

Good morning, church. My name is Don Starnes, and I serve as one of the church elders. As Tony mentioned last week, he is enjoying vacation with his family right now, and the elders and pastor interns will be completing the book of Titus over the next six weeks. Therefore, at least for today, welcome to the “B” team. As you just heard from Barbra’s reading, we have a lot to cover this morning, as [Titus 1:5-9](#) is very strong on non-negotiable doctrines.

Verse 6-9 sets the bar for church leaders high, very high. Scripture gives us plenty of examples of what is unacceptable and expected behavior for children of God. Today's message is made up of both the dos and don'ts regarding the qualifications for a church elder/pastor. Sermon preparation should always get very self-reflective, and I can assure you that working through this message has been very humbling. My hope is that we all examine ourselves against this and all scripture, as [2 Timothy 3:16](#) tells us, All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.

V 5 This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained in order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. Remained in Greek renders as lacks, lacking, or falls short. How did Paul know that the churches in Crete were lacking something, anything, many things?

We know that Paul received communication from many people from many places, so he may have learned of the Cretan churches' status by communication from any of those personal relationships, or maybe these communications were simply piled onto the firsthand experience Paul had with the churches from his stop through Crete on the way to Rome.

ACTS 27 tells us that Paul was not alone on his trip to appear before Caesar in Rome; he was accompanied by Luke, and [Aristarchus](#), who was a companion and fellow worker on Paul’s mission trips.

[Paul’s trip to Rome]



Bad sailing weather on Paul's trip from Caesarea to Rome caused Paul's ship to make a stop at Fair Haven, Crete. This was a short stop, lasting anywhere from days to a few weeks; however, Paul does not need much time to get a grasp of the condition of a church. Since Paul was under arrest, it is plausible that he sent Luke and Aristarchus on a mission to find local churches and bring leaders to him so he could visit with them or, minimally, bring him a report of the local church condition. The fact is that scripture is silent on how the Holy Spirit informed Paul he was needed in Crete, but it is obvious that he was needed, and not only did he respond to this call, but he took his experienced coworker and spiritual child, Titus, with him.

Titus was not only a soldier for the gospel but a tireless coworker with Paul. As Pastor Tony stated last week, it is very probable that Titus came to faith under Paul's teaching. He also traveled with Paul to the Jerusalem council, worked hard in Corinth, as well as Crete, and after Crete, moved on to Nicopolis and Dalmatia. All of this indicates that Titus was highly trusted by Paul and up to the monumental challenge of Paul's orders for the work in Crete.

Whatever remained to be done in Crete, Titus knew exactly what Paul meant, and he was equipped to accomplish it. The challenge was the amount of work to be done. All that remained was not likely to be a small task, and he was to appoint elders in every city, EVERY city.

Paul told Titus that he was sending his replacement to Crete and that he wanted Titus to meet him in Nicopolis, where Paul would be wintering. That leaves Titus less than 12 months to get his assignment done. Crete is an island of approximately 160 miles E to W, and 7.5 to 35 miles N to S, making a 12-month church planting mission in every city an impossible request. Therefore, the churches were already there, so where did churches in every Cretan city come from? We know that Cretans were present in Jerusalem when Peter preached his first Spirit-led sermon at Pentecost because it lists Cretans by name as one of the peoples that heard their own Greek dialect being spoken by Galilean Spirit-filled speakers. Before or shortly after Stephen's martyrdom, some or all of those Cretans returned to Crete with the gospel. That is likely the birth of the church in Crete, but not likely the birth of sound doctrine in those churches.

Now that we have an idea of why Titus is there and what his task is, let's move on to the main task, appointing elders in every church on the island, an island the Greek poet Homer referred to as "hundred-cities". Not a literal one hundred cities, but many cities. Paul gave the trusted Titus a list of qualifications that must be met for one to serve as an elder. If Titus was a seasoned worker with Paul, do you think he needed this to-do list he was given? Maybe after Paul left Titus in Crete, he remembered that he forgot to give him instructions, or that Titus possibly forgot what he was supposed to do, or maybe he decided to implement a plan of his own. We know that Paul was not that sloppy, nor was Titus that disobedient. This letter is the written form of Paul's earlier instructions to Titus. In short, the letter was for the church body, leaders, and false teachers to know that Titus was operating with authority given by the Apostle Paul.

Before we get into the qualifications of an elder, what is an elder? In Greek, elder is used as both *presbuteros* and *episkopos*. *Presbuteros* literally means older man, used to describe a man of age, experience, and wisdom, which could be any older man. *Episkopos* is used to describe an office held in the church by an older man, which is why the two words are used interchangeably throughout the New Testament. It also renders as overseer, and we also use the title of under shepherd to describe this office. We use under shepherd to illuminate the fact that the flock belongs to someone else, and it is to be tended to as directed by the owner or head shepherd. All church flocks belong to Jesus and are to be led as He directed by His written word.

Verse 6-9 lists the qualifications of an elder, and Paul gives Titus a list that sets the framework or guardrails of an elder candidate.

V6 Above reproach.

Reproachless, without the stain of reproach, all point to a blameless man. Is a blameless man a sinless man? Absolutely not. We were all sinners before and are still not sinless after receiving a regenerated heart. So then what is the difference between sin and reproach? Sin is an action or even an inaction against a Holy God. I suspect that we all understand the action of sin, such as using the Lord's name in vain, is an action against His commandments, just as getting angry and saying something that is hurtful to someone is an action. Having the ability to help someone yet watching them continue in a need that could be satisfied is a sin of omission. Jesus taught of omission in Matthew 25:42-43 ²for I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; ⁴³I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me. Therefore, in instances of a choice, inaction is also an action. So we see the sin of action is not blameless, and reproach is blameless. Again, what is the difference? Sin is an action that falls short of the character of God, and a reproach is the disgrace, blame, shame, or consequences that follow a person, possibly for life, as a result of that sin. An example of reproach could be a married believer who committed adultery and is now divorced as a result of it. Adultery was the sin, and the broken family the divorce caused is the reproach. Again, the evidence or shame that follows that person. Israel partook in the sin of idolatry, and the reproach was the shame of being removed from the promised land through captivity by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. If a person commits the sin of theft, but repays the theft sevenfold, that issue should be forgiven and therefore settled.

If the person I mentioned earlier, who got divorced before coming to faith, could they be considered for elder, after all, the divorce took place before regeneration? Maybe, it depends on the circumstances. Did it result in a shameful reproach? Divorce before salvation would not be an automatic disqualifier, any more than Saul's harmful actions before becoming Paul disqualified him.

Long story short, if sin has left a stain that is still a shame, blame, or scar on this person's life, it is very possibly a reproach that disqualifies them from being an elder.

Reproach is the broad disqualifier in that it does not matter what the sin is; if it rises to the level of reproach, it is a disqualifier.

V6 Husband of one wife.

Paul next states that the candidate must be the husband of one wife, or said another way, a one-woman man. This is not speaking to the practice of polygamy. Although the act is described in the Old Testament, it was never referred to as God honoring or as getting good results. It was also not a practice in Judaism that needed to be taught against. Since 1 Cor 7:39 clearly states that remarriage after the death of a spouse is permitted, a one-woman man would not exclude a widower, and since there is a narrow window for justified Christian divorce, again, Paul is not saying that one CAN'T be divorced. So what is he saying? If married, stay married and honor that marriage in your heart and all your words and actions, always, and nothing is allowed to be a distraction to this sacred relationship. This means thoughts, friendships, the internet etc., etc., nothing means anything. A one-woman man means only and just her, always. He married his girlfriend, and she has stayed his girlfriend forever.

V6 the husband of one wife, having children who believe, and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

As stated earlier, we are the flock, and Christ is the shepherd. An elder is an under shepherd appointed to take care of the master's flock. Every father, as an under shepherd, is to lead his children to Christ. Verse 6 sets the bar high and states that an elder's children "are" believers.

The Greek word used here is *pista*, which also means faithful. If we take it to mean believing, as in believing the gospel, it poses challenges. One, at what age is an elder to be held accountable for his child to have saving faith? Two, to require that an elder's children have genuine, saving faith is to hold one person responsible for the salvation of another, and we will not find that taught anywhere in scripture. This would assign to a man a role in salvation that belongs only to God. If we use faithful, we must decide what is the object of that faith. I propose the child's respectful relationship with their parents, and all others. In the context of a father's children, we should hold this man accountable for what he can control. Are this man's children submitted to his authority? Are they respectful of others and to the church? Do they follow their parents' lead and believe spiritual teaching to the best of their ability at their current maturity level? This type of walk for a child is highly influenced by their father and is a good indicator of the man's ability to help lead the church's flock.

The **debauchery and insubordination** portion is reflective of the faithfulness of these children as they grow, as they grow through their teens. Insubordination is a refusal to submit to rightful authority and is a form of rebellion against God's established order. Debauchery is a life of reckless indulgences, impurity, immoral behavior, and a general lack of self-control. This is the exact opposite of the faithful children we just discussed. The natural testing of boundaries that some, most, or all children do is not what is being addressed here.

In the end, here, an elder's children cannot bring reproach upon the elder, which in the end could, if not, create challenges in the church.

Continuing on to **V7**, we read, **For an overseer,^[c] as God's steward, must be above reproach.**

We discussed earlier that an elder must be above reproach, and we discussed it in the context of his moral character, but here he is again being held to the standard of above reproach. This call to above reproach is regarding the elder's actions and decisions while serving as an overseer. The same moral character that qualified this man to be an elder must follow him into service. An elder must now take the church and the elder board's reputation into consideration and realize that a reproach could arise just out of how an action is perceived. An elder should take into consideration the optics of his decisions and actions, as bad intent or sin does not have to be present for people to form the wrong opinion based on optics. For example, a pastor should not travel with a female staff person anywhere, a meal, a meeting, not anywhere, ever. No matter how innocent, it just leaves room for speculation, and that speculation could gain momentum and become a stain on the church. I could go on and on about this, but I suspect we get the idea here, correct?

Again, in **V7**, we read that **a Leader must not be Arrogant.**

Scripture calls us to be humble, Matthew 23:12. ¹²Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. We have all had to deal with an arrogant person, and I suspect that most, if not all of us, did not enjoy the experience. Arrogance is an excessive, exaggerated, and in many cases an unwarranted estimation of one's own importance. It would seem that any man who met the qualifications to become an elder would not have an issue with arrogance, and I agree with that position. However, two summers ago, during pastor Tony's vacation, the elders taught 1 Timothy, and chapter three covers the qualifications as dictated from Paul to Timothy. It states in v6, He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Arrogance, conceit, and haughtiness can grow into a person who has been elevated to a high position, and there is no room for that in anyone in Christ's flock and most certainly not in leadership.

V7 continues on to say that A Leader Must Not Be Quick-Tempered.

A quick-tempered person is marked by foolish actions and responses before giving good consideration to what is actually happening or being said. A quick temper takes the filters out of play that all Christians should employ as we strive to stay clear of anger. Anger is an emotion that is difficult to control once triggered. Let me share my view of anger in my own life. In my shop, I have many tools to work with, from shovels to chainsaws, and for any particular job, there is a tool that is best suited to assist you with the task at hand. I view anger as a tool in the shed that I need to rarely, if ever, use. It seems that every time I pick up the tool of anger, I break, hurt, or minimally damage something, usually someone. How do I know? I have failed at anger more than once, therefore proving my metaphor to be true. Scripture is what led me to that conclusion, James 1:19 ²⁰ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. God is very slow to anger. Let's all follow His example, and we will be just fine.

V7 also states that an overseer must not be a drunkard.

The most important part of this edict is to accept that this does not merely apply to alcohol. We are not to become inebriated on anything; moderation is the key. The secular proverb "moderation in all things" can be a valuable tool, but it is not applicable in all things for the Christian. For instance, staying well on this side of intoxication with wine is an appropriate example of moderation for the Christian, but moderation in sin, well, that's just silly. So, would other recreational things that might intoxicate a believer be okay if moderation is exercised? Maybe: Is it legal? 1 Peter 2:13 says we are to

submit to authority; therefore, we are called to not break any laws unless they conflict with God's laws.

V7 continues on to state that **an elder must not be violent**.

1 Timothy uses the word pugnacious, which means to strike or blow. Violence implies the same failure, but both include the idea of bullying. A person can be violent without throwing blows. This could be someone who always has to have their way to the extent that it becomes uncomfortable to work with them. An inability to control oneself, which would include a violent tongue. James 3:8 ⁸ But no one can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil *and* full of deadly poison. We are all called to be gentle, and there is no room for any of us, much less an elder, to be violent in words or blows.

V7 ends with stating that an **overseer cannot be greedy for gain**.

Greed is an excessive and selfish desire for material gain. Greed by spiritual leaders has been around since before the 1st century, and we can find plenty of current examples of it with a brief internet search. Leaders control financial accounts and decisions for those accounts. They also choose the vendors that receive money for services rendered to the church. This leaves too many opportunities for a greedy person to damage the church financially, and possibly damage the trust the congregation has for leadership. Therefore, a leader cannot have even a hint of the spirit of greed.

Moving on to V8, an elder must be **Hospitable**.

This word is used in the context of being hospitable to strangers. Being hospitable with our friends and family is not the point here; we all should do that. In the 1st century, travel was challenging, and sleeping outside could be dangerous. The idea here is to be hospitable to someone who cannot repay you, or charitable hospitality.

V8 continues and states that an elder **must be a lover of Good**.

The lover of good is always pursuing, doing good, enjoying good, and enthusiastic about trying to reflect God's own nature. Looking at good from the reverse might be helpful. This person wants nothing to do with being bad, mean, or disrespectful.

V8 also states that an **elder must be self-controlled**.

All of the must-not-do items on 1 Timothy 3 and Titus' lists are grounded in self-control. Self-control thwarts temper, anger, drunkenness, violence, and greed. Just be self-controlled, just do it, just stop it. Sounds easy, right? Since emotion is a significant influencer of self-control, this is not as easy as it sounds, but it is the goal. A good filter for self-control would be, would a leader do this, respond that way, say this or that, or just generally fail to control themselves if they were in the presence of the Lord? We need to remember that we are in the presence of the Lord at all times, and leaders are to be the example of this, not just the teacher of the command.

V8 continues and states that an **elder must be Upright..**

Upright is not a word you will hear often in 2025; however, it is a word you will find 392 times in scripture. As God is upright, it is an attribute that He cherishes in man, the creation He made in His own likeness. So what is the spirit of uprightness? Honesty, sound character, always doing what is right, just in decisions, alignment with God's will, summed up with seeking to be pleasing to God in thought and action. It is easy to see that this is a requirement for an overseer.

V8 also requires an elder to **be holy**.

This is a big word! Holy: set apart, consecrated, or dedicated to God. The idea is that this man is set apart for service to the Lord. As an under shepherd, he is in service to the flock owner, and the owner wants the man to be of the highest moral caliber and therefore set apart. He is not better than other men, but he is held to a higher accountability than those who do not serve in this capacity. This man works for the Lord and will be held accountable for his actions as well as his inactions while performing the function of under shepherd.

V8 ends with the **requirement of being disciplined**.

This person demonstrates self-control in all areas of his life. At regeneration, a believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and that is the beginning of the sanctification walk. Out of love for the Lord, a new believer's walk often begins as obedience, which can sometimes be in the form of white knuckling it as the soul fights against the sin-filled flesh of the believer. As a believer's walk progresses, obedience evolves into discipline, meaning old habits are broken and new habits form. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.^[a] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. For instance, daily time in prayer and the word is no longer a challenge to make time for; it just becomes a new part of the believer's life. Though a man called to leadership will continue to grow and be more Christ-like, he should not be struggling with a lack of discipline in dealing with sin.

V9 Hold Firm to the Word so He can give instruction in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it.

This is the primary requirement that sets the elder pastor apart from other leaders. He MUST be able to teach God's word. Preaching is a separate calling, though they may not be currently serving as one. All pastors should be qualified to be elders. Though all elders must be able to teach, not all elders will preach. An elder must be steadfast and unwavering in teaching of and defense of the word of God. He should be steadfast and not moved by the external influences of the world that want to water down God's word into something easier or more palatable to today's society.

God's word is the truth that each believer needs. In His amazing mercy, the Lord gave us the treasure of His word, and as Scripture's author, He lives on every page. If we want to know what His expectations of elder candidates are, here it is. What does he think about marriage, divorce, can we be saved yet disobedient enough to lose salvation, and what happens after death? We need those answers, and they are in His Word! This is the Lord's word, divinely inspired and written through chosen men to give us a picture of what God's expectations are and what His character is. Why is His character important? He made promises, promises of eternal gifts and promises of eternal consequences. A God without character cannot be counted as a promise keeper.

It does not matter how churches choose to teach God's word, be it a new message weekly, a series that lasts weeks, or in an expository manner like we do at this church. What does matter is that what God said is what it taught. The love and grace parts, as well as the difficult truths of the word. Not all of it is fun; it's not supposed to be, it's supposed to prick hearts so that they will change. So where am I going with this? That was a bit preachy, and I don't remember where I was. Kidding, I remember. Elders and pastors are to teach and preach the word as God intended it. They are to keep each other inside those guardrails and make sure we do not let books or materials that are outside of the guardrails be taught in the church. There is a lot of bad material out there, and it leads to more and more incorrect teaching that can lead to modified doctrines, and before you know it, you are no longer listening to God's truth. Elders are to make sure that does not happen, ever.

Personal

It is a truly humbling thought that the Lord God has allowed me to serve in the capacity of elder. For four and a half years, I have served as an elder with some truly

impressive men. It has been like being the most incredible small group or discipleship program you could imagine. I want to share something with you that has been very helpful to me as an elder. Our board has had no less than five and no more than seven elders on the board since I have been serving. In the first few months of my service, something profound was shared with the elder board. Mark Fortney, co-founder and president of Crossroads Asia, facilitated a retreat for our church elders in the summer of 2021, and at that retreat, he told us that we were like a diamond. Clearly not because he thought we were a girl's best friend, but he did mean like a precious stone. He said, each of you represents a different facet of the stone, and each of you refracts light differently, and that's what makes the board of elders valuable to God and this church. As an opportunity, an issue, or anything that requires a decision arises, these men will share different perspectives. From there, when you submerge this decision in prayer, you should get most if not all of the board decisions right.

As an encouragement, I want to speak of your board of elders. It feels strange to speak of myself, so I am going to remove myself and just speak of them. These men are very similar in that they all love the Lord. They are also different individuals, just as different as everyone on the row you are sitting on is. They do not initially agree on everything, but after discussion and sometimes more discussion, there is always consensus. Rarely has there been tension, but it is never disrespectful. The beauty is, the individual man never tries to be the correct one in the group; they always try to get the decision right as a group of leaders. They love the Lord and each other, and that's the glue that makes it work. I am humbled to be among them, and I love everyone. By experience, it is my opinion that a church functions well with five or more God fearing elders. I don't know why you would ever leave this church, but if you must, find a church with a plurality of God fearing elders, and you have probably found a good home.