

“Elder Credentials”
Titus 1:5-9
(Preached at Trinity, January 22, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Twenty years before Paul wrote this letter he conducted his first missionary journey. He and Barnabas sailed from Antioch through Cyprus and across the Mediterranean Sea. In each city he and Barnabas faced opposition. At Lystra Paul was stoned so severely they thought he was dead. After reaching Derbe they did something unusual. They decided to return to each of the cities where they had been. Why? Because they had planted churches in each city. They returned to each city and ordained elders. Missionary work is not finished until churches are planted. And churches need able men to lead them.
2. Now, twenty years later Paul is still equipping churches. Paul left Titus at Crete knowing the work needed for these young churches to succeed. **Titus 1:5 NAU** - "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains" – **λείπω** - The things left unfinished. The NT is a church book. It was written for churches primarily. Individuals secondarily. Paul was a church man. It wasn't enough just to go from town to town preaching the Gospel and making converts. Paul was a church planter. After planting a church Paul gave great attention to seeing it prosper. This was his standard practice.
3. Paul begins this letter by affirming the foundation, God's work of grace. **Titus 1:4** - "Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior." We are chosen and saved by God's grace. The church exists by God's grace. Our hope of eternal life is by God's grace. The church of Christ is built upon God's work of grace.
4. Having established this foundation, Paul then stresses the importance of right doctrine. The Gospel must be saturated with sound doctrine. Right practice depends on right doctrine. Paul knew that there were already false teachers sowing lies in the church – **Verses 10-11**.
5. A healthy church needs strong leadership: **Titus 1:5 NAU** - "appoint elders in every city as I directed you," This is our Lord's purpose. He loves His church. **Revelation 2-3** tells us He walks among His churches. He is here this morning. He provides for His church. Protects His church. Paul loved the church because Christ loves His Church. In order to care for His church Jesus has raised up Pastors. They are His under-shepherds. They are essential to the health of the church.
6. Paul understood this well. He put great emphasis on building strong leadership within the church. He surrounded himself with young men that he nurtured and built up in the faith. This included Timothy and Titus. Acts 20 describes his personal instruction with the elders at Ephesus.

7. These elders needed to be men of integrity. They needed to be men full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.
They needed to be men who were well instructed in sound doctrine, men who understood the knowledge of the truth and able to impart this knowledge to others. They needed to give themselves to sound preaching and teaching. Paul's great words of instruction to Timothy were, "Preach the Word!"
8. **Verses 5-9** summarize Paul's emphasis on equipping and installing elders in every church.
They needed to be men of a particular sort, of a particular calling, bearing a particular profile with particular gifts and an excellent character.
 - A. They needed an internal call from God. God raises up those He would have to lead His people. Paul also described this in his letter to Timothy:
1 Timothy 3:1 NAU - "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*."
"Aspires" – a strong desire, a longing—I must pursue this.
The word for "desires" can mean "covet" or "lust" – it describes an inner compulsion, a powerful stirring, a sense that this is what God would have me to do and I must obey with all my heart.
 - B. Along with this inward call, there had to be an outward affirmation. His calling needed to be tested and confirmed. This is why Paul is commanding that elders be appointed in every city. They had to be carefully examined, affirmed by other elders, and set apart by the church.
Paul wanted the church to understand that elders were not merely individuals who were self-appointed, who forced themselves upon the church. They had to be men called by God who met certain qualifications.
God established standards to protect His church.
9. These qualifications are both descriptive as well as prescriptive.
They describe the characteristics of the man qualified for the office of pastor.
Objective qualities that can be observed and tested.
They also prescribe characteristics we should strive to increase and improve.
10. God provides these qualifications in order to protect His church.
Paul listed the qualifications for this office so that there would be no confusion.
He also listed the qualifications in his letter to Timothy.
These are universal qualifications.
They are the same for every pastor.
They are the same in a small church or large church.
They are the same in every nation and every culture.
They are the same in the first century and in the twenty-first century.
11. While these are high qualifications for elders, they are also the qualities every Christian should strive to maintain. But our leaders are held to a high standard. They must set the example.

- I. What are the qualifications?
- A. Reputation is important. Paul says he must be “Above reproach.”
1. Paul states this twice, once in **Verse 6** and again in **Verse 7**. Paul seems to be implying that there are two areas that must be examined. The pastor must be above reproach in both—in his homelife and in his character.
 2. The pastor is a public figure.
 - a. The pastor must be of excellent character. He must not be guilty of sins that will raise questions. He must be an example of Christian faithfulness.
 - b. He preaches high doctrines. His behavior must not contradict his doctrine. His life should demonstrate the power of the Gospel?
- B. The first area of a pastor’s qualification for ministry deals with his home life. He must be above reproach in his care of his home.
1. “husband of one wife” – Literally it could read, “a one-woman man.”
 - a. This speaks of marital fidelity. He is faithful to his wife. He doesn’t have wondering eyes. He controls any lustful thoughts. He loves his wife and everyone knows it.
 - b. Regarding a pastor’s relationship with his wife, he must be above reproach. Marital infidelity is a permanent disqualification from ministry.
 2. Paul then speaks about the pastor’s children. How does he manage his home? – **Verse 6**
1 Timothy 3:4 NAU - "*He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity*"
 - a. Some translate the passage: "having children who believe"
 ESV: “his children are believers” (**creyente**)
 Better: KJV – “having faithful children”
 The focus is more upon behavior of the elder’s children than their eternal state. A Godly home can be conducive to faith, but it cannot produce it.
 A pastor can’t control if or when his children come to saving faith. But he is responsible for training his children well, of managing his household well.
 He understands the importance of maintaining a balance of love, discipline, and high expectations—which is the model of our Heavenly Father.
 - b. A pastor’s children must be faithful, not unruly or disrespectful. The Puritans used to say the family is a little church. The man who cares for his children well is ready to care for the church. He knows how to train his children with respect, patiently nurturing and disciplining them unto the pattern of godliness.
- B. In **Verse 7** Paul changes words to describe the office – from “elder” to “overseer”
1. The New Testament uses three synonymous terms to describe this office—pastor, elder, and bishop.
 Pastor - ποιμήν – refers to the work of a shepherd caring for sheep
 Elder - πρεσβύτερος – refer to the maturity of the office as well as the ruling nature. All through the Old Covenant and the history of Israel the elders were those vested with authority.
 Bishop – Overseer - ἐπίσκοπος – refers to oversight – **Verse 7**

2. Paul also refers to the elders as “stewards” – a manager. One entrusted with that which belongs to another. It is a high, sacred trust.
- C. As Paul continues in **Verse 7** he gives several qualifications that speak to the pastor’s self-control, his ability to discipline himself. He must be above reproach.
1. He must not be “self-willed” – He isn’t like those who give their chief attention to pleasing themselves. A pastor must be able to serve others. He must not be arrogant and overbearing.
 2. “Not quick-tempered” – he doesn’t quickly become angry. The pastoral ministry can be stressful. Caring for Christ’s sheep can be difficult. It often demands great patience. There will be times when he faces criticism. A pastor should not be hot-headed.
 3. “Not addicted to wine” – this could be applied to anything that gains control over us. It could be food. Many pastors may not be given to alcoholic excess but have difficulty putting their fork down. A pastor must not allow anything to gain mastery over him.
 4. “Not pugnacious” – the pastor must have control over how he handles his authority. Paul is saying he shouldn’t be a bully. The pastoral office carries the authority of leadership and the force of the Word of God. Power can corrupt. We are to lead by example, not by force.
 5. “not fond of sordid gain” – The pastor is worthy of his pay. The church has a duty to provide for their pastor. This can leave the church at risk of men who are only trying to extort money without the rigors of the pastoral ministry. The true pastor must not have his eye upon his pay.
- D. **Verse 8** describes the pastor’s attitude towards people
1. He must be “hospitable” – given to hospitality. This was important in the first century when many were engaged in the great missionary endeavor and there were few public inns. The word literally means, “a lover of strangers.” The best application for today is that the pastor must be approachable. He must be available to others – this is a part of his work as shepherd to the flock of Christ.
 2. “loving what is good” – he should care about things that are beneficial to others. A good pastor loves being a blessing to others. He should always have his eye upon Christ. What will bring Him the greatest glory?
 3. “Sensible” – He is the church’s chief administrator. He must be sensible – it implies wise, careful consideration before taking action. He is able to focus on priorities. He maintains vigilance for the care and protection of the church.
 4. "just, devout," – righteous and holy – he should be pious.
 5. “self-controlled” – self-discipline, able to maintain order in his life. The pastoral office demands time-management. Time for pastoral care. Time for study. Time for family. Time for personal devotion.

- II. The pastor is able to teach – or an able teacher.
 So far all of the qualifications have to do with spiritual character and attitudes. Now Paul stresses the nature of the office.
 “Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching”
- A. The pastoral office is primarily a teaching office.
 - 1. This is an important distinction between pastor and deacon.
 - 2. Paul wrote to Timothy that one of the qualifications was “Able to teach.” He must be an able teacher. His primary duties are preaching and prayer. He is always in teaching mode. Always ready to teach and defend the truth.
 - B. There will always be false doctrine that has to be refuted.
 - 1. He must be able to refute those who bring in false teaching
The good pastor must protect the church.
 - 2. God’s people will always need to be taught and built up in the faith.
 - 3. The pastor must be a constant student, always studying, always increasing his understanding of God’s Word.
 - 4. He knows he’ll never reach perfection. He’ll never have perfect understanding. So, he spends his life studying.
 - 5. He is to study it diligently, hold fast to it fervently, stand upon it with unshakable resolve. Only a man completely convinced in the power of God’s Word will preach it with faithfulness and confidence.
- III. Paul gives a couple other pastoral distinctions in this passage
- A. Plurality - "appoint elders in every city"
 - 1. Paul charges them to appoint “elders” (plural) in every “city” (singular)
 - 2. It provides for a combined leadership.
It provides moral and theological accountability among the elders.
There is strength in combined counsel
It provides for a continuity of leadership.
 - B. Male leadership
 - 1. All of the pronouns and cases are masculine
 - 2. **Verse 6** - "if any man is above reproach"
Literally: “If anyone” but it is a masculine pronoun
 - 3. “husband of one wife” – again, stressing male leadership

Conclusion:

1. This is the pastoral office. It is a high calling. It carries fearful accountability.
2. This office must not be entered without careful consideration.
Charles Spurgeon famously said, “If you can do anything else do it. If you can stay out of the ministry, stay out of the ministry.”¹
3. The highest privilege is caring for the Bride of Christ. He loves her. He died for her. Pastors are charged to care for her. And they are to hold Christ high.

¹ Quoted by Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), Page 491.

