

# **TITUS 1:1-16**

## **Election and Elders**

**Background:** Titus was written about 60 AD by the apostle Paul to one of his co-laborers in the faith, Titus. We don't know a lot about Titus—but one thing we do know is that he wasn't circumcised. Now that may seem like I am "sharing way too much information" and this is probably something you wouldn't want people to know. But in Paul's day this was a big deal because Titus was a Gentile Christian.

Up until that point God's people had always been circumcised since the time of Abraham, around twenty five hundred years earlier. But.....up until that point.... God's people had always been Jewish. Now the Gentiles entered the picture! They had become a part of God's plan! This was apparent because the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit—which was verified by them speaking in tongues. But here is the problem.....they weren't circumcised!

The Jewish leaders felt you HAD to be circumcised. Paul said you did NOT! Things got so heated they had the first church council where the Jewish leaders and the apostles met in Jerusalem to decide the matter. One of the people they took with them was Titus. The question everyone wondered was whether Titus would leave this meeting a circumcised or an uncircumcised man. In the end—Titus was spared the knife.

So that was Titus' fifteen minutes of fame. He was known as the man who was not circumcised! Eventually Titus ended up being the leader who was assigned to set in order the church that met on the island of Crete. Crete is the largest of the Greek Isles and is south of Athens. We are not sure how the church started there but we do know that during Pentecost there were Jewish folk who came from Crete. They may have started the church. If they didn't then it was established by Paul who first showed up in Crete in Acts 27 when he was being shipped to Rome to face trial. There was a storm that forced the crew to spend the winter in Crete.

After Paul's release, things weren't going well in Crete. There were false teachers who were trying to lead the people astray and many of the leaders did not lead godly lives. They insisted the Cretans be circumcised. So Titus was sent there to straighten out the mess and to appoint elders. The book is significant because it provides a look at eldership and who would be a candidate for being one. As we aim to revise the constitution at Northside the information we learn in Titus proves very helpful. Let's begin.

**Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, 2 in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began 3 and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior; 4 To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.**

There are two nuggets in this introduction that are profound and should not be overlooked.

### **1. Christians are the product of God's elect**

You read about this in verse 1. Paul is an apostle for the sake of God's elect. What that means is that you are not responsible for choosing Christ—God elected you. Now some of us may be uneasy with that suggestion. But the term is used in the same sense that you will use it during the upcoming election. In November, a president will be elected by the citizens of the United States. The president does not elect themselves. The people do. They campaign in hope that you will play a part in electing them.

So why would God choose one person over someone else? The answer simply is that we don't know. There was never anything in us that warranted God choosing us. That is where grace comes in. The term literally means undeserved favor. If you still are having trouble with this—and many do—please read this next passage carefully. It is found in 2 Timothy 1:9. Paul tells Timothy that it was God.....

### **2 Timothy 1:9**

who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

### **Ephesians 1:4-5**

even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

This passage says that God called us not because of anything we did (i.e. our works), but because of His purposes. Now this has been a very controversial issue throughout church history. It started with a debate between Pelagius and Augustine. Both were godly men but they completely disagreed with each other when it came to original sin and choosing God. Pelagius said that we did not inherit a sin nature from Adam but that we were responsible for our own actions. Consequently, we had the ability to choose God. Augustine completely disagreed and said the opposite. We do inherit a sin nature from Adam which makes it impossible to choose God. Pelagius argued that God would not tell us something to do and hold us responsible if we did not have the ability to do it. Augustine countered that if we are somehow involved in choosing God then the grace we receive is a partial grace because we contributed to it. In the end, the church sided with Augustine and condemned Pelagius.

The natural objection is that does not seem fair. That would seem to take away from personal choice and free will. Here's how the Bible reconciles this. We have always been free to choose. But as Jonathan Edwards once said, because of sin we choose not to seek after God. The book of Ephesians says that before we knew Christ we were dead in our transactions. Romans three mentions that no one is good or seeks God. So we are free to choose---but unless God regenerates you with the Holy Spirit we will not choose God.

Let me get practical with you. There are a lot of people who call themselves Christians and they are not leading godly lives. There are a lot of non-Christians who will tell you they are not ready to choose Christ—I was one of them. Inevitably we are people who think that we are responsible for our salvation. I can choose God or I don't have to. It is up to me. That is not what the Bible teaches about salvation. God chose Israel out of many nations not because they were great—but because He wanted to be glorified. God choose the apostles not based on their credentials—they were fishermen, tax collectors, and Paul was a murderer of Christians—but because of His own purpose and plans. Think about yourself: God choose your gender. God choose the country you live in. You are not here because you chose to exist. You are here because God wanted to give you life and breath.

In the end—God has to get the glory. He has to get the complete credit. The fact that we exist is amazing. The fact that many of us are Christians is phenomenal. It was nothing we did—it was entirely what God did. It was His grace. Knowing that should change your life. This is the second thing Paul mentions in these opening verses.

### **2. Right knowledge of God leads to godliness**

That's what Paul says in the opening verse. Knowledge of the truth accords with righteousness. In other words, the more you know about God—the more you will be affected in your heart. Let me give you an example: If you grasp that God has chosen you based on nothing you have done—then your life should be drastically changed. You realize you are fortunate. When we have that knowledge we think less of ourselves and more about God. We are like the angels who marvel at God's plan of salvation. We should have the kind of awe for God. We need to think less of ourselves and more about God.

I'll be honest with you—there are many Christians who I'm not sure are Christians. The primary reason is because I don't see any change year after year. I don't see the desire in their hearts to please Him. Many have this attitude I'll get serious when I'm ready. But when the Holy Spirit gets a hold of your life you should be changed. You should be making progress. You should want to go to church. You should want to spend time in prayer with Him. As we look through Titus one of the themes is making sure people have a right understanding of God. Making sure leaders teach the right doctrine. Making sure that people are living the kind of life before God that is pleasing.

This wasn't happening in Crete and it doesn't happen in the church today a lot. Knowledge of the truth should accord in godliness. That's why Paul wants Titus to appoint elders and make sure the congregation understands right doctrine. Let's read verses 5-9.

**5 This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— 6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. 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, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.**

Things you need to know about elders

### **3. Elders are synonymous with overseers and pastors**

Notice what Paul says in verse 5. He says that Titus was left in Crete to appoint elders. The Greek word that is used is presbeteros (πρεσβυτέρους). This is where we get the word presbytery from. That word is translated as elder. It can refer to men with gray hair or someone who is in charge of a community. Now as Paul describes the qualifications for an elder notice in verse 7 he uses a different word, overseer. This comes from the Greek word episcopon (ἐπίσκοπον), which is where we get the word Episcopalian from. But here is the deal. Both words are synonymous. They are not separate offices—they are the same one. Here is another area where Christians can get confused. Not only are overseers and elders synonymous—but so are pastors. There is a tendency to think pastors are at the top of the food chain and then come the elders. But this is not true. A pastor is an elder. The Greek word for pastor means to shepherd. To shepherd means to protect and watch the church. It means to oversee. There is a passage in 1 Peter 5 where all three terms are used synonymously.

#### **1Peter 5:1-2**

Therefore, I exhort the **elders** among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, **2 shepherd** the flock of God among you, exercising **oversight** not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

So Peter says three things here. First, he indicates that he is an elder. Next Peter encourages the elders to shepherd the church—which is the same word used in the sense of pastor. Finally Peter says they are to exercise oversight—the same word used for bishop / overseer. All that to say that an elder is an overseer or bishop, and a pastor. The elder represents the position. The overseer represents the duty. And the shepherd represents the ministry.

### **4. Elders are selected by the leadership of the church**

The next thing that is worth noting is in the selection of elders. The appointment is to be done by the leaders in the church. It was the duty of Titus to appoint the elders. There is no nominating committee. There is no voting done by the congregation. The elders are to be appointed by the leader, Titus. In addition, if Titus had other elders in place they would have teamed with him to choose the elders. This pattern occurs in Acts 14 and in Timothy where the elders are to be appointed. This seems to be the norm for the church. In a business you would never expect the employees to select the supervisor. Instead you expect the leaders of the business to appoint the supervisor. In the church it is important to get the input of the congregation but ultimately the leaders should have the final say.

### **5. Elders are qualified by character traits—not because of occupation or status**

There has been a trend where elders are appointed based on their occupation or ministry experience. I have been in big churches that nominate elders and they do not know a thing about each candidate’s personal life. Instead the congregation is given out forms that describe a person’s social status or various achievements. Vote for him because he has been on a missions trip. Vote for him because he has served at this church for over twenty years. Vote for this person because they are an accomplished lawyer or accountant. Basically what happens is that the congregation reads a file on the prospective candidate and votes on that info. Here’s the problem. The only qualification that the Bible requires of elders is that they have good character traits.

God doesn't care about what we do or where we have been as far as ministry experience. Instead he cares about how we conduct ourselves in public and in private. The most important requirement for an elder is that they love God and live a life to try and please Him. Here are some of these qualifications.

1. They are to be above reproach: Thought of well by the church and unbelievers. Blameless. There should be nothing about this person that can be brought forth as an accusation against their character and conduct. .
  
2. The husband of one wife:
  - a. Various Views
    1. They must be married to the church: Roman Catholic Church  
Pros: Stresses the seriousness and commitment of eldership  
Cons: Takes a literal passage metaphorically
    2. They must be married  
Pros: The text speaks of marriage and managing ones family  
Cons: Paul was not married and singleness is described as a gift
    3. They must not remarry  
Pros: Seems to support the emphasis on "one"  
Cons: Paul allows for remarriage if widowed (Rom. 7; 1 Timothy 5)
    4. They must not be involved with polygamy  
Pros: The focus is on one woman  
Cons: This was illegal and never an issue with the early church
    5. They must not be divorced  
Pros: In line with managing one's household well  
Cons: The legitimacy of biblical divorce: Widowed or a victim of adultery
    6. They must be a one woman-kind of guy  
Pros: The emphasis is on being faithful to "one woman" This is also the literal definition  
Cons: Seems to be to simple

The best view is the one woman-man because it addresses a character issue, namely lusting after other women or committing adultery. One is above reproach when his affection is only for his own wife. In addition, the word can be *Mias gunaikos andra can be* understood to literally mean one-woman kind of guy. In a nutshell, the congregation must know you are fully committed to your wife without question. If one flirts with another woman (besides his wife), then he is discredited for the position of an elder. Because of the seriousness of being a leader in the church, one's character relating to other woman or pornography must not come into question. This is harder than it sounds and makes us exercise caution and dependence on God.

3. Children must be believers: This is a reflection on how one models Christ in their home. Some have argued that if God chooses who is saved—how can parents be responsible for an unbelieving child(ren)? We must remember that salvation is accessed by sharing the gospel. God uses those who share the gospel to regenerate others.
  
4. Not open to the charge of debauchery: Elders don't want to give the appearance that they are involved in excessive sensuality or drunkenness. Be careful where you go or what you do for entertainment.

5. Not insubordinate: The false teachers were discrediting Paul's message and saying he was wrong when it came to circumcision. Paul's concern here is that the elders not discredit Paul or Titus, or the gospel which was preached to them
6. Not arrogant: An elder should not think too highly of himself. But should model the attitude of Jesus who being in very nature God—humbled himself and became a servant to men. Notice that Paul begins his letter as Paul a servant an apostle. Therefore, understanding you are a servant should guard against arrogance.
7. Not quick tempered: Not a hothead.
8. Not a drunkard: This doesn't mean you can't drink; it simply means you don't drink to get drunk. You must be above reproach
9. Not violent: The term literally means not a striker. You shouldn't be "clocking" people as an elder
10. Not greedy: Used in conjunction with financial gain. Can also be applied to giving of one's time and being selfish
11. Must be hospitable: (literally "one who loves strangers") An elder must be one who shows genuine kindness and hospitality, not only to the members of his church, but also to people he does not know well.
12. Lover of good: An elder must demonstrate goodness in life with others. i.e. helping others
13. self-controlled: He must be a man who is disciplined in terms of his response to physical desires for food, pleasure, comfort, money, sleep, sex, or anything else which could cause him to stumble.
14. Upright: People must know he is the real deal and walks the talk. He lives out the gospel.
15. Holy: Set apart for Jesus and serving in the church. This includes his lifestyle.
16. Disciplined: This is an issue involving habits: Being on time, eating, devotions, praying with family.
17. Hold firm to the gospel: Literally means "clinging." An elder must cling to God's word and not waver.
18. Must be able to teach sound doctrine: You don't have to be a public speaker, but you must be able to defend your faith and point out false doctrine. You must have an understanding of theology

The last qualification involves rebuking and pertains to verses 10-16. This is not an easy thing to do—but there are times when people in the church need to be rebuked. In adhering to this practice the Galatians 6 imperative to be "respectful and gentle" when rebuking applies. In saying this however, if one needs to be rebuked it must be clear to them they cannot continue to behave in such a manner because it goes against biblical teaching.

**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. 12 One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." 13 This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. 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. 16 They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.**

#### **6. Elders must be willing to rebuke when needed**

In the church an elder must be ready to rebuke someone because of false teaching. Now one can get too anal and rebuke folks for almost every disagreement. However, the key thing for Paul is not to "add" to the salvation message of Christ. When this occurs, the elder must silence the teaching because it leads people astray and away from the grace of Christ. If this happens there is no option but complete silencing of the false teacher. In the end, part of being a shepherd is to protect your flock from danger. If people are turning away from the truth because of false teaching, a red alert needs to be sounded and action must take place to rid the danger.

## Duties of an Elder

- Shepherd the flock, setting an example for all (1 Peter 5:1-3; Acts 20:28)
- Feed and care for the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12)
- Teach and preach sound doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:9)
- Rule and lead (1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:12)
- Train, ordain, and appoint others (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; Titus 1:5)
- Refute and rebuke the insubordinate (Titus 1:9, 13)
- Keep watch over and give account to God for the spiritual well-being of the church (Hebrews 13:17)
- Serve with Christ-like humility (1 Peter 5:3-5)