

The Books of Titus, Philemon, and Jude

Lesson 1: Appointing Elders in Every Town -- Titus 1:1-9

Imagine stepping off a boat onto the island of Crete. The sun is bright, the harbor is busy, and the air carries the smell of salt and fish and olive oil. The people here are famous, and not in a flattering way. Even their own poets joke that Cretans are liars and lazy gluttons. Yet scattered across this rugged island are little gatherings of new believers, people who have heard the gospel and turned to Jesus, but who are still tender, still untaught, still wobbling on their new legs. Paul has been here. He has preached, and souls have been won. But the work is unfinished, and so he has left behind a trusted younger man named Titus to do something that sounds almost ordinary and is in fact enormous: to set in order what remains and to appoint elders in every town.

That word “remains” tells you something. The gospel had landed, but the churches were not yet settled. They had no recognized leaders, no shepherds, no men charged with guarding the flock and feeding it. Into that gap a hundred loud voices were happy to step, and many of them were teaching things that were tearing households apart. Paul knows that a church without godly leadership is a field without a fence, and the wolves are already circling. So before he says one word about false teachers in the verses that follow, he tells Titus how to recognize and appoint the kind of men who will hold the line and hold the church together.

It would be easy to read these opening verses as a dry list of qualifications, the sort of thing you skim on your way to the good part. But slow down. Behind every line is a vision of what God wants His church to look like in the world. He wants congregations led not by the most charming or the most successful, but by men whose lives have quietly proven that they can be trusted with souls. He wants leaders whose homes are in order, whose tempers are under control, whose grip on the truth is firm enough that they can both encourage the faithful and answer those who twist the Word. This is God’s design, and it is good.

Notice, too, where Paul begins. Before he ever gets to elders, he plants his feet in the gospel itself: he is a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, set apart for the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, resting on the hope of eternal life that God, who never lies, promised before the ages began. That is the soil out of which church order grows. We do not organize the church because we love organization. We organize it because we have been gripped by a truth worth protecting and a hope worth handing on. As you read these nine verses, ask the Lord to give you that same seriousness about His church, and that same confidence in the God who cannot lie.

Group Discussion: Paul tells Titus to appoint elders in “every town” where there were Christians (v. 5). Why do you think God designed the local church to be led by a plurality of qualified,

recognized men rather than left to run itself or follow whoever speaks the loudest? What happens to a congregation when this kind of leadership is missing?

Personal Reflection: Paul roots everything in “the hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began” (v. 2). When you are discouraged or pressured, how much does your daily peace actually rest on the fact that God cannot lie? Where in your life right now do you most need to lean on a promise from a God who has never once broken His word?

Read Titus 1:1–9

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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.
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?

9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Acts 14:23, Paul and Barnabas appointing elders in every church they planted; 1 Timothy 3:1-7, the parallel list of qualifications for an overseer; 1 Peter 5:1-4, elders shepherding the flock under the Chief Shepherd; Acts 20:28-31, the elders of Ephesus charged to guard the church against wolves; Hebrews 13:7, 17, remembering and submitting to those who lead and keep watch over your souls.