things are done that hurt others.

Granted, I am not a counselor but I suspect there are many reasons why people are *hot-headed*. I could begin with our fallen sinful nature – that would be a good general place to start. I also know from my years in law enforcement that angry people nurture angry people, so parents need to be mindful of that with regards to their own children. I have also met those who seem to have this constant simmering anger, similar to bitterness – and for them it only takes a tiny spark to light them on fire, and then I have read that this kind of *hot-headed* anger is typically rooted in pride, where a person's temper flares when they don't get their way or when they don't have control. Honestly, I'm not sure of the real reason, but whatever the reason may be, Paul explains that a man who cannot govern his anger cannot govern a church.

Paul continues and says a man should not be **addicted to wine** and that would apply, in my opinion, to any alcoholic beverage or controlled substance. Now, let me say that there are situations where abstinence is absolutely called for; however, in the context given to us here, abstinence is not the idea being presented by Paul – rather it's a question of over-indulgence – meaning one should know their limits and never allow these kinds of substances to dull their senses, to lower their inhibitions, or to cloud their judgment, and if one occasionally chooses to drink, he must be careful and keep in mind that he is an example in the home and in the church.

Now, if I called you **pugnacious** who thinks I just used a really big word to call you a little ugly dog with a flat face? Well, that's not it. That word describes a person who is itching for a fight either physically or verbally. They are quarrelsome and combative, and according to Paul, surprise – surprise, they don't make good elders.

We are also told that elders are not to be **fond of sordid gain**. **What in the world does that mean?** The priorities of a spiritual leader are not to be centered on the accumulation of wealth – the love of money which pulls them away from the love of God and the love of others. In their financial dealings, whether personal or business, an elder cannot be one who uses unethical or dishonest tactics to make their money for he will barter away his faith for worldly gain.

Then we come to some *dos* – some positive character traits in **verse 8**. An elder must be **hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,**

Now, for the sake of time, I am going to go through these a little faster. Paul begins with the word **hospitable** – a word that literally means “*loving of strangers*” which is a quality every Christian should strive for, but I think more importantly, especially for our day and time, it also means loving those who are different from us which may be a little more challenging.

The elder is also to be **loving what is good** which describes a man with a good heart who is attracted to things that are good and surrounds himself with these things. Paul says the elder must be **sensible** which speaks of being sober-minded, reasonable, and having sound judgment. It describes a man who does not get easily distracted by the foolishness of this world. The word **just** often means *righteous*, but in this context, it probably refers to a man who is *fair* in his dealings with others. Paul mentions **devout** – a word that paints the picture of a person who walks with God. This person is not perfect by any stretch of the means, but he takes God seriously and wants to live right before Him, and lastly in **verse 8**, we come to **self-controlled**.

Self-controlled is another word for *disciplined*. An elder must discipline his time so that he gets his studies and his work done. He must discipline his appetites, especially when loving church folk try to stuff him with food during fellowship. He must keep his emotions in check, so his emotions don't dictate his responses, he needs to be quick to listen and slow to speak – that requires a lot of discipline, and he must moment by moment, step by step, day by day yield himself to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit who equips and guides him. The man described in **verse 8** will be very different from the man in **verse 7**.

We started with the home life, we moved to the public life, and now last but not least, we come to church life. Let's look at **verse 9**, where Paul says the elder should be,

**holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.**

**Holding fast the faithful word** refers to men who base their lives and their ministry on sound biblical doctrine – doctrine he has been taught by a trustworthy source. Those who lead in the church must embrace the true teachings which came through Jesus Christ and His apostles instead of flirting with new doctrines or trying to reinvent or reimagine Jesus to suit themselves and please the masses. The elder must be unwavering in his commitment to the truth found in God's word, and Paul provides two reasons for this. The first reason is to strengthen and encourage the church, and the second reason is to **refute** those who **contradict** the truth or attempt to spread false doctrine within the church.

*“Bob, you are a pastor, so I know you don't understand the temptation I'm going through.” “I mean, we pay you to be good.”*

There are many misconceptions when it comes to elders – to pastors. Yes, I am in a distinct role in the church with a great responsibility to God, but I'm a normal guy. I experience the same temptations like everyone else, and then some because of my role. I have my struggles just like you, I try to sleep at night but usually toss and turn. I brush my teeth, I have to pay bills, and I have to work my way through various relationships – sometimes a mine field of relationships just like you.

I bring all this up because I am like you, and these character qualities given by Paul to Titus are not only intended for me, but as I said earlier, they are also intended for every single man – like me – like you, who seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. They are marks of maturity for every man.

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