



Choosing Elders

Although Paul opened his letter to Titus with what would have been a common form of introduction, he used that introduction to set the tone for what is to follow. Now, in verse 5, it is straight down to business

“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”

Verse 5

Titus was left in Crete — we take it from this that Paul himself had previously gone there with Titus — to finish setting things in order and appoint elders who would look after the churches when Titus was gone.



What can we learn about the church in Crete from verse 5?

In verses 6 to 9 Paul reminds Titus of the kind of person an elder must be but before we look at Paul’s list of essential qualities there are a few general points we ought to consider.

First, Paul uses two terms for the people to be appointed. He writes about “Elders” (verse 5) and “Bishops” (verse 7). Both names refer to the same role. Elder (the Greek word is PRESBUTEROS) describes an older person (1 Timothy 5:2, 11). It is also used to describe people, such as members of the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5) and church leaders (Acts 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6) who hold positions of leadership. It brings to mind the dignity and maturity of those who hold the office. Bishop (the Greek word is EPISKOPOS) means “to watch over” in the way that a shepherd watches over his sheep. This word brings to mind the kind of work an elder does.



Does the use of the word elder have any significance with regard to the age of those who should be appointed to oversee the church?

Paul said that Titus should appoint elders (plural) in every town. Is that significant?

It is clear that Paul only envisages men in the role of elder. Do you agree with those who believe that women should not serve as elders? If so, why do you believe it is important to confine this role to men only?

An Elders' Job Description

We do not have a complete list of the duties of an elder in the Bible but as we consider the qualities essential in those who fill the role it might be helpful to keep in mind the following summary of its duties gleaned from different parts of the New Testament.

The elders' task is:

- To rule, chiefly by example. Hebrews 13:7, I Peter 5:3;
- To feed and care for the flock of God. Acts 20:28_{ff}; I Peter 5:1–4;
- To guard the flock of God. Acts 20:28_{ff};
- To teach the word of God and refute those who contradict it. Titus 1:9.

Timothy's List

One final point before we come to consider Paul's list of qualities. In Paul's first letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:1 – 7) we have a similar list of qualifications for eldership. Comparing the two lists helps us to understand more exactly what Paul has in mind and combining the two gives us a fuller picture of the kind of person who is qualified to be an elder.



What points are different in the two lists?

When both lists are combined what qualities are given most emphasis?

Blameless

The word translated "blameless" (ANEGKLETOS) means without reproach. It is not that an elder must be sinless and perfect but he must be a man of good reputation and because this stands at the head of the list, he must in particular be one who cannot be charged with any wrongdoing in regard to the qualities that follow.

The Husband of One Wife

The phrase, "the husband of one wife" has been the cause of a lot of debate. The most commonly held opinion views it from the perspective of people who lived in a culture where polygamy was practiced and takes it to mean that an elder must only have one wife at a time. Some who think it must mean something more argue that it also implies that an elder must be exemplary in his faithfulness to his wife. Others would use it to exclude anyone who has been divorced and remarried from eldership.



Could a single man be considered for eldership?

A Good Father

"Having faithful children not accused of dissipation (being wild, living a life of excess) or insubordination (disobedience, unruliness)."

Verse 6b

Some take this to mean that an elder's children must believe, that is they must be Christians. The phrase could be translated that way. They argue that if a man's children remained pagans, it would throw into question his ability to lead others to the faith. However "faithful children" could simply mean that the children

are faithful to their parents and not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient as the following phrase says.



What do you think the second half of verse 6 means?

Why do you think it is important to include this in a list of qualities that are essential in those to be appointed as elders?

A Good Steward

“For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God.”

Verse 7

The word blameless is the same word as was used in verse 5 but the focus here is on the fact that the elder is a steward — one who is accountable for managing someone else’s property. An elder is not just a servant of the church; he is appointed to oversee God’s property and is accountable to God for how that property is used and how it prospers. Eldership is a position of trust and huge responsibility and so it is hardly surprising to find that Paul says a potential elder ought to have a proven track-record of having handled the Lord’s goods wisely.



How do you think a potential elder’s good reputation as a steward of God ought to be demonstrated before he is appointed?

Negatives and Positives

Paul continues with a list of negative traits that disqualify and positive traits that must be present before anyone is appointed as an elder.

He must not be overbearing. That is he must not arrogantly disregard the interests of others in order to please himself.

He must not be quick-tempered: must not readily yield to anger, but rather must meet frustration with patience.

He must not be given to drunkenness.

He must not be violent: not quick to raise his fists and not quick to stir up arguments.

He must not pursue dishonest gain and he must not be greedy for money.

He must be hospitable. The word used here literally means that he must love strangers. Christians travelling in the first century avoided public inns with their pagan atmosphere and food that had already been offered to idols. Instead, they would seek out a Christian home in which spend the night. One of the results was that believers from widely scattered areas got to know each other, cementing lines of fellowship between churches. Hospitality was an important virtue in Paul’s day.



Why do you think it is important that an elder should be hospitable?

How is the quality of being hospitable demonstrated today?

The list continues: an elder must be someone who loves good deeds and good people.

How would this quality be apparent?



An elder must be self-controlled. The word means sober-minded and the implication is that he is someone who is in control of his thoughts and feelings so that he can act thoughtfully, wisely and discreetly.

An elder must be upright, just and holy: one whose whole manner is pleasing to God.

An elder must be disciplined: someone who shows inner strength of character by being able to master his own desires.

A Teacher

Finally, Paul highlights the elder's ability to teach the word of God, but he does not merely say that he must be a good teacher. What Paul has in mind is more specific and more exacting than that.

“...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.”

Verse 9

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught to him — the message of the apostles. He needs not only to know the word of God but also to be firmly, unshakably convinced of it and to be able to use his knowledge to teach others, to exhort them to follow and remain faithful to sound doctrine and to convict any who contradict sound doctrine of their sin.

What skills will an elder need to have in order to be able to do these things?



Notice This

Did you notice the word “for” at the beginning of verse 7? If you follow the passage closely you will see that it connects verse 5 with everything that follows right down to the end of verse 9. Timothy was to choose men who were blameless, husbands of one wife and good fathers because they must be blameless as stewards of God's property, not self-willed and so on. It seems that Paul believed that the qualities required of an elder would be demonstrated in his reputation and in the way he exercised his role as a husband and father.

In what ways does this thought modify your understanding of verse 6?

