

Paul left Titus in Crete in order to “straighten out” what was left behind. He was to do with by appointing godly men to lead the church. This implies that what was left “needing straightened” was the false teaching of various teachers (cf. 2:15) who were making the way of the Lord crooked (1:10ff, note the “because” link with elder qualifications; 3:10). It is vital that godly leaders be above reproach in their relationships, character, and teaching in order to set things straight in the church, the Bride for whom Christ died (Acts 20:28)

Elders must be above reproach:

"not called out to account"

see 1 Cor 1:8 - blameless

Col 1:22 - blameless

1 Tim 3:10 – blameless

The concept of blamelessness ultimately has to do with living out the lordship of Christ and faith in Him consistently. We have a tendency to try and break apart the heart and the external life of obedience, but it is not delineated as such in Scripture. For, the external life is evidence of the heart, they are part and parcel of one another. One cannot please God without the faith of the heart (Heb 11:6; Rom 14:23), and all that is of faith will produce the external fruit of good works and godly character (James 2:20,26; Gal 5:6; 1 John 2:6). It is not merely a matter of heart or desire, but rather it is this dependent faith upon Jesus *expressly and evidentially produced in the way that he lives and the choices that he makes*. It is externally observed and his blameless life gives evidence that what he says he believes, he truly believes, and that Jesus is truly the Lord whom He gratefully obeys. It is the life of the Christ-centered, gospel-believing, cross-boasting man. This man knows Christ and it is clear in the way that he relates to God, how he relates to others, how he relates to himself, and how he teaches the gospel.

The Elder is to be above reproach in his relationships, his character, and in the soundness of his doctrine.

1. Above Reproach in Relationships

a. "one woman man"

- i. Most likely not referring to polygamy, which was taboo even in Crete.
- ii. Having the character of being committed and intensely devoted to ONE woman
 1. The emphasis in the original language is on “one”
 2. Would disqualify having two wives who are alive (the death of a spouse and remarriage would not be evident of a “multi-woman man”
 3. However, divorce and remarriage while a Christian would disqualify one from being an elder of Christ’s church
- iii. The marriage relationship is the training ground for godly and Christ-like leadership
 1. How does a man relate to his wife? Like Christ to the church?
 2. How does a man handle trouble? Like Christ to the church?
 3. Does he lead her to Jesus with admonition, exhortation, encouragement, and humble prayer, etc.?

b. "children who are being faithful"

- i. “faithful” or “believing”?
 1. Most likely not “believing”, but “faithful” as indicated by the following specifics.
 - a. What about children who are young and have not yet made a confession of Christ?
 - b. There was no talk of the wife’s spiritual condition, either
 2. The issue is whether or not a man has led his family well, having children who are obedient and trustworthy, not insolent and insubordinate to authority.
 - a. Again, perfection of the child is not the emphasis, but rather what does the father do when his child messes up?

- i. Does he lead her to Christ in exhortation and admonition, in encouragement and Christ-like love?
 - ii. Or, does he have children who receive no guidance, discipline, or exhortation, but rather who run all over him in defiance or passive resistance?
- ii. not debaucherous
 - 1. "unsaveable" "abandoned" "profligate"
- iii. not insubordinate
 - 1. "without submission"
 - 2. This is different than outright rebellion, which is high handed and "in your face"
 - 3. This is passive aggressive disobedience, a slow resistance to authority

2. Above Reproach in His Oversight

- a. BECAUSE IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE OVERSEER TO BE ABOVE REPROACH
- b. OVERSEER: "over-watch" "guardian" "superintendent" "curator" "ruler"
 - i. God's steward of God's flock; the ones who guard and rule over the flock on behalf of Christ
 - ii. "epi-skopos" – "over" + "observe, scrutinize, give attention", basic meaning is to "keep watch over" for the purpose of recognizing danger (see Galatians 6:1)
 - 1. 1 Timothy 5:17
 - Let the elders who rule [προεστωτες] well be considered worthy of double honor.
 - 2. 1 Timothy 3:4–5
 - He must manage [προισταμενου] his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage [προστεναι] his own household, how can he care for God's church?
 - 3. Acts 20:28-29; 1 Peter 5:2
 - i. The duty of elders to "oversee" or "supervise" the flock implies a governing function for the purpose of protecting the flock from danger
 - 4. 1 Thessalonians 5:12
 - i. But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you [προισταμενους] in the Lord and admonish you.
 - 5. Hebrews 13:17
 - i. Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account.
 - ii. Obedience and submission implies a role of leadership and governance and again the reference is probably to the elders though the leaders are not described.

"Love from pastors can be detected by the sheep, but sooner or later so can pretense. The lips of the pastor may speak of love, but the whole person eventually conveys a message of its own."

~Jim Elliff, *The Cure of Souls: the Pastor Serving the Flock*

2. Above Reproach in Personal Character:

- 1. NOT:
 - i. "self-willed"
 - 1. "self-delighting"
 - ii. "quick-tempered"
 - 1. prone to anger
 - iii. "drunkard"
 - 1. sits long at wine
 - iv. "pugnacious"
 - 1. brawler, bruiser
 - v. "greedy for gain"
 - 1. shamelessly
 - 2. from *kerdos* – "advantage" (Tit 1:11)

- a. Phil 1:21; 3:7 - gain
- 2. BUT:
 - i. "hospitable"
 - 1. honors guests
 - 2. from philo + xenos (love + guests or strangers)
 - ii. "lover of good"
 - 1. Self-explanatory, one who loves what is good, beneficial, honorable
 - iii. "sensible"
 - 1. soundminded, self-controlled, sound judgment, not given to fits of fancy or "wishy-washiness"
 - iv. "just"
 - 1. righteous, fair, in line with what is true and right
 - 2. In line with the character of God, biblically righteous, fair
 - v. "devout"
 - 1. specific holiness and righteousness, as opposed to the general "just" or "righteous",
 - 2. *hosios* (devout) is specific uprightness - "devout, pleasing to God in particular actions"
 - vi. "self-controlled"
 - 1. "self-mastery" from the compound word "out of strength"
 - 2. elders are to be strong and masters of their own impulses and emotions
 - 3. Their ability to lead comes from an inner strength that is independent of pleasing men, but rather is dependent upon the Holy Spirit for the purpose and desire of pleasing God

3. Above Reproach in Doctrine (the teaching):

- 1. holding firm - seizing against the flow, clinging to, devoting oneself to
 - i. see Matt 6:24; 1 Thess 5:14
- 2. "the teaching"
 - i. "the" –definite, a certain set of truths and propositions that constitute "the teaching"
 - ii. "according to the faithful word"
 - iii. defines the content of the teaching,
 - 1. that which is according to the trustworthy word,
 - 2. that which has been TAUGHT by Paul and the Apostles
 - a. **1 Timothy 4:13-17** Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.
 - b. **Romans 16:17** I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.
 - c. **1 Timothy 6:20** O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge,"
- 3. according to Christ
 - a. **Colossians 2:8** See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits¹ of the world, and not according to Christ.
- 3. Holding firmly to the Gospel gives power to oversee well
 - i. "so that" indicates purpose of holding firmly to the teaching
 - ii. The elder may be able (power) to exhort (parakalein)
 - 1. powerful (in the teaching) to exhort, comfort, encourage, and lead
 - a. It is the teaching of sound doctrine, the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that empowers elders to oversee and exercise authority on behalf of Christ
 - i. 2 Timothy 4:3
 - ii. Titus 2:1
 - b. All exhortation, comfort, encouragement, and leadership must come from the Word of God

- i. All instruction
 - ii. All counseling
 - iii. All comforting words
 - iv. All authority of leadership
 - c. A teacher is only worth his salt if he is pointing people to Jesus Christ: the way, the truth, and the life!
- 2. "*parakalein*" is the title given to the Holy Spirit by Jesus in John 14,16, "one who is called alongside to exhort, comfort, guide, encourage, instruct (see John 14:15-17,26; "another" (like Christ), note context of John 14 pertains to keeping the word and commandments of Jesus, i.e. doctrine)
- iii. Elders are to hold firmly to the teachings of Christ, through His Word and by His Spirit, so that they can come alongside and instruct, exhort, admonish, and encourage God's people, *pointing them to Jesus Christ and His glory* with sound (healthy, accurate) doctrine
 - 1. Ephesians 4:11
 - a. Pastors and teachers are pictured as one office, so that the pastor (whom we have identified as an elder) has the responsibility of teaching.
 - 2. 1 Timothy 3:2
 - a. The overseer must be "able to teach." And we have seen that the overseer and elder are the same office.
 - 3. 1 Timothy 5:17
 - a. Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.
 - i. Not that all don't have to be able to teach—they do; but some "labor," that is, they devote more time and energy to it, perhaps earning their living by it.
 - b. Not all elders need to be able to do public preaching. The requirement is not for a preaching gift, but for a solid grasp of doctrine and the ability to spot and correct errors, explaining biblical truth plainly.

"If ministry cannot be clearly established as the continuation of Jesus' own intention and practice, we lose its central theological premise." –Thomas Oden

- a. John 15:15-16
 - b. John 17:18
 - i. "even as...I also" (sent like Jesus)
 - c. John 20:21
 - ii. "even as...I also" (send like Jesus)
 - d. Matt 28:19
 - iii. The divine command to preach, baptize, and teach in Christ's name relying on His presence is the ground floor of...the practice of ministry. Take away the Lord's command, and the living presence to which it witnesses, and we have little upon which to build any significant idea of Christian ministry. - Oden
 - e. 2 Cor 5:19-20
- iv. The necessity of an elder's ability to exhort and instruct and encourage with sound doctrine is because of the following verses:
 - 1. **Titus 1:10-11,13-14** 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... 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.
 - 2. **2 Timothy 4:1-4** I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; **reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.** ³ For the time is coming

when **people will not endure sound teaching**, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Most of the time shepherds find their task extremely rewarding and pleasant. But on occasion we tangle with a character disorder whose calloused conscience allows him to manipulate others to satisfy his own insatiable ego....One thing for sure, the job of shepherding, so peaceful in its mental imagery, requires dancing with wolves. ~Michael S. Lawson

Conclusion:

Elders, that is overseeing pastors, are called by Christ to a vital and intense responsibility of overseeing the Bride, whom Christ obtained with His own blood (Acts 20:28-29). It is necessary that the men called to be the under-shepherds of the Great Chief Shepherd are men whose character and capability are above reproach, blameless as they follow Christ and are filled by His Spirit, teaching the Word of God with accuracy and soundness. If we take great pains to ensure the safety of our children from dangerous teachers and school workers by demanding vigorous background checks and evaluations, does it not make sense that God does the same? Elders are called to govern the flock and lead it to Christ, that He might be praised and adored above everything and everyone else.

When it comes down to it, the leaders that God has called to lead His church with His authority are those who are following hard after Christ, who lead by the authority revealed in His Word, who guide all people to Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, through all prayer and proclamation of the Word. They must be proven to be above reproach, without blame in their relationships, their character, and their ability to accurately and consistently instruct and rebuke with the Holy Word of God as they continually and unabashedly point the church to Jesus Christ and protect them from false doctrine and lifestyles that dishonor Jesus. To the glory of God alone, both now and forever.