

Two Essentials of a Healthy Church

Titus 1:1-16

Today we are going to talk about two essentials of a healthy church: Sound Doctrine, and Qualified Elders. The majority of the sermon is about elders.

- We are also putting **Donnie** forward today as an elder candidate. The elders fully recommend him without reservation. There has been a period of testing, and examination, and more to come. Now, you covenant members will have over thirty days to ask questions, and then we will affirm him publicly on Sept 16. (Personal Word)

Why is a message about elders important for you?

- (1) Some of you are going to plant churches or be sent out on teams. Please, get this right. It's essential.
 - (2) Because the church should be important to you. It's Jesus' bride.
 - (3) Many, if not most, problems in a church can be traced back here: leadership problems. This is relevant for everyone.
 - (4) Practically, everything on this list of qualifications (with the exception of the ability to teach" – and even that to a degree) is the same list of character traits that every Christian should possess. "Examine Your life and Doctrine" Paul says to Timothy, and we all should be examining our lives.
- If you are a **dad**, especially, this is relevant. For a good dad, is a little shepherd. You are "pastor dad."
 - **Dudes**, remember Mark Liederbach's words, "**Every man an elder**," meaning their character.
 - If you are a **single lady**, this list shows you not only some of the character qualities you also need, but also the type of guy you should want to marry! That may sound strange to you. "**You say, I don't want to marry a pastor.**" You should. Not maybe in the role of a pastor, but in the same character. You don't want a hospitable, approve reproach, one-woman man?
 - "**Are you called to marry a pastor?**" She thought I was crazy. She probably thought elders/pastors were like aliens.

Titus is about renovating the church in Crete (Read v. 5).

Titus has the hard task of trying to put what remained in order, and to do that he is to *teach sound doctrine*, and *appoint qualified elders*. Apart from these two, the church will collapse. Virtually, every church in the NT needed reformation in these areas.

So let's look at these two essentials of a healthy church, and they are related: (1) Sound Doctrine (1-4), (2) Qualified Elders (5-16).

ESSENTIAL #1: SOUND DOCTRINE (1-4)

A. Sound (Healthy) Doctrine as the Major Theme

This is a long introduction, especially for a small book. It's one sentence. One obvious observation to make is that it emphasizes doctrinal truth, and the believer's response to that truth.

This gives us a hint as to this theme in Titus.

- Paul does this sort of thing elsewhere, previewing his theme by noting it in the opening verses. In Philippians, he notes joy (1:4). And then talks about some 14 times.
- Here in Titus, unlike the other books, he launches off into some theological beliefs. Why? Because he is going to emphasize sound theology throughout the letter.
 - v. 9, "give instruction in sound doctrine"
 - v. 11, "teaching ... what they ought not to teach"
 - v. 13, "sound in the faith"
 - v. 14 – "turn away from truth"
 - 2:1, "sound doctrine"
 - 2:10, "adorn the doctrine"

B. Some Reasons Why Sound Doctrine is So Important?

#1: You will build your life on something.

A. Many build their lives on myths. This was problem in Crete, "Jewish myths" (v. 14), and it's a problem today also. "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths" (1 Tim. 4:7)

- **Myths** – Examples: **Easter Bunny, Christmas, Tooth Fairy.**
- **More acceptable myth** “*It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere.*” **You can be sincere, but you can be sincerely wrong. (Example: Following Kimberly)**
- **The world teaches many false beliefs.**
 - Grocery store “*new discovery, fat burning prayers*”
 - **More Examples: TV Talkshows. Here are some:**
 - *All your problems are someone else's fault*
 - *This world owes you happiness*
 - *You will be happy if you get what you want*
 - *There is no reason to feel guilty*
 - *Man is good and unselfish basically*
 - *All beliefs are equally valid*
 - *Porn and perversion are innocent*
 - *You shouldn't have to wait for anything*
 - *The answer lies within you*
- **People make money on these myths.** It was happening here in Crete. “**Teaching for shameful gain.**” (1:11).
- **Untrue beliefs are the cause for many of the world's problems, but also they're the cause of many of “my problems.”** Many Christians for example, affirm the sovereignty and goodness of God, but live as a functional atheists, worried to death over everything.
- **Your beliefs determine behavior.**
 - “Theology leads to biography”
 - Notice that phrase in verses 1, “Truth that accords with godliness” or “truth that “leads” to godliness.

B. Your beliefs are your choice. You can't blame anyone else. You can believe “**Elvis is alive, and the moon is cheese.**” You can also change your beliefs. Paul says that the Word is “preached” (3), and that he and Titus have a “common faith.” They believed. **Further, some of the Cretans were “liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons,” but some of them**

believed and were transformed. You don't have to believe what your parents believed.

#2: The only source of absolute truth is God and His Word

- You can build your life on what the “world says” or what the “Word says.”
- Build it on that which doesn't change. The Bible is from God, the God who never lies.
- *Science books change all the time; when I was studying health, we always had new discoveries. But the Word remains forever.*
- Building our lives on God's Word is the key for stability and peace.
- At least 80 times Jesus says, “I tell you the truth.” He explodes common myths. Build your life on the words of Jesus.

C. Doctrines Highlighted in Titus 1:1-4

We could go through here and highlight several key doctrines. I want to point them out and follow up with a few applications.

Doctrine of Salvation (1a)

- Paul is a **“servant of God.”** This is not unique to Titus, but notice quickly that Paul is a slave of Jesus. He has become a slave to Christ. **That's what happens when you become a Christian, you get a new owner.** And only in this new identity do you actually find purpose and identity and joy.
- **“and an apostle of Jesus Christ”** – This highlights Paul's calling. Who called him? **The risen Jesus.** Salvation is wrapped up in the person and work of Christ.
- **“for the sake of the faith of God's elect.”** Paul is describing the purpose of ministry, which is noted here as “furthering” or “nurturing” the faith of God's people (or “God's elect”). Notice the mystery in salvation here, the divine initiative and human response; it is God who chose some in Crete, and they also expressed faith in Christ. Now, Paul wants the elect to grow in their faith.

- **“Knowledge of Truth”** (1b) is another way to talk about eternal life. Salvation is a coming to the truth and the truth in Jesus.
(Example: Matt Cheuning: "Good for you")

Doctrine of Sanctification (1b)

- **“accords with godliness”** or leads to godliness means that real saving faith leads to a life of godliness.
- See Titus 2:11-12 – Grace for godliness
- So here are two ways for the believer to grow, in **“faith and in godliness.”** Are you growing in these areas?
- Paul thanked God that the Thessalonians faith was growing **“more and more”** (2 Thess. 1:13)

Doctrine of Glorification (2a)

- **“in hope of eternal life”** – Hope means a settled security in the Bible. We should also be growing in hope.
- Notice why we can have this hope (and this gets us into the doctrine of God....)

Doctrine of God (2b)

We can have settled hope because of this guarantee

- **“God does not lie.”** The Cretans lie. Satan is a liar. *Apart from grace, we're liars* But God doesn't lie. He cannot lie because he can't “disown himself” (2 Tim. 2:13).
- Look at Hebrews 6:17-20. We are anchored!
- **“God promised grace before the ages began.”** In other words our hope is rooted in God's eternal purposes. It's not a wish dream; it's a settled confidence in our sovereign and good God. It was then promised and then revealed in God's own time (v. 3).

Doctrine of Scripture (3a)

- *“Manifested in his word” “with which I have been entrusted by God”*
- God reveals himself through the Word.
- **The preaching of the Word is the bridge between the past promises and the future fulfillment.** We preach the Scriptures in between the times.

Doctrine of Christ/Trinity (3b-4)

- **“God our Savior” (v. 3) “Christ Jesus our Savior” (v. 4)–** Jesus given the title as God and Savior.
- **See 2:13** – God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Doctrine of the Church (4)

- **To Titus: “my child in a common faith”**
- **Paul shares a common faith with Titus; and a common family, called the church.**

A Few Questions Before We Move Forward:

- **To All Believers:** Are You Growing In These Areas? Faith, Knowledge and Hope?
- **To Leaders:** Are you laboring for the faith, knowledge and hope of your people? Are you nurturing faith, leading them to the knowledge of the truth, and reminding them of their certain hope?

ESSENTIAL #2: QUALIFIED ELDERS (5-16)

V. 5: Notice first why Paul left Titus in Crete – to put what remained in order, to finished an unfinished task. Elsewhere Titus is doing other ministries, as an apostolic delegate. He is spoken of with affection (**cf., 2 Cor. 7:5-6**). Here he has a clear method of achieving this goal: find qualified elders.

This is critical of course. It has been said that everything rises or falls upon leadership. (READ 6-9).

Five Truths Pertaining to Elders

Truth #1: The terms “overseer” and “elder” are used interchangeably. They refer to the same office (5, 7).

- There are only two offices in the NT: Deacon and Elder/Overseer (See Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3).
- Notice **verse 5**, “Elder,” (*presbuteros*) then **v 7** “Overseer” (*episkopos*)
 - Example: **Acts 20:17, 28**
 - Example: **1 Peter 5:1-2.**
- Another word that’s used to refer to the same office is “pastor” in **Ephesians 4:11** (Poiema). Like the elder/overseer passages, he is called to “teach.”
- However, we should note that the most used term is “elder,” even though in some circles it’s “pastor.” Pastor appears one time.
 - I’m not saying you stop using “pastor” – we use it at IDC to refer to the same group. I’m just saying elder is used more frequently.
 - Some don’t like the term for elder, especially among Baptists. **One guy recently asked Nate, “What do you young guys call it now, “Elders?” Actually, no sir. That’s what the NT calls us. We’re not being innovative. Our polity is 2,000 yrs old.**

Truth #2: The plurality of elders is the NT norm (5).

- Notice that Titus is to appoint “elders in every city” (Plural). That is “every city that has a church” (See Knight).
- No specific number is ever dictated and the emphasis in Scripture always falls on their character not their number. But it is usually

plural in number. See [Acts 11:30](#); [14:23](#); [15:2-6, 22-23](#); [16:4](#); [20:17](#); [Acts 21:18](#); [Titus 1:5-ff.](#); [1 Tim. 5:17, 19](#); [1 Pet 5:1, 5](#); [James 5:14](#).

- **Many** have changed language and called this a “staff.” They speak of a **“the Pastor” and his “staff.”** But this isn’t best. First of all, there is no one that’s called **“the pastor” in the NT, especially not “Senior Pastor”** – except Jesus! ([1 Peter 5:4](#)). So I say we reserve that title for Jesus.
- **What the NT teaches is a plurality of under-shepherds who are accountable to the Senior Shepherd for how they have cared for God’s flock. Notice the phrase “God’s steward” – implying responsibility and accountability.**
- How this “pastor and his staff” model often works out in churches is this form of **Varsity-JV sort of polity.** The youth guy is JV, and if the “Senior Pastor” **doesn’t visit you, then it doesn’t count.** That’s terrible. **While some may be the primary preacher/teacher (cf., [1 Tim 5:17](#)), each are elders/pastors.**
 - A Church may have a staff (assistants in the office, for example) but that’s different than elders.

Plurality is not only biblical, but it’s also incredibly practical and wise. Let me share some benefits of it:

- (1) It protects you from mistakes you could make as the lone pastor.**
- (2) It helps make up for your deficiencies as a pastor.** Some are prophets, others kings, and others priests.
- (3) It makes your job more enjoyable.**
- (4) It guards against sacrificing your family.** “If you lose your family, you’ve lost” [Larry Osborne])
- (5) It provides accountability and encouragement.**
- (6) It allows you to divide the shepherding responsibilities** (including praying for congregational needs).
- (7) It ensures doctrinal integrity.**
- (8) It should reinforce the idea that Jesus is the Head of the Church, not a single pastor.**

(9) It guards against the “celebrity pastor” movement that permeates the Christian sub-culture. The church is not built around one rock star senior pastor, but a plurality of servant leaders.

(10) It allows for a team-teaching model to flourish.

(11) A plurality of elders is the best way to prepare for the departure of a(n) elder/pastor. We will not use a “pastor search committee” to replace a pastor. We will simply identify other elders. We will not have an interim preacher, since all of our elders can preach (It’s a requirement for a pastor – 1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:9). They will just step in and preach.

What Makes a Good Elder Team?

- (1) Theological Unity
- (2) Philosophical Unity (agreement on how to “do church”);
- (3) Relational Harmony (you like spending time together); and
- (4) Competency (each guy actually gets things done).

Why do churches not do this? Tradition, Ignorance, Fear of Change, and Corporate models. Just to name a few.

Truth #3: The selection of elders involved an elder-led, congregationally involved process.

Titus is called to appoint the elders and is told what to look for. But Paul’s emphasis on the potential elder’s “above reproach” character, or “blameless” character indicates that the congregation will be involved.

- **The congregation’s involvement is consistent with other passages as well: Acts 1:15, 23-24, 6:2-5, 13:3, 14:27, 15:3, 22, 2 Cor. 8:19.**

This is what our Bi-Laws say, in Article 2, Section 2: Selection

“Should the need for additional elders arise, there will be an active search initiated by the elders for men who meet the biblical qualifications. The elders will examine each candidate to determine if they meet the biblical qualifications. The number of candidates presented to the membership for affirmation will depend upon the needs of the church. There is neither a preset number of elders, nor a preset term of service.”

Truth #4: The elders must be above reproach in character and conduct (6-8).

Now we get to the part I mentioned in the introduction. These character qualifications are like a little self-examination.

- **I know of at least eight guys** who have disqualified themselves the last two years- related to these matters. This list is not just something off the top of Paul's head. It's reality.

The first thing to notice is the repetition of the phrase **“above reproach”** or **“blameless”** in verse 6 and 7.

- Now, you should interpret this realistically. Paul doesn't mean “perfect” or “flawless.” What he means is a man of **“unquestioned integrity”** (JBP).
- Public reputation is important. **David Platt put out names in the newspaper!**
- The same thing **in 1 Tim. 3:2** (the parallel text to this)

Then we might divide the lists into two categories: Blameless in Relationships, and Blameless in Conduct.

A. Blameless in Relationships (6)

Guthrie says, **“The home is the training ground for Christian leaders.”** Paul mentions both marriage and parenting first.

Marriage

- ***Husband of one wife*** – literally a **“one-woman man.”**
- It doesn't mean that you have to be married; the best evidence is that neither Paul nor Titus was married... But the norm is that they will be married.
- **MacArthur says**, “Paul is not referring to a man's *marital status*, as the absence of the definite article indicates. Rather, the issue is of

moral character, sexual behavior. Many men who are only married one-time are not “one-women men.”

- I'm a a one woman man....

Parenting

- “**children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.**” Let’s take the last part first...
- He must have children that are **neither wild** (not open to the charge of debauchery), **nor disrespectful** (insubordinate). The picture is of the Prodigal Son who lived recklessly.
- Timothy adds, “he must keep his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God’s church?” (3:4-5)
- So his to have behaved kids. Not perfect ones. **But not little "hobbit demons."**
- But what about “**children are believers**” (6)? I agree with George Knight who says:

“Should ΠΙΣΤᾶ in this clause be understood as “faithful” or as “believing”? The range of usage shows that either meaning is a possibility: The word can clearly mean “**faithful**,” as it does several times in the PE, including once with a noun, as here (2 Tim. 2:2). It can also mean “**believing**” and does on several occasions in the PE, again including once with a noun (1 Tim. 6:2). **The context here and the parallel in 1 Tim. 3:4–5, however, provide some important indicators:** The qualifying statement here, “not accused of dissipation or rebellion,” emphasizes **behavior** and seems to explain what it means for ΤΕΚΝΑ to be ΠΙΣΤᾶ. Likewise **1 Tim. 3:4** speaks of the overseer “keeping his children under control with all dignity.” In both cases the overseer is evaluated on the basis of his control of his children and their conduct.... If that is so, then ΠΙΣΤᾶ here means “faithful” in the sense of “**submissive**” or “**obedient**,” as a servant or steward is regarded as ΠΙΣΤῶς when he carries out the requests of his master (Knight, 289-90).

"A further application of this principle may be envisaged, especially in cases where candidates are unmarried or childless. Before being accepted for a wider ministry, they should have proved themselves in a narrower one, for example, in Sunday School or youth club." (Stott). I would add child care, and there are others.

B. Blameless in Conduct (7-8)

Five Negatives

The first set deals with areas of strong temptation: **Pride, Temper, Drink, Power, and Money**. *That's like every dude!*

1. **Not Arrogant** – Some leaders live to feed their own pride and vanity. They don't accept criticism or advice. They get envious and jealous of others.
 - "Not puffed up with conceit" (1 Tim. 3:6), or you might fall into the condemnation of the devil. Not like Terrell Owens, "I love me some me."
 - "Let another man praise you, not your own lips" (Prov 27:2)
 - "What do you have that you did not receive? If you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?"
 - Prideful leaders try to "lord it over people" (1 Peter 5:3), instead of leading by example & care. Leadership is not lordship. It's about humble service.
2. **Not Quick Tempered** – This is a temptation because pastors often work with demanding and difficult people. The temptation is to be irritable or impatient. He is not to have a quick fuse. Don't be a religious bully if in leadership. (Example: "too cold," "not a pastor," "wearing black," "goatee") - cf, 1 Cor 4:12-13
3. **Not a Drunkard** – Not all will be abstainers, but all pastors are called to temperance and self-control and moderation.
 - In hard times, pastors may try to self-medicate, but Jose Cuervo and Johnny Walker make bad accountability partners!

4. **Not Violent** – “not a striker” – in actions or words.

- Paul says, “not violent but gentle.” (3:3)
- Pastors aren’t to lead by force, but by example and love and truth – like Jesus.
- There will be days you might feel like it, but make it Call of Duty 3, not your congregation.
- (Example: Me and Kimberly playing Xbox)

5. **Not Greedy** – “not pursuing dishonest gain” (NIV).

- Not one who uses the ministry as a money-making business. Money is not to be the motive of an elder.
- **1 Peter 5:2** says, “you minister not for dishonest gain, but eagerly”
- **1 Tim. 6:10** says, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”
- **It is not wrong for them to be compensated, but they are to not take advantage of others, or be motivated by greed.**

Those things he is not to be – neither is any man in this room! Now, what is he to be?

Six Positive Qualifications

1. **Hospitable** – The word literally means, “the love of strangers.”

- He opens his heart and his home to others, both inside and outside the church, every race, background.
- This is the opposite of “arrogant” or “overbearing” – people enjoy being with those who are hospitable.
- For corporate worship, this is also important. The pastors should have a welcoming disposition, and be good hosts. **We can’t have the building looking like a frat house when people show up! ... Do you tighten up or relax when he's around?**

2. **A lover of good** – promotes virtue; and what is good for others. He has a concern for goodness in your life. He supports good causes (Micah 6:8).
3. **Self-Controlled** – This is the opposite of violence and drunkenness.... Donnie... You must be able to control yourself... Some guys I wanted give a pet to.... Fly off handle, reckless...
4. **Upright** – He is honest and fair and just in his dealings with people.
5. **Holy** – He is pursuing pervasive holiness. He is seeking Christ-likeness.
6. **Disciplined** – He isn't lazy. He works hard. He isn't wild and reckless. (example: Dude's car was a total trash can... Some are Excessively big...)

What I want my boys to be, and who I want my girls to marry.

It's interesting that the word for "discipline" is used last in the list of the fruit of the Spirit (self-control), as a fitting summary of the qualities, since the big idea is one must practice self-mastery.

It's also important to remember that these qualities don't exist un apart from the work of God's grace (Titus 2:12), and the Spirit of God working through us (Gal 5:16-ff). It is necessary for us to rest in the fact that God is working these graces in us, and also pursue them with repentance and disciplined living.

Differences in 1 Timothy 3? "Respectable" (Tim only), "Not a recent convert" (Tim only), "well thought of by outsiders" (Tim only). "A lover of good, upright and holy" (Titus only). "Children are believers" (Titus only). These should also be taken into consideration when evaluating a candidate.

#5: The primary role of the elders is to care for the flock through faithful teaching (9-16)

To faithfully teach, Titus is to instruct and rebuke. He is to teach truth and refute error.

A. **He must instruct (9)**

- He most “hold firm” to the word of God. That which has been passed down.
- He is to “give instruction in sound doctrine.” The phrase occurs 8 times in the New Testament, all in the pastorals, with 5 of those in Titus.
- There are various contexts for teaching: public, classes, or more mentoring type of instruction (2 Tim 2:2). But the elder must be able to teach in some capacity.
- This **includes music selection!** It's portable theology!

B. **He must rebuke (9c)**

- This negative aspect of teaching is unfashionable, but it is necessary.
- Jesus did it. The Apostles did it. And with the word of God, pastors must do it.
- **Verse 11** he adds that we must “**silence**” false teachers
- **Verse 13** he adds that we must “**rebuke**”

Notice what is said about these false teachers...

A. **Their Identity (10)** – Rebellious people, empty talkers, deceivers.

- Their talk doesn't edify and it leads people astray.
- Paul is especially referring to the circumcision party, who are obsessed with myths.

B. **Their Influence (11)** – He says that they must be “silenced” meaning that one has to take action.

- Why? Because they are home-wreckers. (**Those are good burritos but not teachers!**).

C. **Their Character (12-14a)** – He quotes what seems to be Epimenides' saying.

- There was also a term “**kretizo**” for “lie” or “cheat” named after the Cretans.

- Paul says “this is true.” (13)
- But Paul doesn’t accept that for every Cretan. He knows some have been transformed.
- Paul seems to be applying Epimenides saying to the false teachers.

D. Their Errors (14b-16) –

- **First, they teach “the commands of men” (14b).** This sounds like Jesus to the Pharisees, who taught “the traditions of men” as if they were the words of God.
- **Second, they have a false understanding of purity (15).** Like the Pharisees, they prized external ritual above that which is internal and transforming.
 - **Once we’ve been made clean inwardly,** Jesus said, “everything will be clean for you” (Luke 11:41).
 - In Paul’s words “To the [inwardly] pure, all things are pure.
 - This includes the gifts of the Creator, including food and drink and marriage.
 - But to those who don’t believe, nothing is pure. Their minds (what they believe) and their conscious (what they feel) are corrupted.
 - False teachers don’t understand gospel transformation.
- **Third, they claim to know God, but deny him by their actions** (read v. 16).
 - There is a difference in "profession" and "possession"
 - James says truth faith is dynamic, leading to obedience.

John Stott notes that these three tests can be used to test any system:

- Origin (commands of men or word of God),
- Essence (inward, spiritual and transforming or external ritual)
- Result (transforming or merely ascent)

He concludes by saying “They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work.” The theme of disobedience and obedience sort of runs through the whole chapter.

How can one be transformed? We must look to Christ.

- Left to ourselves, we can't live out this list of qualifications!

- But there's one who did - the ultimate Overseer.
 - He was not arrogant but humble;
 - not quick tempered but patient;
 - not a drunkard but sober minded;
 - not violent but gentle;
 - not greedy for gain but instead became poor for our sake....
 - He was hospitable - the friend of sinners;
 - he was a lover of good...

- We must place our faith in Christ, in his perfect work, and be counted blameless positionally, and then through Christ, experience these graces practically. (Read Heb 13:20-21)

- Praise God, Jesus traded places with the unfit, detestable, disobedient. He took the judgment of sinners on himself, and in turn gives them righteousness, then empowers us to live out his character.

- Have you placed your faith in this Christ? Our Great God and Savior? Our great Shepherd? You are building your life on something. Build it on Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life.