

# The Character Of An Elder: Part 1

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## I. Titus 1:5-9

A. For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you-- if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, 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.

## II. Review

- A. Paul left Titus in Crete to "set in order the things that are lacking and to appoint elders."
- B. The fledgling Christian community in Crete was at risk until the "things which were lacking" were established.
- C. This included the appointment of elders to shepherd believers in each church. As we saw last time:
  - 1. FIRST: the goal is for there to be multiple elders within each church – plurality of eldership.
  - 2. SECOND: the Scripture uses equivalent terms which all describe a single role: elder (presbuteros) = bishop or overseer (episkopos) = shepherd or pastor (poimēn).
    - a) Elders are to be relatively older, experienced, mature individuals who are responsible for overseeing and guarding the flock in a similar way that a shepherd tends a flock of sheep.
  - 3. THIRD: elders are men – in accord with the gender-specific roles which God has established within the family and church.

## III. Exposition

### A. Titus 1:6

- 1. The office of elder requires both character and gifting by God, but notice how in both relevant passages Paul begins with character qualifications and only afterward discusses capabilities.
  - a) IMPORTANT – in God's economy, both character and gifting are needed, but character has the higher priority. Gifting without character is a prescription for shipwreck of the individual, the ministry, and often those under its influence.
  - b) OBSERVATION – Believers today seem to have little concern for character and often follow gifted individuals or ministries lacking in character.

2. **Blameless** – *aneklētos*, a compound word meaning “not accused”
  - a) Strictly: not having been called up or arraigned before a judge. Free from reproach, not accused of having done anything wrong.
  - b) 1 Timothy uses a slightly different word – *anepilēmtos* meaning “not to be laid hold of”. The idea being similar: he has done nothing wrong and stands without accusation of wrong-doing.
  - c) It does not mean ‘perfect’ or ‘sinless.’
    - (1) 1 John 1:8  
If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
  - d) It also does not mean that everyone likes him.
    - (1) It means the elder has not been formally accused of actual wrong-doing, especially within the community at-large.
    - (2) 1 Timothy 3:7  
“Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside...”
  - e) The position of elder is a natural target for rebellious believers.
    - (1) As with anyone in a leadership position, there will always be someone who has a perceived reason to dislike the leader — typically because the leader is in a position of spiritual authority and has challenged an unscriptural practice of another.
    - (2) If an elder is walking in wisdom and with deference to the one being disciplined, then other non-elders in the fellowship generally will not know the details of what has gone down ‘behind the scenes.’
    - (3) Elders won’t shepherd perfectly, but they are attempting to walk a difficult balance between leading by example and using God-given authority when required.
      - (a) Hebrews 13:17  
Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.
    - (4) Spurgeon - “Lectures to my Students” concerning the advice that those who would shepherd ought to act as if having “one blind eye and one deaf ear.”
3. **Husband of one wife.**
  - a) The Greek literally reads, “[a] man of one-woman”
  - b) The phrase must be important because it appears first on the list of qualities necessary for church leadership in both Timothy and Titus (1Ti. 3:2,12; Tit. 1:6). Both elders and deacons are to be “one-woman men.”

- c) How should this be interpreted – there is some ambiguity as the phrase stands on its own which leads to a number of possible meanings [Woods]
  - (1) If we take it to mean “never divorced”, this would have a significant affect upon who is qualified for the position of an elder since statistics indicate that over 50 percent of all marriages in our day (both Christian and non-Christian) end in divorce.
- d) Various interpretations have been put forth in church history.
  - (1) Married to the church
    - (a) “wife” being allegorized or spiritualized to mean “the church”. Married men (with real wives) do not qualify.
    - (b) Used in support of the requirement for Roman Catholic priests to be celibate.
  - (2) An elder must be married – unmarried men do not qualify.
  - (3) Only ever married once, whether before or after becoming a Christian - widowers who remarry do not qualify.
  - (4) Never divorced, either before or after becoming a Christian - widowers who remarry are acceptable as elders.
  - (5) Never divorced after coming to faith - a man who is divorced while a Christian does not qualify.
  - (6) Monogamy – presently married to only one wife. A polygamist does not qualify.
  - (7) Moral husband for all time – any husband who has ever been unfaithful does not qualify. (Although unfaithful, the man may not have been divorced.)
  - (8) Moral husband in the present – for a sufficient period that wisdom suggests he qualifies for consideration as an elder.
- e) Principles to consider when evaluating the possible meanings
  - (1) Concerning the possibility that it indicates that an elder must be a married man.
    - (a) Paul elsewhere emphasizes that unmarried individuals can serve God with greater dedication and less distraction (1Cor. 7:8,25-33).
    - (b) If marriage was required in order to have experience managing a family and to produce children which could then be examined for their faithfulness, what about married couples to whom God does not grant fertility?
    - (c) There is no indication that either Paul or Timothy were married (or had children).
  - (2) Regarding monogamy – this was not an issue in the Roman culture outside of Palestine. Also, it is said that the wife of a deacon must be a “one-man woman” (1Ti. 5:9) – are we to conclude that polyandry (a woman with multiple simultaneous husbands) is meant? This was never an issue in that culture.

- (3) All the other qualities which Paul mentions concern the qualifications of an elder emphasize the individual's present condition.
  - (4) As to whether remarried widowers are excluded, in Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians, Paul indicates that after the death of the first spouse, the marriage bond is legitimately broken thus allowing the surviving spouse to remarry (Rom. 7:2-4; 1Cor. 7:39). Therefore, the surviving remarried spouse is no longer bound to the deceased.
  - (5) When considering post-conversion divorce, we must remember that not all divorcées are morally culpable.
    - (a) Christ granted permission for people to divorce on the basis of adultery (Mat. 5:32; 19:9).
    - (b) A spouse could initiate divorce against the desire of the husband.
    - (c) In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul indicates that an unbelieving spouse who desires to depart from a believer should not be opposed if it leads to disharmony.
  - (6) If believers are forever limited by their pre-conversion sins, then is their really true forgiveness and restoration to be found in Christ? And what are we to make of God's restoration of individuals such as Moses (guilty of murder), David (guilty of adultery and murder), and Paul (accomplice to murder)?
  - (7) Is it logical to preach reconciliation and cleansing from all sin, including murder as in the case of Moses, David, and Paul and then hold up divorce as a more serious sin which permanently disqualifies a man from ever being considered as an elder?
  - (8) Do we experience less forgiveness and grace after we are no longer enemies of God, but among the redeemed?
- f) The appeal of legalism and judgmental-ism to the flesh.
- (1) Coming to God as a needy debtor of His grace and restoration, how quickly having experienced it's healing power we throw it off when our gaze subsequently turns to take in our brothers and sisters in Christ!
  - (2) Reading other commentators and interpreters on this passage can be an instructive, if depressing experience: a bewildering and arbitrary collection of moralizing and limitation which serve in the main as a healthy reminder to rejoice that our fellow man is not in the place of God.
    - (a) He must be married, he can't be married. He can never have been divorced. He can't have been widowed. If widowed, he can never remarry... on and on it goes – much of it sorely out of touch with the tenor of the entire New Testament teaching concerning legalism and grace.
- g) Summary: a man who is presently a faithful husband to one woman

- (1) Consistently, over a sufficient period of time that wisdom suggests qualifies him for consideration as an elder – just like the other characteristics which follow.
- (2) Men like Moses, David, and the Apostle Paul were all guilty of far more serious sins, yet following repentance and restoration, subsequently served in leadership roles.
- (3) This stance is more difficult and requires great wisdom and forgiveness, but accords more closely with the great truths of grace taught within Scripture.
- (4) As with many other elements of New Testament truth, walking in the Scriptural balance requires greater dedication.
- (5) It requires less maturity and responsibility to walk in legalism, but this seriously perverts the forgiveness and grace which are absolutely critical components of the gospel message!

#### 4. **Having faithful children.**

a) Faithful – does this mean they must be believers?

- (1) “having children who believe” (NASB95), “his children are believers” (ESV)
- (2) One commentary makes, what seems to me, to be a very presumptuous statement: “*It must be supposed that a Christian father who has unbelieving children is himself a recent convert or a very careless Christian.*” [White, 4:187]
- (3) Another state, *He who could not bring his children to faith, how shall he bring others?* [JFB, Tit. 1:6]
- (4) One wonders if these folks have ever raised children or observed real families?!
- (5) More importantly, what does Scripture teach elsewhere concerning salvation?
  - (a) Is coming to faith simply a matter of good instruction, godly example, and a wholesome environment?
  - (b) If the church at large did an exemplary job of presenting the gospel and living it out, would the entire world flock to Christ?
  - (c) Predestination, election – does the elect include every child of an elect parent?
    - i) What about situations where only one parent is a believer?
    - ii) How about situations (which we’ve all experienced) where several children are brought up identically in the same home under the same parents, but respond differently to the Christian faith? Was it a difference in the conduct of the father in the home that was the ultimate determining factor?
    - iii) What about the Scriptural truth that each *individual* is responsible before God — and that one person can never “make” another come to faith?

iv) John 1:12-13

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

- (6) Jesus chose Judas to be His disciple. If anyone had a perfect teacher and an environment that would have assured coming to faith, wouldn't it have been Judas? Yet we know he did not come to faith, but perished.
- (7) Letter to Timothy clarifies that this concerns *faithful behavior subject to godly discipline* rather than being born-again, which no father, exhort – teach – pray – as he might, can guarantee:
- (a) 1 Timothy 3:4-5  
one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);
- (b) 1 Timothy 3:12  
Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling [*their*] children and their own houses well.
- (8) Given the compass of Scriptural teaching concerning the process of salvation, it is best to understand this passage according to the reading adopted by the NKJV: the children of an elder are to be *faithful*, that is, *reliable, trustworthy* – whether born again or not.
- (9) Here we can agree with the venerable commentator Matthew Henry:  
And, as to his children, *having faithful children*, obedient and good, brought up in the true Christian faith, and living according to it, at least as far as the endeavours of the parents can avail. [Henry, Tit. 1:6-16]

## 5. Not accused of dissipation or insubordination

- a) Dissipation – *asōtías*
- (1) behavior which shows lack of concern or thought for the consequences of an action—'senseless deeds, reckless deeds, recklessness'
  - (2) a lack of appreciation for how their actions affect others
  - (3) out of control, undisciplined
  - (4) Eph. 5:18 – describes the effects of being 'drunk with wine'
- b) Insubordination – *anupótaka*
- (1) independent, out of control – not subject to the father's authority, or authority in general
  - (2) disobedient, rebellious
- c) As Paul makes clear in his letter to Timothy, the qualities of a good father within the home are a requirement for service in a similar role in the church.

- (1) Leadership by example.
- (2) Encouragement, motivating children to discover and develop their God-given gifts.
- (3) Consistency
- (4) Firm authority where needed (and it will always be needed at times!)

#### **IV. Points Of Application**

- A. Christian Ministry has high standards.
  1. Character is a *prerequisite* for effective gifting – they must not be separated.
  2. Gifting without character results in damage. Damage to believers and damage to the cause of Christ.
  3. The tendency in our time is to focus on gifting to the detriment of character. The results are both evident and predictable.
- B. The primary measure of a man's character is reflected in his treatment of his immediate family.
  1. His wife
    - a) It is no accident that one of the first requirements Paul mentions in both passages concerning the qualifications of an elder is that he be a "one woman man."
    - b) Steadfast loyalty and faithfulness.
    - c) Sexual purity.
    - d) Devotion to the partner God has given.
    - e) The most intimate relationship possible this side of heaven.
    - f) Encouragement, protection, gentleness.
    - g) Trust – will it be earned and held?
  2. His children
    - a) Do they respect him, even when they disagree?
    - b) Does he nurture them – or frustrate them?
  3. 24/7 relationship – impossible to make it out to be different than it is.
    - a) The man's wife and his children are the litmus test of who He and how he behaves is in close relationship over time.
- C. The Christian walk involves enormous grace and forgiveness.
  1. Lack of forgiveness and legalism which characterize many churches mar the face of Christianity
    - a) Observers who are outside fail to see the enormous forgiveness and restoration which is only found in true Christianity.

- b) Believers, having come to faith, can face the cruel and unbiblical reality of a congregation which judges them more harshly than Christ and refuses to forgive that which is now past – whether prior to coming to faith or after.
2. We experience (and extend) no less grace after having come to faith than before coming to grace. Christianity is all about grace!
3. Grace with Wisdom and in light of true repentance and Biblical process.
4. Ted Haggard as illustration.<sup>1</sup>
  - a) After 22 years, he served as pastor of New Life Church operating from a campus in northern Colorado Springs with a congregation of 14,000.
  - b) In November 2006, a male prostitute and masseur alleged that over a period of 3 years Haggard had paid him to engage in sex and also purchased and used methamphetamine.
  - c) A few days later Haggard resigned from all of his leadership positions.
  - d) On February 6, 2008, the new pastor at New Life Church, former home to Haggard, issued a press release announcing that Haggard had requested to leave the team created to "restore" him and that as Haggard's restoration is "incomplete", and that he was not welcome to return to vocational ministry at New Life Church.
  - e) On January 23, 2009 . . . officials from Haggard's former church announced that a young male church member had come forward in 2006 and that there was an "overwhelming pool of evidence [of an] inappropriate, consensual sexual relationship [that] went on for a long period of time [with Haggard]. Haggard's successor said the church reached a six figure settlement with the man, who was in his early 20s at the time.
  - f) On June 1, 2010 Haggard announced that he intended to start a new church in Colorado Springs. On June 6, 2010 the first meeting of the St. James Church occurred with Ted Haggard as the Pastor at his home in Colorado Springs, Colorado.
  - g) This is a man who, during his most intimate relations with his wife, knowingly exposed her to life-threatening risks without her knowledge. This is a most extreme violation of trust and evidence of selfishness!
  - h) Mr. Haggard has prematurely cut off the brothers who were overseeing his healing and restoration process and has entered ministry in a pastoral role after an extremely short period of reflection and healing.
  - i) The fact that he would seek to shepherd others so soon and after such deep betrayal of his wife and family is a big red flag.
  - j) This is not biblical wisdom – those who place themselves under such a leader have only themselves to blame!

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted\\_Haggard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_Haggard)

- (1) Gifting – I’ve seen this man at work personally at a missions conference some years ago.
  - (2) Character – I mentioned my suspicions to Deb way before any of this became public.
  - (3) Here we go again: gifting without character!
5. As in all things of applied Biblical wisdom – there is a *balance*.
- a) Yes, complete restoration and forgiveness can be found in Christ at any stage in our walk.
  - b) Yet it is also presumptuous and spiritually reckless to promote one’s self or another as being suited to lead God’s people relatively soon after a serious betrayal of trust and a questionable period and process of healing.

## V. References

- Henry            Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), Tt 1:6–16.
- JFB                Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset et al., *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Tt 1:6.
- White            Newport J. D. White, *The Expositor's Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 4:187.
- Woods            Andy Woods, *The Meaning of "the Husband of One Wife" in 1 Timothy 3:2* [<http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/documents/articles/15/15.htm>].