

Introduction:

Today is the second part of our study of Paul's first charge to Titus, in Titus 1:5-16, a charge that shows the priority, qualifications, and focus of elders. Last week, we took time to consider the scope of the Bible, regarding elders, or overseers. We observed that elders aren't simply older people within the church, but an office of leadership, that only qualified men are appointed to. We considered how the Bible shows that appointing men to the office of elder, or overseer, was a priority for the apostles because they are called and commissioned, as God's stewards, to manage His household. We noticed how they carry a similar call of the apostles to lead and shepherd the church of God, following in the footsteps of the chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who purchased them with His own blood. This led to us beginning to look at the qualifications for elders. Here is the truth we were considering, how

ELDERS MUST BE QUALIFIED MEN WHO DISPLAY GOD'S GRACE

In Titus 1:6-8, we covered 2 of 3 ways elders must display God's grace. We first looked at verse 6 to see how elders must display God's grace to love and lead well. We observed how the evidence of their love for one woman, if married, and the response of their children to their leadership, if they have children, reveal their ability to love and lead the church well. We then saw, from verses 7-8 how elders must display God's power to fight sin and pursue godliness. We observed how Paul lists 5 negative traits elders must put off, revealing God's power to fight sin, contrasted with 5 positive traits they must put on, revealing God's power to pursue godliness. And we ended by considering how these negative traits and positive traits are ones that all Christians seek to put off and on. Elders, or overseers, must have these qualifications because they serve as examples to the church of how to live for the glory of God. Today, we are going to continue with this first charge, observing the third way elders must display the grace of God, how Paul shows the focus of elders, and the reasons Paul gives for that focus. Let's start with the 3rd qualification, that

3) ELDERS MUST DISPLAY A FIRM COMMITMENT TO THE WORD OF TRUTH

We see this in the first part of verse 9 of Titus 1, but let's start in verse 7 to keep the flow of Paul's thought in mind,⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught. Pause there. Holding firm means to cleave, be devoted to, or stick close to. The idea is not a soft grip on something, or a take it or leave it attitude. Rather a zeal for something that drives your life, and a clinging to it like a rock climber clings to his hold, or a running back clings to the ball. And pay close attention to what the elder holds firmly to, the trustworthy word. Paul uses very purposeful and precise language here to focus our attention on something specific. When Paul calls it the trustworthy word, in Titus 1:9, he uses a term directly connected what he said in verse 3, when saying God manifested the hope of eternal life in His word through Paul's preaching. This trustworthy word is the same word manifested by God, at the proper time, through Paul's preaching. It is the apostolic proclamation of God's very word. If this wasn't fully clear, Paul says it is the, "trustworthy word as taught."

It is not as clear in our English translations but, in his commentary, Robert Yarbrough, points out how Paul uses one word in the original language to reveal this is the teaching handed down from Christ to the apostles, commenting how, Paul uses a word (didachē) that summarizes apostolic instruction in Acts (2:42; 5:28; 13:12; 17:19) and in his own ministry (Rom 6:17; 16:17; cf. 2 Tim 4:2)... The “message” that pastoral leaders are charged to uphold is not theirs to invent, shape to their own demands, or edit to their preferences. They are to embrace, live, and impress the teaching they have received from an apostolic spokesman. Elders must have a firm commitment to the teaching received from Christ through the apostles. When elders are considering how to lead and guide the church, the trustworthy word as taught must be their guide. When they are shepherding people, the trustworthy word as taught must be the primary tool. Just like the previous qualifications, the goal is that all of us might hold firmly to it, therefore elders must display a firm commitment to the Word of Truth. We see the importance of this qualification when Paul moves to the focus of elders, showing that,

ELDERS FOCUS ON BUILDING THE CHURCH ON SOUND DOCTRINE

Look at verse 9 again, 9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and to rebuke those who contradict it. “So that,” in the middle of verse 9, points to purpose. The purpose of elders having a firm commitment to the word of truth, is so that they would focus on leading the church in two ways. First, to provide consistent and clear instruction or exhortation. The term translated “give instruction” is one word that signifies calling others to one’s side through encouragement. Listen to how Paul uses this same term in 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, 11 For you know how, like a father with his children, 12 we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. Elders lead by giving instruction and exhortation to the church, like fathers with children. And the tense, in the Greek, reveals this as a continuous or repeated action. I was reminded of when we taught our daughters how to Rollerblade. We didn’t just sit down with a manual, cover the basics, and send them out on the street in our neighborhood. That would have been disastrous, leading to scraps, bruises, and possibly even broken bones. No, we went with them, holding their hands, giving constant instruction and encouragement in things like correct foot placement and balance. We brought them alongside of us to exhort them in the way they should go. That is the idea here. Elders are called to consistently instruct, exhort, and guide the church. Pay attention to how this instruction, or exhortation, is tied to something specific. Paul says it is, 9 ... in sound doctrine. What’s interesting is how the word for doctrine has the same root as the word used for “as taught.” This connects it again with the apostolic teaching handed down. Church, doctrine is not a lofty theological word. It means “the teaching.” Doctrine is the truth of scripture handed down by Christ through the apostles as the teaching we should cling to and live by. Here it is compounded with the word sound, or healthy. It is where we get our English word hygiene from. The instruction and exhortation is the correct, healthy, or sound doctrine we have received from the apostles. This helps us to understand why they also rebuke those who contradict it, involving both correction and teaching. Elders rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine because it isn’t healthy teaching for the church. In fact, we will see it is harmful. Church, the teaching we receive in this church is of high importance. Therefore, the elders are not called to leave it to chance, but to be dedicated to giving instruction themselves and rebuking those who contradict it. Elders focus on building the church on sound doctrine. I want you to see how Paul drives this focus home through the rest of this chapter by providing reasons for this focus. Notice the way verse 10 begins. 10 For there are many. For is a linking term, showing that what follows is the reason for what came before. In verses 10-16, I see 3 reasons Paul gives, centered on the effects of false teaching, or unsound doctrine. Consider the first reason with me,

1) FALSE TEACHERS UNDERMINE TRUE FAITH

Notice the problem verses 10-11 reveal 10 For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. 11 They must be silenced since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. Do you see the problem? Titus is facing many who are teaching what they ought not to teach. From the beginning, one of Satan's schemes to undermine true faith has been to infiltrate the church with teaching that should not be taught, and he continues to use that scheme today. Notice what Paul says about these false teachers to show they cannot be trusted. 10 For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. He starts by calling them insubordinate. They do not submit to apostolic authority and by extension the authority of Christ. False teachers refuse to submit to the authoritative writings of the scriptures. Sometimes this is subtle, but it is always present in some shape. Church, God gave us His word of truth, through the words of those who wrote scripture, who were either apostles or directly connected to apostles. He sent His Son at the perfect time in history, and worked through these writers, by the power of His spirit, in such a way that their words were His words. He used their writing styles, understanding, and hearts to communicate the exact truth He longed for His people to know throughout all time. And that truth never changes. We should deny teachers who refuse to submit to the scriptures as the final authority on faith and practice. Further, Paul identifies them as empty talkers. They really don't speak anything of substance but babble on with empty words. Still more, they are deceivers. Satan himself is called the deceiver of the whole world in Revelation 12:9, and they follow in His work of deception, seeking to lead God's people astray. The last phrase signifies a particular aspect of the false teachers in Crete. Paul says, 10 ... especially those of the circumcision party. The phrase "circumcision party" is used mostly throughout the New Testament to refer to a sect of Jewish "believers," who claimed that aspects of the ceremonial law were still required in order to be saved. Things like circumcision and forbidding certain foods to be eaten. We know this is who Paul is referring to from verse 14, where Paul refers to Jewish myths and the commands of people. The commands of people are those ceremonial law additions, added to the gospel, and Jewish myths were likely the ways they captured people's attention to listen to those commands. Most scholars understand these myths as either ways of exaggerating Jewish history through genealogies or things like suggesting numerical values of Old Testament names reveal a deeper meaning in Old Testament passages. The substance of either option is a claim to some deeper understanding of the Old Testament or the history of God's people. False teachers had infiltrated the churches in Crete to undermine true faith, and Satan is still using these teachers today. One reason we need elders focusing on building the church on sound doctrine is because false teaching undermines true faith. The second reason for elders focusing on building the church on sound doctrine is because,

2) FALSE TEACHING HAS A SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT

Pay close attention to the harm Paul reveals from this teaching again in verse 11, 11 They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. The reason they must be silenced is because of their impact on whole families, or households. Upsetting means to overturn. Families can mean family or households. This could refer to family units, or entire churches since early congregations were often household churches. It may be both, because havoc wreaked in family units is bound to bleed into the church at large. False teaching has a substantial impact. Sadly, there is a dangerous response to false teaching these days that suggests it isn't harming anyone, that people are welcome to believe whatever they like because it only affects them. That is simply not true. As people casually share "what has been revealed to them," it slowly but surely creeps out causing others to believe that same false truth and have their faith affected by it. We need to understand the substantial impact of false teaching to see why elders focus on building the church on sound doctrine.

As GracePoint is built on sound doctrine through consistent instruction and rebuke, when needed, false teaching will have little room to flourish within this community and wreak havoc on our church family. The third reason elders focus on building the church on sound doctrine, is that

3) FALSE TEACHING IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH TRUE FAITH

Oh church, we have to know this truth and Paul hones in on it in the final verses of this chapter. Notice how he starts in verses 12 and 13, 12 One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” 13 This testimony is true. Paul reminds Titus’ of a well-known view of Cretans. He is most likely quoting a Cretan man named Epimenides, considered to be a prophet, who wrote of the Cretan reputation. Epimenides was saying Cretans always lie, are evil people who devour others, and those who only care about their own bellies. Then Paul says, this testimony is true. Ouch! We would never suggest stereotyping people like this today, but Paul had valid reason to. The Cretans were so bad that there was a slang term developed, “to Kretenize,” which meant to lie. Why would Paul speak like this? Because Titus and the elders in Crete needed to know the depth of sin they were dealing with. Understanding the depths of sin always helps to understand the reasons for careful consideration of what is being taught. False teaching is always a sin-filled lie that harms God’s people and is incompatible with true faith. Look at how Paul continues to point to this in verse 13, saying, 13 ... Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, The rebuke is clearly for the false teachers, but it is unclear whether the “they” refers to Cretan believers or these false teachers. Either way, the point is the rebuke seeks to correct and establish true, sound faith. In verse 14, Paul continues to lay it on thick. 14 not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. This wasn’t a slight mistake the false teachers were making. It was a clear rejection of the trustworthy word. Yet, Paul is not done. It gets more significant in verses 15 and 16, look there with me. Titus 1:15, 15 To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. Don’t mistake the point of verse 15, this is not a license to do anything, as though everything is now pure. It is anchored to the context of this passage. Verse 15 serves as an understanding of why the ceremonial laws are no longer required. If you have been purified in Christ, Christ has said these things are pure. What defiles a person is their heart, not what goes into the body. And those who are in Christ, have received the true circumcision of the heart. Notice how Paul says those who are defiled are also unbelieving. They don’t believe the gospel of grace; therefore, both their mind and consciences are defiled. Both their understanding and moral evaluation are defiled because they are not believing. Verse 16 lands the plane, so to speak, showing the reality of those who turn away from the truth. Of these people, Paul says, 16 They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. They say they know God intimately, but their works, their understanding, and their actions prove that they are really denying God, because they have denied the way, the truth and the life, Jesus Christ. Salvation is by faith alone through trusting in the work of Christ on the cross alone. The terms that follow, show this has devastating consequences. Detestable means they are an abomination to God. Disobedient means they don’t obey His word. Unfit for any good work means nothing they do is acceptable to God. Do you see how false teaching is incompatible with true faith? If not consider the words of Jesus in Mark 7:6-8 speaking to the pharisees who devoted themselves to these things, 6 And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “ ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 7 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ 8 You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” Adding to the gospel isn’t a harmless misunderstanding. Charles Spurgeon says it well, Do not count it a trifle to be sound in the faith... In this world we see too much of salvation without Christ—I mean we meet with many who believe that they are saved because they have been baptized, or confirmed, or passed through the ceremonies of the church to which they belong.

They have not looked to the precious blood. They are not depending simply upon the finished work of the Redeemer, but something else than Christ has become their confidence. Now, avoid that and buy the truth, which lies here: “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). Because false teaching is incompatible with true faith, elders focus on building the church on sound doctrine grounded in the gospel. This means elders must be carefully engaged with all the teaching that happens here at GracePoint church, because the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth is at stake. And this is why they must be qualified men who display a firm commitment to the word of truth.

Conclusion:

We have seen the reasons Paul charges Titus to appoint elders who hold firm to the word of truth and build the church on sound doctrine. To close, I want to consider one of the foundations Paul laid in the first 4 verses, tying in all that we have seen so far, showing us why Christ longed for His church to have shepherds lead like He did, and why the apostles’ appointed elders, to continue that shepherding care of the church. This foundation is so important for us to recognize and remember as we walk forward as a church, the foundation that

GOD CARES ABOUT HIS PEOPLE HAVING TRUE FAITH

Consider one more time the purpose of the rebuke Paul gives to Titus in verse 13, 13 ... Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith. God moved through the apostle Paul to urge Titus to rebuke the false teachers sharply, because God desires for His church to be sound in the faith. God’s love moves towards His church through a concern for their faith to be true and sound. And he doesn’t leave that to chance, but calls and equips elders, as His stewards, to build your faith on sound doctrine. This is why GracePoint will always seek to have qualified men who display God’s grace as elders and encourage those who serve in this office to humbly press into their call to shepherd this church together, focusing on building it on sound doctrine. As the worship team comes to lead us in a final song of worship, let’s consider the main application for everyone in this room, do you long to be sound in the faith? Are you striving to go deeper in your understanding of His trustworthy word so your faith is sound? Do you have a faith built only on the truth of the gospel? Church, anything added to the work of Christ as being necessary for salvation is incompatible with true faith. And anything that doesn’t include the word of the cross cannot lead to true faith. In the coming weeks, we are going to see how a deep understanding of, and dependence on, this gospel brings about godly lives that magnify the glory of Christ. And how godliness flows from true faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you are not trusting in the cross of Christ or have wandered into trusting in something added to the gospel, turn and trust in Christ alone today, receiving His forgiveness, and the new life that only comes through Him. GracePoint Church, Let’s be a people that cling closely to the gospel of Jesus Christ as our only hope in life and death, growing deeper in our understanding of His trustworthy word to live lives that magnify His glory and grace.

Would you stand as I pray this over us?