

Unfinished Business

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we are in the New Testament book of Titus, and we started this series two weeks ago. In case you missed that, this is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to Titus, and Titus was a trusted co-worker of Paul's in his gospel ministry to the Gentile world.

And Titus, at the time of this writing, is serving as an apostolic delegate right now on the island of Crete, which is a large island just southeast of Greece in the Mediterranean Sea.

After introducing himself and naming Titus as his recipient, Paul now moves into his first words of instruction to Titus. Let me read our passage for this morning for us from Titus chapter 1, starting in verse 5.

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

[1 : 14] Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

So the first thing that we hear from Paul is a reminder of why he has left Titus there on the island of Crete.

Let's just notice a few things here. Paul has left him there to put things in order, to set things right. What things?

[2 : 18] The things left unfinished. The things that remain to be done. The things that were lacking or incomplete. It's sort of implied here that Paul himself, with Titus, has done some ministry on this island.

Remember that the time of this writing is thought to be after Paul's first imprisonment in Rome. It's sort of implied that Paul and Titus went to Crete after he had been released, and that as a result of preaching the gospel in various towns on the island, new local churches were established.

Paul then leaves the island, and he leaves Titus behind to continue on with the churches and see that these remaining things are completed.

Now, there were likely several things that Titus had been given to do to put in order what was left unfinished, but here at the start of this letter, Paul mentions one main thing in particular.

Paul left Titus there so that he might appoint elders in every town. This is one of the things that was lacking. Church leadership will be needed in each of these newly established churches.

[3 : 37] And let's not miss that Titus serves the whole region. He's doing this work of appointing elders in more than one town.

In each town where the gospel has been received with faith, and there's a local church growing, he is to appoint elders. Now, I know that we talked a fair bit about elders last fall in our series through Paul's first letter to Timothy, but here we see again that establishing elders as leaders in the local church is of the utmost importance.

Think about this. Paul is very soon to be executed, and it won't be long before all of the apostles will die. They'll be gone.

And so how will the churches be led in the years ahead? How will the churches be governed?

Jesus wills it that elders shoulder that responsibility in each local church.

This is the leadership imperative that was given by Christ through Paul for the churches on Crete and for the local churches everywhere. And if we read carefully through the book of Acts, we notice that Paul not only preached the gospel in every place that he could, but he also circled back to those newly established churches again and again, and he appointed elders in each church.

[5 : 10] And it was elders, plural, in each church. So this is one of the main tasks that Paul has left Titus on Crete to do.

Now what follows, Paul gives Titus a list of qualifications that men must have in order to be elders in the church. So leadership in the church is not open to just anyone.

Jesus wills that only a certain kind of man hold this role in the church. And in summary, he must be a man of very good reputation.

He must be a man of godly character. He must be managing his own family well. And he must be holding firmly to the gospel and all the sound teaching that goes with it.

Paul gives about a dozen qualifications here. Some are things that he must be. Some are things that he must not be. Some have to do with character. Others center more on behavior.

[6 : 14] Let's work through this list this morning. An elder must be blameless. Now in this context, blameless does not mean perfectly flawless or a man who never sins.

Rather, it means that he's not known to be at present guilty of wrongdoing. And that generally, he's a man of very good reputation. A man to whom accusation or blame does not stick because he has a long pattern of good conduct.

And it's well known by everyone. An elder must be faithful to his wife. Just as in Paul's letter to Timothy, he must be a man who keeps his marriage vows, keeps the marriage bed pure, and is the faithful husband of one wife, one woman, and not engaged in any sexually immoral behavior with other women.

An elder must be a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Now this is a hotly debated qualification. And much of the debate is over the word believe.

That same word can also be translated as faithful. An elder must be the husband of one wife with faithful children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion.

[7 : 44] And in this case, it's not that they're full of faith, but that they're trustworthy, dependable, submissive, obedient. And so there's kind of a divergence of opinions here on what that means.

Some believe that the elder's children must have a personal faith in Jesus. Others believe that the children must just generally be well-behaved, faithful children, obedient and submissive to parental authority.

And then there's the question of what's meant by children? Does this refer to just young children, school-aged children? Or does this refer to a man's children even once they're grown as they go through their lives?

So the questions here abound. My take on this is that Paul means faithful children rather than believing children. And that the following clause further explains what he means by faithful children. They are children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion. Now this doesn't mean that an elder's children never disobey their parents or never do a foolish or reckless thing.

[8 : 59] These descriptors, wild and rebellious, are the same words that are used elsewhere in the scriptures to describe drunken partiers and rebellious false teachers, people who have a deep-seated rebellion against church authority.

In other words, a man is disqualified if his son or daughter is often defiant and disobedient against his authority or is engaged in a pattern of regularly carousing, drunkenness, drug use, crime, immoral behavior, etc.

And my take on this is that it doesn't apply to grown adult children of a man but only to those children who live under his roof and are therefore part of his household.

A man is not responsible for the behavior of other men. He's responsible for the behavior of those in his own family since he has given authority over them by God as head of his household.

And this idea of a man only being responsible for the children in his household is kind of assumed in what Paul says next in verse 7. He says, since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless.

[10 : 20] So just like in his letter to Timothy, Paul is saying that a man's good management of his own household and those in it is a requirement for him to serve as an overseer or manager of God's

household, the church.

The two are connected. He must, I guess in his words to Timothy, it was, if he can't be managing his own family well, which is smaller, how will he be able to manage God's church?

Now in the local church, we can't compel people to believe, we can't force them to believe, and so this is another reason why I think it's faithful children and not believing children, but we do hold people accountable for how they live, for their conduct.

In the home, discipline is required to teach children to obey and to do what's good and right. And in the same way, in the church, discipline may be required if people enter who are rebellious, deceitful, divisive.

And we're going to hear more about that next Sunday in the next portion of this letter. But just to quickly recap, an elder must be blameless, good reputation, he must be faithful to his wife, he must be faithful in his parenting, in the home, and the list goes on in verse 7.

[11 : 47] An elder must not be overbearing. This word means to be self-willed, stubborn, and arrogant. Now, if a person is these things, he is likely an argumentative person, quick to express his opinions about everything and to try to convince others that his way of seeing everything is the only right way to see things.

An elder must not be like that. He must not be overbearing. He must not be quick-tempered. There was a man named Herodian who was a Roman civil servant who lived in the second century, and he defined this word well.

He said, quick-tempered persons lose no time being angry and do so with those they ought not over things they ought not and far more than they ought.

An elder must not be a quick-tempered or easily angered person. He must not be given to drunkenness. It speaks for itself.

He must not be violent, meaning a man who is a bully or given to fighting or brawling or making threats. He must not be pursuing dishonest gain.

[13 : 09] And there's really kind of two shades of meaning in this word. The first is to be greedy for money. It's a person who has an immoderate desire for wealth, money, possessions, and often, but not always, often this love of money shows itself in a willingness to deal dishonestly to get it, to cheat, even to steal.

A church elder must not be greedy for money or be pursuing dishonest gain. rather, Paul now flips to the positive side, rather he must be hospitable.

He must be a person who's welcoming and kind to strangers and outsiders and who's attuned to the needs of others. An elder must be one who loves what is good as opposed to what is immoral or foolish or worthless.

And I think it's interesting that he uses that word loves what is good. Not just a person who does what is good, but a person who loves what is good. That it's in here, in his heart.

An elder must be self-controlled. What does it mean to be self-controlled? The origins of this word point back to this idea of having a sound mind, a purposeful mind, a mind free from illusion or distortion or deception, a person who makes good decisions and judgments.

[14 : 49] And by the time the New Testament was written, this word came to mean a person who governs himself well. A person who rules over their appetites and their emotions and their desires instead of a person who's ruled by their appetites and their emotions and their desires.

The self-controlled person fulfills their obligations and their responsibilities and keeps their promises because they are in control of their lives I don't mean in the sense that God is in control of their lives but the person who lacks self-control they're the person who is spiraling out of control the person who's ruled by their emotions they're as dependable as they are feeling that day the person who lacks self-control is often derailed by bodily appetites for food drink pleasures they go where their feelings take them many times in the service of Christ things must be done which are immediately unpleasant which offer no immediate comfort or reward or fulfillment an elder must be one who regularly shows self-restraint and who rules his appetites and leads his emotions an elder must be upright says Paul this word means just fair not corrupt not crooked or deceitful not someone who plays favorites an elder must be holy to be holy means to be set apart it means to be different from the common way of the world it means to be specially devoted to God a man whose life stands out in our world because of his faith in Jesus an elder must be disciplined this word is very similar in meaning to self-controlled but one of the ways this word was used was to describe what was

required of an athlete preparing to compete in the games in order to have a chance they would have to discipline themselves they would have to train with purpose and intention they'd have to do it consistently they'd have to make hard decisions and even sacrifices they'd have to rearrange their lives and their priorities around their goal they'd have to rule their appetites and emotions as we talked about earlier and they'd have to do this for more than a week they'd have to do it for a long time all this to become competitive at the games to have a shot at winning being an elder is demanding and difficult it requires more than just showing up at 12 meetings a year and casting a vote and expressing opinions it's about shepherding the local flock the local household of God well it's something you can't do well without living a disciplined life it not only requires self control but intentionality it's about more than just responding to things as they come up it's about seeking the Lord's will in his word and then purposefully and intentionally leading the people in that direction an elder must be disciplined and finally an elder must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it so it's not enough for a man to be good kind successful in his trade he must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught there is a body of teaching that comes from God himself it came through Jesus and then through Jesus through the apostles the ones that he chose and sent out and as the time of the apostles draws to a close here Christ's will is that his teaching that trustworthy word or message would be passed down from generation to generation and who's responsible for this in the local church elders an elder himself must hold firmly to the teaching to the gospel to the word of

God so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine that word encourage could also be translated exhort teaching is in view so it's not enough for him to just believe it he must hold firmly to it he must cling to it if you're a man and you're excelling in all the other qualifications but have little desire to know God's word to read it to meditate on it to study it then you're disqualified from leadership in the church because this is the trustworthy message that has been given to us by God by Christ and without this faithful word we cannot lead the church to be and to do what Christ wills not only that but an elder must hold firmly to the trustworthy message so that he can refute those who oppose it elders need to know

God's word well so that they can correct and expose false teaching those who would lead God's people astray whether intentionally or unintentionally whether they're inside the church or whether outside the church now how does this all apply to us today well for starters we see that it's Christ's will for the local church to be led by qualified elders men of good reputation and godly character men who have proven themselves at home with their families and who are holding firmly to the word of God by the grace of God this is a reality in our church today but who will rise up to help shoulder this responsibility in our church in the future this is critical this is of the utmost importance for us the Davidson Community

[21 : 36] Bible Church because it's elders who God has tasked with teaching the trustworthy message and exposing and correcting false teachers the vitality of our church is tied up in this so this is why we've been putting such an emphasis on our men's ministry lead we want to challenge our men not just to take it easy and coast the way that many in our world are doing but to follow Christ with tenacity and devotion the future of our church its testimony in this community its vitality depends on this now some of you might be thinking well that's good to know for elders that's what's required for them but what relevance does this have to me personally maybe you're a woman or a young person or just not interested in being an elder or you look at this list and you think I'm disqualified already

I'm not even there if that's you this morning I have a question for you do you think all these things listed are things that Jesus only wants to see in the lives of church leaders these things are not just gatekeepers to the office of elder many of these things if not all of them are just what it means to be a devout follower of Jesus a mature Christian man or woman the picture Paul paints for us here is something for all of us to aspire to whether we're interested in being an elder or not we could look at all kinds of passages in the New Testament where just Christians in general are commanded to be each of these different things in the list we're commanded to live lives that are worthy of Christ to be of good reputation to be faithful to our spouses and sexually pure to manage our homes well to teach our children to know the Lord to discipline our children when it's needed we're commanded all of us as Christians to be self controlled it's one of the fruits of the spirit not to be given to drunkenness Ephesians 4 to be holy 1st Peter to not be greedy Jesus commands all of his

followers to do and to be almost everything in this list he talked about these things during his earthly ministry and then the apostles followed up and talked about these things and urged the Christians to be and do these things in their letters so we should not think well you know this stuff is just about elders it has nothing to do with me no this is the example this is the kind of person that we should all strive to be forget the elder part for a minute if you're a follower of

Jesus and one or more of these things is not true of you Christ is calling you to bring that area of your life or that attitude or that behavior before him and repent and seek his grace and power to change regardless of your gender or your aspirations to be in leadership which of these characteristics do you most need to grow in let me encourage you to make that a matter of prayer to ask the Lord about that thing in your life ask him how to remedy that how to grow in it ask him to strengthen that quality in your life and share that quality with a brother or sister or with your spouse or your children ask them to pray for you about it maybe this year is a good year to read a good Christian book on the subject or listen to a good Christian podcast on the subject one that will help you hear more of what God's word has to say about that area in your life one that will give you practical steps and tested wisdom about how you can grow in that aspect of your faith because these things are what it means to be a faithful disciple of Jesus it means in part as we hear in the great commission that we are obedient to his commands and these are the things that he has commanded of all his people to live this way there are two final things that I want to remind us of as we set our faces towards this first of all living like this isn't about earning a right standing with God God salvation cannot be earned no amount of good works is enough and we've already done enough wrong to fall short of his standard a right standing with

[26 : 58] God and membership in God's household comes to us as a gift through Jesus and what he has done for us we accept this gift by faith by repenting and believing in him and so this list is not a list of what you must do to be loved by God as we've been memorizing together with the kids God demonstrates his own love for us in this while we were still sinners Christ died for us so what is this list this list here in Titus is what we do because we believe because we belong to Christ this is the kind of life that flows out of our faith in him it's the fruit of our being united with him which brings us to the second thing yes we have to be intentional to live like this to grow in these things but we're not left alone to ourselves to live like this or to become more like this

Jesus gives us his Holy Spirit for all of us who believe and who belong to Christ God's own spirit comes to live inside of us he works in us he produces these things in us we have God's help to live like this every day and so what do we need to do each day we need to look to Jesus we need to look to the spirit and ask for his help ask for his power we need to rely on it daily as we seek to live in obedience to him and the wonderful thing about this is that with God's spirit inside of us we truly can change we can become more and more like this list that we see in Titus wouldn't it be something if every single one of us sought with all of our hearts to be and to live like this mature devout men and women of

God men and women of character disciplined self controlled men and women in the service of Christ in the service of our families in the service of our church what kind of a testimony would we have in this community who would be able to measure the impact for Christ that we would have right here in Davidson also in Crake in the surrounding areas for the glory of Christ in the words of Charles Studd only one life will soon be passed only what's done for Christ will last let's pray father in heaven we open ourselves up to you and we confess and we admit that this is a list that at times and in different ways you know our lives and our stories we have fallen short of we have all sinned we've all broken your commands we've all lived selfishly and it's affected every area of our lives but we thank you that with you there is grace there is forgiveness that these sins of our past don't own us that you wipe the slate clean and now as your children as members of your household we pray and we ask that you would form these good fruits of your

Holy Spirit inside of us make us a blessing at home to our spouses to our children make us a blessing here at the church and in our relationships with each other to one another make us a blessing in this community may we be that light shining pointing people to you Jesus that more may be saved and that your name might be glorified we ask this in your name amen