

God Blueprint for a Healthy Church

Titus' Task

Titus 1:5-9

July 2, 2017

We are in an eight-week summer series, "God's Blueprint for a Healthy Church" based on the New Testament book of Titus. Titus is a letter written by Paul to one of his disciples, traveling companions, and coworkers. Titus was an apostolic delegate¹ representing Paul and helping struggling churches. We started the series last week by looking at Paul's ministry as the mission of the church. Today we look at, "Titus's Task," reviewing the reason Paul left Titus in Crete.

MIAS – Paul left Titus in Crete to help the struggling churches by teaching healthy doctrine, appointing elders, and correcting false teachers.

Paul reminds Titus why he left him in Crete, so *that* he might put what remained in order and appoint elders in every town (5). This was no small task as there were twenty towns in Crete spread over more than 3000 square miles without an established road system. Paul wanted Titus to help these struggling young churches get better established by teaching them how the gospel applied to life, living in a non-Christian culture, and appoints elders. Elders is a plural noun, meaning that God has designed there to be a group of leaders who lead and govern the church. Paul did not rush to appoint elders himself because it takes time to identify and in this case, develop elders. These were young churches and it was not wise to appoint elders prematurely. So, Paul is reminding Titus to remain focused on the task he gave him and not get distracted by the many good things that can fill ones' time in ministry. The blueprint for a healthy church requires the necessity of good leadership to fulfill the mission of the church, making disciples.

Then Paul tells him what to look for in elders (6-9), focusing first on the family. He starts out with "If anyone is above reproach." Above reproach is the overarching requirement of elders, repeated again in verse ten. He focuses on the character of elders before he addresses the competency of elders. The word above reproach means to be unaccused or have a good reputation in the community. Then he goes on to describe what he means by above reproach as it relates to the family. First, he must be a husband of one wife.² Some interpret this to mean that an elder can never have been divorced, but I do not think you cannot prove that from the text. Moving to his children, they "are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination (6)." The children living at home are not to be wild, reckless, or rebellious.³ There is disagreement over the translation of the phrase 'his children are believers,' other bible versions translate the phrase 'his children are faithful' which I think is a better translation for several reasons. First, the parallel passage in 1 Timothy only requires children to be submissive (3:4). Second, if children are young, you cannot always tell if a child is a believer or not, even if they profess it. Third, the churches in Crete are young and some of these potential elders are fairly recent converts and so their children may not have come to faith yet.⁴ The most compelling reason is that salvation is ultimately the work of God and not the work of parents. The ultimate deciding factor in our kids coming to faith is God not us. Let me make some comments about children. Some of us have been blessed with low maintenance children while others are blessed with high maintenance children. Some of us are blessed with compliant children and others are blessed with strong willed children. God does this because he wants to work in you in specific ways. So here is what Paul is saying in verse six, if a man is above reproach, that is, if he has a track record of marriage faithfulness and his children are generally faithful and obedient, then let him serve.

¹ Someone who represented Paul to the churches in the New Testament.

² There are five different ways to interpret this phrase that are beyond the scope of this message. I think it means that they have a long-term track record of marriage faithfulness and fidelity.

³ The elders cannot control nor demand these requirements once they are no longer under the father authority.

⁴ This is why Paul does not say they must not be a recent convert as he does 1 Tim 3:6; context of the local situation influences the list.

Then verse seven tells us why he has listed family qualifications first. “*For an overseer,⁵ as God’s steward, must be above reproach (7).*” For (because) gives the reason an elder must have a stable family life, because an elder, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. The steward is the household manager that the owner delegated authority and responsibility in his place. In other words, to lead God’s family a man must show he can lead his own family faithfully well. The family is a picture of God’s family and one needs to have his own family in order if he is to lead God’s family (1 Tim 3:4-5). The marriage relationship reflects Christ’s relationship with the church. So, husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and laid down his life to serve the church (Eph 5:25). It would be inconsistent to have men lead the church who do not display Christ’s love for the church in the home. The home is the ideal place where men (and women) learn to love, lead, serve, and shepherd others. He uses above reproach again for emphasis, stating even stronger, “he must be above reproach (7).” Then he goes on to describe what above reproach means for elders outside the family relationships.

The list is divided into negative and then positive character qualities (7-8) that are pretty straight forward. First, he must not be arrogant. That is, a person who is full of themselves. Next, he must not be quick tempered, like a hot head, someone who has a short fuse. Nor a drunkard, someone who overindulges with alcohol. That is, he needs alcohol to have a good time. He must not be violent describes being a bully. Lastly, he must not be greedy for gain, he is not driven by the love of money. Moving to the positive qualities Paul describes, he must be hospitable, that is, he likes to open up his home and be with people. Then He is a lover of good, that is, he loves the moral goodness God loves. This can be everything from what he watches, what he puts before his eyes, what he thinks is fun. Next, he must be self-controlled. That is, he is able to control his mind, emotions, and actions. He life is not filled with excesses. Then he must be upright, that is, he does the right thing. Similarly, he is holy, meaning devout, he lives a life that pleases God. Lastly, he is disciplined, his life is characterized by self-discipline. Let me make some comments about this list. Elders are not super Christians but model and set the example for godliness for the church. After listing character qualities, he ends the list of qualifications with the competencies required of elders.

First, notice the transition from the character qualities to the competencies. The character qualities are all one word descriptions but the competency quality is a twenty-one word description, showing the significance of an elders’ competency with Scripture. First, he describes the elders posture toward Scripture. “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word (9),” that is, he must be devoted to Scripture. He looks to Scripture for spiritual nourishment and strength and wisdom. You want elders to hear the elders say, “what does the bible say?” Then he points to the elders’ ability to use Scripture. He must hold firm to the word “*so that* he may be able to give instruction in sound or healthy doctrine (9).” It is sound doctrine which nourishes and feeds God’s people in contrast to false teaching. So, elders must be able to handle the word so they can teach, encourage others with it, exhort with it, and correct with it. “Giving instruction” means more than just getting up and teaching but having a good grasp of the bible to handle it freely to encourage others, exhort others, and also to rebuke those who contradict it. Rebuking those who contradict the word means that elders are able to identify and clarify the truth in contrast to falsehood (Acts 20:28-32). So, elders must be able to feed the sheep and also to fend off the foes.

Overseer is another word for elder. Presbyterian and Catholic denominations interpret overseer as bishop and create a hierarchy of bishops overseeing elders/pastors.

