

Appoint Elders

Titus 1:5-9

One pastor said, “Because church health is trickle-down, as goes your elder body, so goes your church.” Titus is about establishing a healthy church, and the first thing Paul says after his introduction is that Elders, of a certain kind, are to be appointed. This is addressed first because it is priority number one for establishing a healthy church.

What kind of Elders are to be appointed? These verses appear to give several qualifications for a man who would be an Elder, but it could be said that there is only one qualification. The one qualification, that is defined by the rest that is said, is that a man must be above reproach. This one qualification is stated twice in our text. To be above reproach doesn't mean that a man must be perfect. So, this doesn't mean that a Pastor or Elder should pretend to be perfect. It means that he should have a good reputation. He should be a man of proven integrity as it relates to the truth Christianity teaches.

In 1:6, Paul begins to define what it means to be above reproach by explaining how it relates to a man's family. First, he defines it in terms of his marriage. Paul says that he is to be a “one-woman man”. This means, “This is a man who is in love with, committed to and devoted to only one woman, and that woman is his wife...A lustful man who flirts with women other than his wife would disqualify himself for leadership in God's church. Addiction to pornography tragically would disqualify him as well”, according to Daniel Akin. Then, it is defined in regard to his children, “his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.” This probably means his children, who are still in his home, are taught to believe gospel truth and are led by him to behave in a way that is consistent with the Christian faith. This verse, defining what it means for a man to be above reproach in regard to his family, doesn't mean a man can't be an Elder if he isn't married or doesn't have kids. This would disqualify Jesus and Paul. It means, if like most men he is a husband and father, he would not be above reproach if these things were not true in his family.

Next, we see what it means for a man to be above reproach as it relates to his character (1:7-8). An Elder must not be characterized by certain vices and should be characterized by certain virtues. He “must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain”. These vices would indicate that he is characteristically defeated in one of these five areas of strong temptation: pride, temper, alcohol, power or money. Instead, there must be particular virtues evident in an Elder. He must be “hospitable”, meaning one who loves strangers, “a lover of good”, one who is enthusiastic about good causes and good works, “self-controlled”, “upright”, “holy”, and “disciplined”. So far, it is evident that even if a man is a great orator, has a charismatic personality, is financially successful or is a strategic thinker, none of this matter if he is not a man of character.

Finally (1:9), Paul defines the meaning of “above reproach” in regard to a man's teaching. “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.” He is to have a strong hold on gospel doctrine, because an Elder's main function is to care for God's people by teaching them. He is called to disciple people with the gospel, meaning he is capable and committed to gospel-centered discipleship. Discipleship is the mission of the church. Christ's church is commissioned to make more and better disciples of Christ. For the church to fulfill its mission, there must be healthy leadership, teaching gospel doctrine and modeling gospel living. Therefore, biblical Elders are mission-critical for a local church.