

The Books of Titus, Philemon, and Jude, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: Appointing Elders in Every Town

Titus 1:1-9

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This opening lesson carries real doctrinal weight, because it sets out the God-given pattern for the leadership and organization of the local church. Paul does not treat eldership as an optional add-on or a cultural accommodation; he tells Titus that finishing the work means appointing elders in every town (v. 5). The teacher should be ready to present clearly what the New Testament teaches: that each congregation is to be shepherded by a plurality of qualified men called elders (also called overseers and pastors in the New Testament), appointed according to the character qualifications listed here and in 1 Timothy 3, and devoted to guarding and teaching the apostolic word. This is also the natural place to note, gently and clearly, that this particular office is given to qualified men, in keeping with the consistent New Testament pattern, and to do so without harshness and without apology.

At the same time, these verses were never meant only to regulate an office. Paul roots the whole discussion in the gospel: the faith of God's elect, the knowledge of the truth that produces godliness, and the hope of eternal life promised by a God who cannot lie. The qualifications themselves are mostly about ordinary character, the kind of man a person becomes over years of faithful living at home and in the world. So the formational aim is large. Every student, whether or not he will ever serve as an elder, is being shown the shape of Christian maturity and invited toward it.

Aim, then, at both targets. Send students home understanding why God's church is organized the way it is and trusting that His design is good, and also examining their own character against the qualities Paul lists. The goal is not merely informed church members but maturing disciples who treasure the truth, order their own homes and hearts under Christ, and love the church enough to want it led God's way.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul calls himself "a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ" whose work serves "the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness" (vv. 1-2). What does this opening tell us about the purpose of gospel ministry, and about the unbreakable link between believing the truth and living a godly life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by noticing how densely Paul packs the gospel into his greeting. He is a servant (literally a bondservant) of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. His authority is not self-generated; it is delegated. And the purpose of that authority is twofold: to advance the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth. Paul will not let faith and knowledge drift apart. Real faith rests on real truth, and the truth he serves is not abstract; it "accords with godliness."

Press on that phrase, "the knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness." The truth of the gospel is not information to be filed away. It is truth that, when believed, reshapes a life. This is a recurring theme in Titus: sound doctrine and godly living belong together, and a doctrine that leaves the life unchanged has not really been believed. Help students feel how countercultural this is in an age that often divorces belief from behavior.

Then follow Paul's gaze upward to the foundation under it all: "in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began" (v. 2). The Christian hope is not wishful thinking; it rests on the character of a God who is constitutionally incapable of falsehood. Before the world began, before any of us could earn anything, God purposed eternal life for His people and bound Himself by promise. That is bedrock, and the teacher should let students rest their weight on it.

Finally, note that this promise has now been "manifested" in the preaching entrusted to Paul "by the command of God our Savior" (v. 3). The eternal plan has broken into history and is now proclaimed. Salvation comes through this proclaimed word, heard and believed and obeyed, not through private speculation. The whole letter flows from this conviction.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Apostolic authority as delegated by Christ, not self-appointed
- The inseparable link between truth (sound doctrine) and godliness (changed living)
- Election and "God's elect" understood through Scripture as a whole, not as Calvinistic unconditional decree
- The reliability of God's promises grounded in His character: He cannot lie
- God's eternal purpose of salvation now made known through the preached gospel (Acts, Romans)

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul refuse to separate believing the truth from living a godly life?
- What difference does it make, practically, that our hope rests on a God who cannot lie?
- How does it change our view of salvation to learn that God purposed it "before the ages began"?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul says he serves the truth that “accords with godliness” (v. 1), the kind of truth that actually changes how a person lives. Where in your own life is there a gap between what you say you believe and how you are actually living? Name one specific area where you sense the Lord asking your conduct to catch up with your confession.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, so the goal is honesty rather than information. Paul has just said that the truth he serves “accords with godliness.” The uncomfortable implication is that wherever our living contradicts our believing, something is off. Help students slow down and actually look at the gap rather than rushing past it.

Encourage specificity. It is easy to confess vaguely that “we all fall short.” It is harder, and far more useful, to name the one area where confession and conduct have quietly parted ways: the temper at home that the congregation never sees, the resentment nursed in private, the integrity that bends a little at work. Naming it is the beginning of letting Christ address it.

Move the group toward grace, not just guilt. The point of exposing the gap is not to crush but to heal. The same gospel that saves us is the gospel that, believed more deeply, closes the gap between confession and conduct over time. Invite students to bring the specific area they named into prayer this week and to take one concrete, humble step.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Integrity as the alignment of confession and conduct
- Self-examination as a healthy, ongoing Christian discipline (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- The danger of “hearing” the word without “doing” it (James 1:22)
- Grace as the power, not just the pardon, for change

Discussion Prompts

- Where is it easiest for our private conduct to drift from our public confession?
- What helps you actually change a habit rather than just feel bad about it?
- How can the church help carry one another toward integrity without becoming judgmental?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul instructs Titus to “appoint elders in every town” and then lists what such a man must be (vv. 5–6). Walk through these qualifications. What do they tell us about the kind of character God requires in those who shepherd His church, and why does so much of the list concern the man’s home and ordinary daily life rather than his talents?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Walk slowly through the qualifications in verses 6 through 8, because the list itself preaches. Notice first how much of it concerns the man's home: above reproach, the husband of one wife, with children who are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. God ties a man's fitness to shepherd the church to how he has shepherded his own household, because the home is where character is tested without an audience.

Then notice how much of the rest concerns temper, appetite, and money: not arrogant, not quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy for gain. These are the ordinary fault lines along which a leader's life cracks. Paul is not looking for the most gifted speaker or the most successful businessman. He is looking for proven, tested character.

Draw out the principle for the whole room. God measures leadership by who a man has become, not merely by what he can do. Talent can be faked for a season; character cannot. This is a quiet rebuke to a culture, even a church culture, that is easily dazzled by charisma and results. The teacher should help students recalibrate what they admire and aspire to.

It is worth clarifying that these qualifications describe a settled pattern of life, not sinless perfection. "Above reproach" does not mean flawless; it means there is no legitimate, standing accusation against the man's character. Every elder is still a forgiven sinner walking by grace. The standard is high, but it is a standard of maturity and integrity, not perfection.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The plural eldership as God's design for each congregation ("elders," v. 5)
- Character over talent as the measure of fitness to lead
- The home as the proving ground for church leadership
- "Above reproach" as settled integrity, not sinless perfection
- The man's mastery of temper, appetite, and money as marks of self-control under God

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God tie leadership in the church to faithfulness in the home?
- What does it say about God's values that most of this list is about character, not skill?
- How might our congregation be tempted to value charisma over proven character?

Question 4

Student Question:

Several of the elder qualifications describe a man who is "not arrogant, not quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy for gain" (v. 7). Pick the one of these that lands closest to home for you. Whether or not you will ever be an elder, how is the Lord using this standard to expose something in your own heart that needs to grow?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the qualification list inward. The negatives in verse 7 (not arrogant, not quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy for gain) are not exotic sins; they are the common temptations of ordinary people. Invite students to let the Spirit press one of them onto their own conscience.

Help the group see that these standards are not reserved for officeholders. An elder must be free of these faults because every mature Christian is being freed from them. The list is a portrait of where the flesh still fights, and therefore a map of where the Spirit is at work in each of us.

Guide students from awareness to a single step. If the issue is a quick temper, what would it look like this week to pause, pray, and respond rather than react? If it is greed, what would generosity cost this month? The aim is one concrete movement, not a vague resolution to do better.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fruit of the Spirit, especially self-control, as the antidote to these works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19–23)
- Sanctification as the ongoing, lifelong putting off of sin
- Anger, appetite, and greed as universal heart issues, not just leadership disqualifiers
- The Spirit's exposing work as an act of love, not condemnation

Discussion Prompts

- Which of these is most socially acceptable in our culture, and why is that dangerous?
- What is the difference between managing a sin and being changed at the heart level?
- What would one concrete step of growth look like for you this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says an elder must be "above reproach" and the manager of a faithful household (vv. 6–7). What does it mean to be "above reproach," and why does Paul connect a man's leadership in his own home with his fitness to lead in the church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Define "above reproach" carefully. The phrase pictures a life that offers no handle for a legitimate accusation, a reputation with no open scandal attached to it. It does not mean a person is universally liked or never criticized; Jesus Himself was slandered. It means that when people look honestly at the man's life, there is nothing standing against his integrity.

Then explore the link Paul draws between the home and the church. A man who manages his own household well, whose children are not running wild in open rebellion, has demonstrated

in the most demanding and least public arena that he can lead, love, discipline, and shepherd. As Paul puts it in 1 Timothy 3:5, if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

Be pastorally careful here. The point is not that godly parents are guaranteed perfect children, nor that a man with a wayward adult child is automatically disqualified for life. The focus is on the present pattern of the household under his care: order, faith, and respect rather than chaos and open rebellion. Help students read the qualification as describing a tested shepherd, not condemning every parent of a struggling child.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- "Above reproach" as the absence of a legitimate standing accusation, not perfection
- The home as the training ground and evidence of shepherding ability (1 Timothy 3:4-5)
- The connection between faithfulness in small, private spheres and trust in larger, public ones
- Pastoral care in applying the household qualification without legalism

Discussion Prompts

- How is reputation related to, but not the same as, integrity?
- Why is leading a family such a revealing test of character?
- How can we apply this qualification with both seriousness and compassion?

Question 6

Student Question:

An elder is to be "hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined" (v. 8). These are not reserved for leaders only; they are marks of a maturing Christian. Which of these positive qualities is the Lord most clearly inviting you to cultivate this season, and what would one concrete step toward it look like this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn the list of positive virtues in verse 8 (hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, disciplined) toward the whole congregation. These are not narrow leadership skills; they are the contours of a mature disciple. Every Christian is meant to be growing into them.

Take a moment on hospitality in particular, because it is easy to overlook. In Paul's world, opening your home meant sharing scarce resources, risking your reputation, and welcoming strangers and travelers, including persecuted believers. Hospitality is love made concrete and practical, and it remains one of the most ordinary and powerful ways the church embodies the gospel.

Then help each student choose one quality to pursue. Self-control, love of good, holiness, discipline: ask which one the Lord seems to be highlighting, and what a first step would be. The aim is to move the virtue from an abstract ideal to a Tuesday-afternoon decision.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The positive virtues as marks of all Christian maturity, not just leadership
- Hospitality as practical, sacrificial love (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2)
- Self-control and discipline as Spirit-empowered, not mere willpower
- Holiness as being set apart for God in everyday life

Discussion Prompts

- Which of these virtues is most neglected in our busy, private culture?
- What would genuine hospitality look like in your home this month?
- How do we pursue these virtues by grace rather than by gritted teeth?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says the elder “must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught” (v. 9). What does it mean that the truth is something “taught” and handed down, rather than invented or received by fresh private revelation, and what does this say about where authority in the church is meant to come from?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 9 is the doctrinal hinge of the qualifications: the elder “must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught.” The word is described as something received and handed down, not generated fresh by each leader. This is crucial. Authority in the church does not rest in the personality or private inspiration of its leaders; it rests in the apostolic word they are charged to guard and pass on.

This is the place to affirm clearly that the faith was delivered, taught, and entrusted, and that our task is faithful transmission, not innovation. The same conviction runs through 2 Timothy 2:2, where Paul tells Timothy to entrust what he has heard to faithful men who will teach others. The chain is preservation, not reinvention. By extension, this guards against any claim of new revelation that would add to or override the completed apostolic teaching.

Help students feel the comfort and the responsibility in this. The comfort: we are not at the mercy of the latest spiritual fad or the most confident voice in the room; we have a fixed, trustworthy word. The responsibility: leaders, and indeed all of us, are stewards who must hold the word firmly and hand it on faithfully, not editors free to revise it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The authority of the apostolic, taught word over private opinion or new revelation
- Faithful transmission of the truth as the leader's core task (2 Timothy 2:2)
- The sufficiency and completeness of the New Testament Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- Holding firmly: conviction as a qualification, not just knowledge

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between guarding the truth and merely having opinions about it?
- Why is “the word as taught” a safer foundation than any leader's personal charisma?
- How does a settled, completed word protect the church from every passing fad?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul says a qualified man can both “give instruction in sound doctrine” and “rebuke those who contradict it” (v. 9). Most of us are comfortable with one of these and uneasy with the other. Are you more tempted to avoid hard truth to keep the peace, or to fight for truth without gentleness? How is Christ shaping you to hold both together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question exposes a common imbalance. Verse 9 says the qualified man can do two things: “give instruction in sound doctrine” and “rebuke those who contradict it.” Most of us lean hard toward one side. Some prize peace so highly that they will let error stand unchallenged; others love being right so much that they wound people in the name of truth.

Point students to the example of Christ, who was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14) at the same time, in full measure, without diluting either. Truth without love becomes a weapon; love without truth becomes flattery. The mature disciple, like the qualified elder, learns to hold them together.

Invite honest self-assessment. Which way do you tilt? The peacekeeper needs courage to speak; the contender needs gentleness to listen and to wait. Ask the Lord to grow the side that is underdeveloped, and have students name one relationship where this growth is needed now.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grace and truth held together, after the pattern of Christ (John 1:14; Ephesians 4:15)
- The danger of conflict avoidance that lets error spread
- The danger of harsh contention that wins arguments and loses people
- Speaking the truth in love as a mark of maturity

Discussion Prompts

- Are you more tempted to keep the peace or to win the point? Why?

- What does it look like to rebuke error without contempt for the person?
- Who in your life needs you to bring both grace and truth right now?

Question 9

Student Question:

This passage lays out God's pattern for the leadership and organization of the local church: qualified men, appointed as elders, shepherding each congregation, holding firmly to the apostolic word. How does the New Testament present this office, who is it given to, and why does it matter that we follow God's design for His church rather than substituting human arrangements that seem easier or more modern?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it deserves the most care. Gather the threads of the passage into a clear statement of the New Testament pattern for church leadership. Each local congregation is to be shepherded by a plurality of elders (v. 5, "elders," plural, in every town). The same men are called overseers (v. 7, the word behind "bishop") and are described elsewhere as pastors or shepherds (1 Peter 5:1-2; Acts 20:28). These are three terms for one office, viewed from different angles: elder speaks of maturity, overseer of the work, shepherd of the care.

Show the consistency of this pattern across the New Testament. Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders in every church" (Acts 14:23). The Ephesian elders are told to "care for the church of God" and to guard it from wolves (Acts 20:28-31). Peter charges elders to shepherd the flock willingly, not domineering but as examples (1 Peter 5:1-4). Titus is told to appoint such men so that the work begun by the gospel can be brought to maturity and order. This is not one apostle's preference; it is the settled design.

Address the question of who may hold this office plainly and pastorally. The qualifications describe "the husband of one wife" who manages his household, and the consistent New Testament pattern reserves the work of elder, overseer, and authoritative teacher over the assembled church for qualified men (compare 1 Timothy 2:12; 3:1-7). This is presented in Scripture not as a comment on worth, since men and women are equally made in God's image and equally heirs of grace, but as a matter of God-assigned roles within the church. Teach it as God's good design, with confidence and without harshness, and resist both apologizing for it and weaponizing it.

Finally, press the "why it matters." We follow this pattern not out of mere traditionalism but because the church belongs to Christ, was purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28), and is to be ordered according to His revealed will rather than according to whatever seems efficient or modern to us. When a congregation substitutes human arrangements for God's design, it loses both the protection and the blessing that come from doing things the Lord's way. A church led

by qualified, godly elders, holding firmly to the apostolic word, is a church equipped to stand against the very errors Paul addresses next.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Elder, overseer (bishop), and pastor (shepherd) as three terms for one office (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-2)
- A plurality of elders shepherding each local congregation as the New Testament pattern (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5)
- The office of elder given to qualified men, by God's design (1 Timothy 2:12; 3:1-7), taught with confidence and without harshness
- The equal worth and shared inheritance of men and women in Christ alongside distinct God-assigned roles (Galatians 3:28 read with 1 Timothy 2-3)
- The church as Christ's blood-bought possession, to be ordered by His revealed will, not human convenience (Acts 20:28)
- Following God's pattern for the church as an act of trust and love, not mere traditionalism

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that elder, overseer, and pastor describe the same God-given office?
- How would you lovingly explain to a friend why this office is given to qualified men?
- What do a congregation and its members gain when the church is led God's way?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across these nine verses. Paul moves from the God who cannot lie, to a hope settled before the ages began, to the kind of leaders who will guard that hope in real towns full of real people. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. What is the single truth from Titus 1:1-9 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks students to look back across the whole passage and name the formational work God is doing. Resist letting it become a vague wrap-up. Encourage each person to identify one specific truth and one specific way Christ is shaping them through it.

Help them trace the movement of the chapter. Paul began with the God who cannot lie and a hope settled before the ages began, then moved to the kind of tested, godly men who guard that hope in ordinary towns. The same God who secured our hope also cares enough to give His church wise shepherds. Nothing here is accidental or merely organizational; it is all an expression of a God who loves His people.

Close by gently widening the application beyond eldership. Whether or not a student will ever serve as an elder, every believer is called to the maturity this chapter describes, to treasure the trustworthy word, and to love the church enough to want it ordered God's way. Send them home with one truth to carry into the week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal formation as the goal of studying Scripture, not just information
- The character qualities of elders as a template for all Christian maturity
- Love for the church expressed in submitting to God's design for it
- Carrying a single, specific truth into daily life

Discussion Prompts

- What one truth from this chapter do you most need this week?
- How is God using this passage to shape your character, not just your knowledge?
- What would it look like to love the church the way Paul clearly does here?