

Qualifications of Elders: His Family Life
Titus 1:6

Last week we began our study of the section in Titus that deals with Elders. It was a little bit academic, yet necessary so that we all would understand what the Bible does teach about leadership in the church. Many of us come from backgrounds in which the church was structured in some other manner than the pattern Paul set in the book of Acts, the first epistle to Timothy and here in Titus. Those churches may have functioned, but pragmatism is never to be the mark of a Christian. Our desire should be to be as true to the Scriptures as we know how regardless of what the wisdom of men would teach. The pattern given in the New Testament is for a plurality of godly men to lead each church.

Elders have various responsibilities that are very serious. Last week I spoke of these responsibilities. They are to 1) Give oversight to \ rule \ administrate the flock. 2) Shepherd/feed the flock of God (Teach the Word). 3) Settle matters of Doctrine & Church policy (By teaching & refuting). 4) Protect the flock from false teachers. 5) Watch Over the Souls. 6) Set a godly example for all. 7) Train people to use their gifts in ministry in the body. 8) Pray over the sick. 9) Ordain others to ministry.

The importance and nature of these various responsibilities should make it self evident that those who would be Elders would need to be men of high moral character and have certain abilities in order to fulfill these responsibilities. That is why Paul delineates here in Titus and in 1 Timothy 3 the qualifications of Elders. If Titus was to carry out Paul's directive in verse 5 to "appoint elders in every city" he would have to know what to look for in the individuals that would be appointed. Remember that what Paul is writing here is not new to Titus, but a helpful reminder and a document that Titus could use to prove his authority to choose men to be elders according to this criteria.

Tragically, too often even in those churches that do understand the need for Elders, those do not choose their leaders according to the Biblical qualifications, but those of the world. Men that have achieved high position in the world - business executives, civic leaders, doctors, teachers, etc. simply because they have those positions. Men are chosen because they have lots of money or are related to a prominent family in the church. Then there are those that are chosen with the thought that giving them a position on the board might increase their commitment to the church. All those things may have importance in the world system, but should not in the church.

Paul writes in 1 Cor. 1:26-29 that "*God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God.*" The same is true in church leadership. In the church the company janitor may be the one qualified to be an elder over the company president; the college dropout over the PhD; poor blue collar worker over the investment banker. Within the church the position a person has in the world is not important. What is important is the position the person has with God and how God has spiritually gifted that individual.

I want to examine the qualifications for elders that Paul has listed here for Titus for the next three sermons in this series. We will first look at the overall category of being above reproach and then the more specific categories of the Elder and his family; The Elder's Moral Character and The Elder's Abilities.

Follow along with me in Titus 1:5,6. *5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 [namely,] if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.*

ABOVE REPROACH

The overall character of an elder is that he is to be above reproach. The word here is ἀνέγκλητος - (anegklatos) KJV: blameless. 1 Timothy 3:2 also lists out being above reproach (blameless - KJV) as the overall character of an elder. However a different word is used there - ἀνεπίλημpton (anepilamptōn).

ἀνεπίλημpton literally means *“that which cannot be laid hold of,”* and hence someone who is not open to censure, someone who is irreproachable. The word describes a person who has such a spotless character that no one can lay hold upon anything in his life which would be of such a nature as to cast reproach upon himself or the cause of the Lord Jesus. He presents to the world at large such an example of the Christian life that he furnishes no ground for accusation. Nicoll said in the Expositor’s Greek New Testament in explaining this word, *“It is not enough for him to be not criminal; he must be one against whom it is impossible to bring any charge of wrongdoing such as could stand impartial examination.”* Hendriksen adds in his commentary, *“Enemies may bring all manner of accusations, but these charges are proved to be empty whenever fair methods of investigation are applied. With the church and in accordance with rules of justice, this man not only has a good reputation, but deserves it.”*

This particular word is also used in 1 Timothy 5:7 to describe the character of the older widows that would qualify to be helped by the church. It is also used in 1 Timothy 6:14 in Paul’s admonition to Timothy to “. . .keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. . .”.

ἀνέγκλητος, the word found here in Titus 1:6 means *“no accusation.”* *“One whose character and conduct has not been called into accusation.”* As it says in 1 Peter 5:3, elders are to be examples to the flock and so must represent what God desires every member of the congregation to be in character and conduct. Congregations tend to mold themselves according to their leaders, so a failure here has ramifications throughout the congregation.

Now if we put both of these qualifications together we find that an elder should have a reputation above being able to be charged, and if he is, the charges will not hold.

Now before any of you think that this means that Elders are to be some sort of super saint, let me point out this same word used here in Titus is also used in the qualification of Deacons (1 Timothy 6) and used in two other passages that apply to every Christian. In Colossians 1:22 Paul has been talking about what God has done through Christ in reconciling the world to Himself and in this verse he states, *“yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.”* You were saved for the purpose of being presented before God Holy, blameless and beyond reproach. In 1 Cor. 1:8 Paul speaks to this same issue stating that Jesus will confirm us to the end, *“blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Every Christian is to be blameless - above reproach, not just Elders. Elders are required to have this overall characteristic because it is an overall mark of Christian maturity.

A couple of notes of caution here are needed. This is not perfection or Peter could not have been an elder because Paul had to rebuke him (Gal. 2:11), and Paul himself by his own admission continued to struggle with sin (Romans 7). The idea here is one of maturity, not perfection, and that maturity is demonstrated in the characteristics Paul lists out in the rest of this passage.

Another note of caution in application. This is blameless before God. Even Jesus was not *“blameless - above reproach”* according to the Pharisees standards. They called our Savior a *“gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!”* (Matt 11:19).

And a final note of caution. All these characteristics are those that are current in the life of the individual. It does not stretch into the distant past. We believe that the nature of regeneration is a new beginning - *“If any man be in Christ he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold, new things have come”* (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul was not blameless prior to conversion. He persecuted the church and participated in the death of Stephen. The Christians in Damascus were initially afraid of him (Acts

9). There are also those that demonstrate these characteristics at one time and then turn away and disqualify themselves. The Elder is to be currently, actively, blameless.

HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE

The first characteristic that an elder must show himself blameless is in his relationship with his wife. The particular Greek phrase here can lend itself to several different interpretations depending on what bias you may have, therefore, this particular characteristic has received more spilt ink than any of the others.

The Greek here is, μιᾶς γυναικός ἀνὴρ. The same phrase also occurs in 1 Tim. 3:2,12 although in both those passages it is the synonym ἄνδρα instead of ἀνὴρ. μιᾶς is the word for the number “one.” γυναικός is the general Greek word for “a woman,” and ἀνὴρ and its synonym ἄνδρα are general Greek words for “a man” as opposed to “a woman” and by context it could also be used to signify “a husband.” Literally, the phrase means, “a one woman man.”

There have been many erroneous interpretations of this phrase because a person’s bias will often narrow the focus of exclusion. Let me tell you first what this phrase does not mean. The phrase certainly excludes polygamy which the New Testament forbids in 1 Cor. 7:2, but polygamy was not a problem in the Roman cultures of Crete or Ephesus that it would have to be addressed. This is not a reference to a widower that remarries for that practice is sanctioned in the New Testament in Romans 7:1-3; 1 Timothy 5:14 and 1 Corinthians 7:39. Paul is also not stating that an elder must be married. He could have simply stated that if that were his point. In addition, Paul himself was apparently not married (1 Cor. 7:7; 9:5) and this would have excluded himself and since there is no indication that Timothy & Titus were married possibly them as well from being elders. It would make no sense at all to set a standard for leadership in the church that neither Jesus or Paul would have been able to meet.

Many have taken this phrase to mean an absolute exclusion of those who divorce and remarry. Certainly a Christian who has an unbiblical divorce - one occurring for reason other than sexual immorality (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) would be excluded by this phrase. A Christian who divorces for reason of sexual immorality by his spouse might also be excluded by some of the other character qualities listed in this passage, but they would not be excluded by this phrase alone. If Paul had meant explicitly divorce in all cases he could have stated that clearly. Those who were divorced prior to becoming a Christian were cleansed from any adultery when they were regenerated by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The issue is their character now, not what they were like before they became a Christian, otherwise no man could be an elder because all men were by nature and practice sinners who could not meet the qualifications.

If anyone wants a more detailed exposition on this, write that down on a piece of paper with your name on it and I will copy a very detailed paper I wrote on the subject sometime ago. I don’t want you to take my word for it because I said nor do I want you to reject what I have said because it was not what you were taught growing up. I want you to be Bereans who will thoroughly investigate for yourself and come to convictions based on the Scriptures themselves, not the wisdom of men.

There are two tragedies that occurs when this phrase is interpreted as meaning explicitly divorce. First, men who are actually Biblically qualified are excluded. But an even greater tragedy is that men who are not Biblically qualified are accepted.

The phrase in context is one of general statement about the character of the individual, not his marital state. It is a reference to his faithfulness, not that he managed to stay legally married to the same woman. This phrase refers to a man who has eyes for his wife only or if single, he is not playing the field, but faithful to the one he is considering as a potential wife. The phrase takes in a host of Biblical commands and demands that the elder be obedient to them.

1 Thess. 4:3 states, *For this is the will of God, your sanctification; [that is,] that you abstain from sexual immorality.* The Christian be free of both pre-marital sexual and extra-marital sexual relations. Jesus stated in Matthew 15:19 that such things reveal the heart and are among those things that defile a

man, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 20 “These are the things which defile the man. It is not a matter of the act, but one of the heart. Jesus made this even more clear in Matt. 5:28, “but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.” The Christian is to flee immorality (1 Cor. 6:18) as well as youthful lusts and instead pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace (2 Tim. 2:22).

The phrase translated here as “*husband of one wife*” is better translated as “*one woman man*” for that brings out the true nature of the character of the individual who would be qualified to be an elder. It excludes not just polygamists and those Christians who have an unbiblical divorce and remarry, but any Christian man with a sexual perversion. Single men who commit fornication and married men who commit adultery. All men who are “*girl watchers*,” who chase after women, or gawk at pornography. This may seem a high standard in a perverted society, but it is the standard God has set. It is the standard of righteousness. The elder must have an unblemished reputation for devotion to his spouse and sexual purity.

This does not mean that a man who has never committed a sexual sin is necessarily more moral or superior to a man who has fully confessed passed transgressions and been forgiven. It simply means that only a sexually pure and continually faithful man is qualified to pastor the church of God. The repentant man can be used in many other areas of Christ’s service effectively, but not as a leader and example to the whole flock.

I added the phrase, “continually faithful,” because in a society like ours it takes work to keep from being sullied. Paul said *I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified* (1 Cor. 9:27). Sexual sin is serious - Paul earlier had warned the Corinthians to flee sexual immorality because *every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own*” (1 Cor. 6:18,19). Paul knew that if he fell into sexual sin he would not longer be above reproach and no longer qualified for leadership in the church.

THE ELDER AND HIS CHILDREN

The next phrase we find in Titus 1:6 is that the man who would qualify to be an elder is a man “*having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.*” The elder must have a proper relationship with his children and be training them in godliness. The foundational reason for this is found in the parallel passage 1 Timothy 3:4 that an elder *must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)*”

The manner in which the man approaches the rearing of his children will reveal how he will approach his responsibilities in the church. If a man cannot manage his own family and teach them to follow the teachings of Christ, he will not be able to do that in the church either.

Shallow Bible study that does not carefully bring out the meanings of words, examine the context and properly cross reference has lead to some erroneous ideas from this passage, and that is the idea that an elder’s children must be believers - i.e. Christians. Now you say, wait a minute, did you not just read the verse as “*having children who believe*”? Yes, I did for that is how the NASB translates it, but this shows the importance of examination of the original languages or at least checking out other translations to make sure you are getting the whole sense of meaning the word can have.

The particular phrase here is τέκνα ἔχων πιστά. It is translated as “having children who believe” in the NASB; as “having faithful children” in the KJV and NKJV; “whose children believe” in the NIV; and “having children steadfast” in YLT.

The particular word here is πιστα which is the accusative plural of the noun πιστος. The only other time this exact particular word form occurs in the New Testament is Acts 13:34 where it is translated as

the “sure” (NASB, KJV, NIV) or “faithful” (DBY, YLT) blessings of David. That is why YLT translates this phrase as “having children steadfast. . .”.

πιστος can be translated several different ways depending on context - faithful, faith, believe, believer and trustworthy. The word is used to refer to Christians as “believers” as in Acts 10:45 - “. . . *all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter. . .*”. It is used to refer to action of believing as in John 20:27 where Jesus tells Thomas to put his hand in Jesus’ side and “*be not unbelieving, but believing.*” Some form of πιστος occurs in the NT 52 times. In the NASB it is translated 37 times as “faithful,” (46 times in the KJV), 7 times as “trustworthy,” once as “faithfully,” once as “faith,” once as “believe,” once as “believing,” and 4 times as “believers.” So as you can see, normally the word should be translated as “faithful” unless there is something in the context that demands a different translation. The question then is the translation “believe” demanded by the context?

The simplest way to dispel that this is a requirement that the elder’s children are believers is that this would eliminate any elder who has children too young to understand and believe. The particular word here refers to children of any age. Some have argued that this would not necessarily be true since Paul is probably not referring to such a young child. A young child can be rebellious, but they can be one accused of dissipation which is a term used of drunken revelry at pagan festivals (Eph. 5:18). Only a older son or daughter could not be such a prodigal. However, the passage does not require the child to be accused of both, but either one, and a young child can be marked by rebellion.

This does bring up the immediate context of what πιστος - faithful/believe is being contrasted with which here is the attitude and behavior of rebellion and dissipation - not unbelief. I think then that it is pretty obvious then that the better translation here is faithful, not believe. What then is the child faithful too?

The obvious answer is to the father who is commanded to raise them in a godly manner to be godly people. In Ephesians 6:4 the father is commanded “*do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*” He is commanded in Colossians 3:21 to “*not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart.*” He is to follow the pattern set in Deut. 6 to himself love the Lord God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might. The Lord’s commandments are to be on his own heart and he is to teach his children “*diligently*” and talk of the Lord’s commands when he sits in his house, when he walks by the way, when he lies down and when he rises up.

We get additional insight from 1 Timothy 3:4 tells us that the elder must be one who “manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity.” The faithful child is one that is under control and dignified because the father has taught him well. This certainly does not mean the child is perfect, but it does mean the child is not out of control. The child is not characterized by being ανυποτακτα - rebellious which means to be personally unruly, someone who refuses to recognize or submit to proper authority - and that includes more than just the parents.

The character that needs to be in the elder is that of a good manager. He anticipates what will be coming and trains his children appropriately, and when his children do disobey, he deals with them properly. He helps them understand self control and personal responsibility. He teaches them the Bible and seeks to lead them in all its commands, precepts and principles by word and example. He seeks to bring them into a personal relationship with the savior.

Sadly, I have known too many pastors that have forsaken their children for the ministry. They think they can make a deal with God that if He will take care of his family, he will take care of the church. God never had and never will make that deal. Jesus said He would build His church (Mt. 16:18). The pastor does not have too. The Lord has already given every father direct commands detailing out his responsibility in raising his children and a key qualification of an elder is that he is caring out those responsibilities in such a way that it shows visibly in his family.

Personally, I am committed to this. When either I see or someone points out that my children are not doing well, then I have to make sure I am doing what I am supposed to be doing with them to train them properly. If they are ever marked as being rebellious kids or ever get involved with dissipation, then that reflects my failure as a father - and as a leader in the church. My resignation must be given in and I must concentrate on seeking to win back my children. A man that loses his children is not deserving of the position of an elder or the respect that belongs to that position. Both the children and the church are important and serious work. The man that fails his children will also fail the church.