

The Need For Pastoring Elders

by Ron R. Ritchie

I have recently been reading "The Reformed Pastor," by Richard Baxter, a 16th century English minister. Here is a quote from his book that is relevant for this morning. Speaking to young pastors of that day, Baxter says,

See also that when you are [ministering to individuals] your own manners reflect the character of what you are communicating. So speak appropriately, and therefore differently, to each one. To the Dull and the obstinate, be blunt and earnest. To the tenderhearted and the fearful, be gentle, and insist on the need of their spiritual direction. To the young, lay more stress on the enticements of sensual pleasures and of the great need to have control over their passions. To the old, prepare them for death and for the need to withdraw from the foolish ways of this present world. To the young, be free; and to the old, be respectful. To the rich, preach self-denial and the deceitfulness of prosperity. To the poor, show the glory of the Gospel. Note, too, the temptation of each group, each sex, each profession, and each one's employment. Be as simple and humble before them as you can. Give them scriptural evidence for all that you may say. Then they will see that it is not just you, but God who is speaking to them. Be serious in all things, but especially in the way that you apply the truth to their specific needs.

It's clear that this man was heavily influenced by the apostle Paul and by Titus, Paul's child in the faith.

We are studying Paul's letter of Titus, and have seen that the apostle left Titus on the island of Crete to "set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city." (Titus 1:5) Paul laid out a number of qualifications for godly elders. They had to be teaching elders who would confront the false teachers, the Judaizers and the Pharisees who were trying to influence the church in Crete. They were also to shepherd, to pastor the flock.

In this next section, Paul exhorts Titus to be alert to the negative characteristics of five different groupings of people on the island. In essence, Paul is saying to Titus, "This is how Cretans live. However, that is not how believers should live in the midst of a corrupt society. I want them to be godly men and women so that they will be salt and light on that island."

The apostle begins by encouraging Titus.

1. The Need For Pastoring Elders: To Exhort Believers To Live Godly Lives (2:1-10)

But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine

Through the centuries this personal letter to Titus has become a handbook for elders in the church of Jesus Christ. Paul instructs Titus to "Speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. You know that the false prophets lie and deceive, the Judaizers try to impose legalism, the Pharisees try to suck people into Jewish myths and the commandments of men. Don't speak of those things, Titus. They disturb the body of Christ. Rather speak sound, healthy doctrine so that people grow up and mature in Christ."

Next, Paul encourages Titus as a shepherd to gently but firmly exhort the following five groups within the Christian church. First, the older men:

Older men are to be sober, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance.

Titus is to tell the older men, "You have lived a long time on this island; you have been heavily influenced by

your culture. But now you must begin to see yourselves as God sees you and become a model to the young men coming after you. They need to hear about your spiritual walk and how you are growing in the Lord."

Do not be enslaved to wine, wasting your life away. . .

First, the apostle says, older men are to be "sober." Cretans were dedicated to the national pastime of drinking, but older Christian men were to be examples of sobriety. Drunkenness was not worth the price of the hurt and the damage it caused.

Secondly, older men are to be "dignified." Paul wants them to have a sense of the seriousness of their position in Christ; to live in a way that brings honor and glory to the name of Jesus. Ed Wood hall and I often joke that when we grow up we want to be dignified--like Jack Bradley. Now there is a dignified older man in Christ.

"Sensible," is the third characteristic. Don't be a foolish old man. The comedian, Rodney Dangerfield, once said, "I don't know why young people love me. Maybe it's just because I never grew up." What a tragedy for a 61--year--old man.

Fourth, be "sound in faith," i.e., have a healthy faith. Paul wanted older men to be spiritually healthy, to live life based on the Word of God, to rest in Christ, using their gifts for a life of good works and sharing their faith openly. Fifth, be "sound in love." Older men should have a healthy understanding of who God is and of his love for them, to love God with their whole heart, their mind and their strength, and their neighbor as themselves. And sixth, be "sound in endurance." "Hang in there," he is saying, and understand that one's life's circumstances were designed by God. In contrast to society all around, Christians exhibiting these attributes would stand out like a lighthouse in a dark and stormy night, offering life and hope to a society sinking in its own corruption

Paul now turns to the second group, the "older women." Here he is addressing grandmothers, women who have raised their children. Verse 3:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good.

He says four things about women in light of the society in which they lived. "Be reverent in your behavior. Exhibit Christ--likeness to the young women around you so that they sense the Lord in you. Do not be malicious gossips. Now that your children are gone, don't spend your life sitting around, slandering other women, tearing them apart. And do not be enslaved to wine, wasting your life away, trying to avoid reality. You older women teach what is good. Older women who walk in the power of the resurrected Lord should spend the remainder of their lives teaching and encouraging young wives in sound doctrine, thus their lives will not be wasted in gossip and drunkenness." I know of many women here in our own body that are doing just that right now: Honey Wood hall, Karen Winslow, Elaine Stedman, Gina Brogran, Carleen Brooks, and my own dear wife Anne-Marie, to name a few. They are always seeking to share sound doctrine throughout our community in home Bible classes. What a wonderful life they have.

Paul goes on to encourage the older women to get involved in the lives of the "younger women" (the third grouping) because of a cultural problem on the island of Crete. William Barclay writes,

In the ancient Greek world the respectable woman lived a completely secluded life. In the house she had her own quarters and seldom left them, not even to sit at meals with the menfolk of the family; and into them came no man except her husband. She never attended any public assemblies or meetings; she seldom appeared on the streets, and, when she did, she never did so alone. In fact it has been said that there was no honorable way in which a Greek woman could make a living. No trade or profession was open to her; and if she tried to earn a living, she was driven to prostitution. If the women of the ancient Church had suddenly burst every limitation which the centuries had imposed upon them, the only result would have been to bring discredit on the Church and cause people to say that Christianity corrupted womanhood.

The apostle says that older women should be

teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored.

First, younger women should "love their husbands," i.e., have tender affection for them. Cretan marriages were contracts arranged by parents, and this caused a lot of problems later in marriage. "Teach them to love their husbands in the way God taught you to have tender affection for your husbands," Paul advises.

Then, older women were to teach the younger women to "love their children." In Cretan society, many children were conceived without the consent of the wives, sometimes just to produce laborers for the family. Thus there was a danger that women would become resentful and bitter toward their children. My wife's great-grandmother in Algeria gave birth to 22 children, 12 of whom survived. Some of the children were born while she was ploughing the fields, working on the family farm.

Younger women were to be "sensible," i.e., to place their emotions under the control of the Holy Spirit. They were to be pure in a defiled society. Also, Paul says, they were to be "workers at home." I think he means young women were to work with their children at home, and with their neighbors. The idea was that the home should be a place where the family found peace, refuge and beauty.

I found this relevant quote in Saudi Arabian newspaper dated June, 1983. A woman wrote a letter to the paper saying, "I notice that women are not working as much in Saudi Arabia as they could be and thus contributing to society." The Islamic religious editor answered:

When people talk about women going out to work, it is unfortunate that they take Western societies as their model. The social system of the West has got its advantages, but it is not necessarily the best system available to man. Indeed, it has its drawbacks which produce some serious effects on society . . . Perhaps it is useful to add that from the Islamic point of view, the most important role women should play in the society, is to look after its next generation. Thus, the man looks after the present generation by providing the means of living, while the woman ensures the continued strength of the society by looking after her children and bringing them up, inculcating in them the ideals and values which ensure the continued moral strength of the society.

But today, Western society places children in day--care centers--while frequently their mothers drive off to work in expensive cars they need to pay for.

Paul is not putting women down here; he is not saying that women and men are not equal in the sight of God. What he is saying is that women have a valuable ministry with their children, producing righteous men and women for the next generation. Do not mortgage your children for some current tickle status symbols.

Titus should request the older women to admonish the younger women to be kind to their husbands, their children, their servants, parents, in-laws, neighbors and strangers. They are to be subject to their own husbands voluntarily, to be willing to rank under them as unto the Lord, recognizing the difference between equality and function and between headship and helpmate. The purpose behind the older women teaching the younger women is "so that the Word of God may not be dishonored." Christians have been given the power of the Holy Spirit to enable them to deal with reality. Apply this truth to life, Paul says, and thereby stop the false prophets, the Judaizers and the Pharisees from calling Christians hypocrites.

Paul's instructions to the fifth group, the young men, are contained in one verse:

Likewise urge the young men to be sensible.

He is saying, in effect, "Titus, you are a young man, therefore it is harder for you to reason with young men. I

suggest you do not preach to them, but rather appeal to their sense of right and wrong. Tell them to be sensible, to submit their emotions and their passions to the Holy Spirit." Young men have a lot of great confidence but no experience; they have great hopes and dreams, but they cannot put it all together yet. They need models and encouragement from their peers as well as from older men. "He who rules his spirit is greater than he who takes a city." (Proverbs 16:32) Paul is saying to the young men, "Learn to rule your spirit by the Holy Spirit, and your life will make sense to you and to everyone else; it will bring honor and glory to Jesus Christ." Last week a young man from Careers was sentenced to two years in prison for killing four people while driving under the influence of drink. He lost his senses one evening and his life is terribly marred as a result.

Paul now shows that the best way to teach young men is through good deeds. Verse 7:

In all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, in order that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

Actions speak louder than words. Then he commends to Titus, "purity of doctrine," in contrast to the false teachers. Be dignified and be sound in speech so that other young men will be encouraged to walk in righteousness. The purpose behind these instructions is "that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us." Put the lives of the false teachers to shame by your life of righteousness, Paul says.

Lastly, Paul gives instructions for the bond slaves. Verses 9-10:

Urge bond slaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

We know from history that there were more than 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. They came from every nation, every tribe, every social level, and many of them were becoming Christians. That created some real problems in the Christian church, because under the Roman government, a master had absolute authority over his slave. A slave had no rights whatever. He was regarded as a living tool. If he was rebellious in any way he was crucified. If he ran away and was later captured, he was branded with a hot iron and called a fugitive. He lived his whole life at the mercy of his master.

But when a slave came into a relationship with Christ he regained his humanity, so that he too became a candidate for the "sound doctrine" that Paul is speaking about. Therefore, the apostle urges that "slaves be subject to their masters in everything," i.e., in everything that is morally correct, everything that agrees with sound doctrine. They were to be "well-pleasing, not argumentative," so that there would be joy, peace and harmony in their masters' households. As Christians, slaves were not to "pilfer" (i.e., they were not to steal because they felt their masters owed them something), but, "show all good faith that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect."

In our culture today, of course, we do not have to deal with this master--slave syndrome, yet Paul's words can be applied to our own lives, especially in the area of employer--employee relationships.

In these ten verses, Paul encourages Titus to shepherd the flock of God, to feed them and guide them in sound doctrine for four reasons: 1) that they might live spiritually healthy lives; 2) that the Word of God might not be dishonored or blasphemed; 3) that the false prophets might be put to shame; and 4) that the godly lives of slaves might reflect the truth of Christ so that others might come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Next, Paul shows why it is possible to live that kind of godly lifestyle, regardless of people's status in the community.

2. For The Grace Of God Has Appeared (Titus 2:11-15)

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

The grace of God appeared; it broke forth like a beautiful light to penetrate a society lost in darkness, sin, shame and guilt. That grace, of course, was manifest in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

In his first appearance, Jesus came as Savior, as Messiah. And, according to this passage, he had four objectives in mind: "to bring salvation to all men: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son so that whosoever believed on him would not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) He brought salvation, i.e., justification. Through the death of Jesus Christ we have been set free from the penalty of sin and declared righteous in God's sight. Once we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we enter a process known as sanctification, i.e., being set aside for God's intended purpose. Our life is no longer our own; it has been bought with a price. We have been set free from the power of sin. One day, when we appear before God (that is called "glorification") we will be set free from the presence of sin; the curse will be dispelled, and we will serve the Lord forever. And that salvation is "to all men." Not everyone individually but "all" in the sense of every tribe, every nation, and people from every social group.

We are to live with eternity in mind in this age which is trying to destroy us

Secondly, that grace appeared so that by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Christians have instructions for right living, training them to deny ungodliness. "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me," Jesus said. To "deny ungodliness" is to turn your back on evil and walk in the ways of the Lord. We are trained to deny worldly desires_ the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life; to live sensibly in a world that has lost its mind; to live righteously toward brothers, neighbors and strangers; to live in a godly way, developing a lifestyle that is pleasing to God. We are to live with eternity in mind in this age which is trying to destroy us with all its values, its philosophies, its opinions and its suggestions.

Thirdly, we have a blessed hope--the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ in all his glory. Jesus' first appearance was in the incarnation. He will appear again to take the church to be with him. Every man, even those who have rejected him, blasphemed him and mocked him, every man will bow his knee and confess with his lips that Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Christians will do this with joy, but the world will do so in anger, for he will be their judge.

Fourthly, Jesus "gave himself for us" for two purposes: 1) "that he might redeem us from every lawless deed." When we confess him as Lord and Savior he comes into our lives and gives us the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He sets us free from the power of Satan and from the values of this world; from sin and death, and from lawlessness; and 2) "to purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works." He once put Israel aside, hoping that they would bring great honor and glory to his name among the nations. They rejected him, and they are put aside for awhile. But now he has picked another people, the church the spiritual body of believers, and he is purifying our lives. All the problems, all the heartaches, all the struggles we are having are designed by God to purify us from the values and the philosophies of the world.

Concluding this section, in verse 15, Paul exhorts Titus to "speak about these things," i.e., "speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine," so that these five groupings whom Paul has mentioned will be built up into maturity. And do this "with all authority," Paul instructs "as though Christ himself were speaking through you. Don't allow anyone to disregard you or ignore you as a shepherd of the church of Jesus Christ on the island of Crete. "

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[Back to Index Page](#)

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