
For Holding Firm to the Trustworthy Word...

Titus 1:5 – 2:1

Introduction If you were with us last week you will know that we began a series on Titus which will take us through the month of June. This morning we will be considering Titus 1:5 – 2:1, a passage which we will summarize under two major headings: *Elders and their Enemies*.

Before we move to the text, I want to tell you bit more about two of the conversations that I shared with you last week. First, there is my best friend...

Then there was the individual who...

The question we're left asking is, "Is Paul really writing about things we know nothing of today?"

Read Titus 1:5 – 2:1 and Pray

Elders (1:5-9)

As recent as this past March we completed a four part Sunday evening series on biblical eldership, so we will not go quite as in depth as we might normally this morning on the portion of scripture we have before us concerning this role. What I would like to do is make several general observations about the role of elder and then briefly speak to their qualifications in terms of the evidence for godly leadership, the evidence of godly character, and the evidence of godly ministry.

General Observations

We might summarize these observations in a single sentence from Paul to Titus that will need some explaining: At the top of my list is church leadership who are themselves witnesses to the power of God's word and grace to transform hearts, that as stewards they might be known as men above reproach unlike the hypocritical Cretans.

At the top of my list is church leadership...

In the Pentateuch there were patriarchs, later there were judges, then kings, then prophets, then apostles, and now elders. This progression is *not* to suggest that elders are a type of patriarch, king, or apostle – it is to suggest, however, that God has always used leaders in the midst of his people. Today God uses elders (overseers, bishops, shepherds, pastors) to fulfill the earthly leadership role in the midst of his people. Elders are not an authority unto themselves. They both derive their authority from, and submit in humility as a servant to, the Chief Shepherd, Jesus

Christ (1 Peter 5:1-12). This is just as Paul sees himself in the first verse of this letter, an apostle (one with authority and the obligation to lead) and a servant (one humbly bowed down to God) (Titus 1:1). Paul wastes no time in getting to the business of reminding Titus to appoint elders in every town. Elders are important. Just as the human leadership of God's people has been the normative pattern throughout redemptive history, it remains so today. Last week we noted that groups of believers are not self-organizing entities, this week we might add that groups of believers are not to be leaderless.

who are themselves witnesses to the power of God's word and grace to transform hearts...

In verse 1 of this chapter, Paul tells us something of the nature of the knowledge of the truth that God's elect have – it *accords with godliness*. This short phrase sets up a theme that will work itself out across this entire letter. Its first reappearance is here in verses 5-9. In general, we might state it like this, “Elders (believers) who hold firm to the ‘trustworthy word (v.9)’ will have lives that evidence transformation (v.5-8) by the trustworthy word.” We won't spend much time on this as it will continue to reemerge in increasingly powerful forms over the two next Sundays.

We also see a second reappearing theme in the course of this letter, and that is the matter of the body of doctrinal truth taught by the apostles and accepted by the early church. That is to say, there *is* a body of doctrine. Scriptural truths and teaching are not an amorphous shapeless bunching of disparate ideas that have changed throughout the ages and will continue to change in ages to come. Rather, we have a declared and distinct set of immutable (unchanging) knowledge that has been given by God in his Word, the Bible, and there is only one true and authoritative interpretation of this Word. We can see this kind of thinking in phrases like: knowledge of *the truth* (v.1), my true child in a *common faith* (v.4), trustworthy word *as taught* (v.9), give instruction in *sound doctrine* (v.9). Unlike so many other industries today, when it comes to the preaching of God's word, *innovation* is not a core value. Shepherds and sheep are to hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught.

that as stewards they might be known as men above reproach...

I believe there are two summative terms or phrases used in this passage that can be thought of as “general organizers” when we approach our understanding of the role and qualifications of elders. The first is “above reproach.” You'll note it twice between vv.5-9, first at the outset of the list of qualifications in v.6 and then again reemphasized in the middle of v.7. One who aspires to be an elder must be blameless in regards to his reputation in the community. Perfect? No – otherwise you'd have no message this morning, but, of upstanding repute among his community, especially those to whom he will minister. This is not to be something the elder candidate is aspiring toward, but has been established as. It is *in* this characteristic that the other qualifications align as being above reproach as attested to by

those around the elder candidate is a strong initial sign that the other qualifications are being met. For instance, a man who is a quick-tempered or a drunkard...

The second term is *steward*, found in v.7. This is a favorite term of Paul's as we will find it in many of his other epistles, including the first letter to Corinth, the letter to the Ephesians, the letter to the Colossians, the first letter to Timothy, and of course here in his letter to Titus. In every case, Paul uses this term in relationship to the ministry of gospel preaching, positively in proclamation, and negatively in defense of. The elder is a manager of God's house, appointed by and accountable to the owner. This "management" is primarily concerned with the skillful proclamation of the gospel to God's elect from the whole counsel of God that the elect might know his grace.

So in character, the elder must be above reproach and in duty he must be about the business of a steward, seeing that the work is done, that is, ensuring that God's grace is declared to His people.

unlike the hypocritical Cretans.

Now this next phrase in our summary sentence may seem a bit odd given we are still talking about elders and not yet the Cretans. But I want to take a moment to begin setting up a contrast that will play throughout the rest of the book (and the rest of our series) and this contrast will require some more background information about the Cretans and their culture that we might hear the coming section as the Cretans would have heard it. Otherwise, it will appear that Paul, at best, is taking a low blow at the Cretans, and at worst, is making a racial slur.

The island of Crete was thought to be by those in the ancient world, *especially those who were Cretans*, the birthplace of Zeus. As such it was *the* major source of Greek mythology and home to the birth place of the majority of gods. The Cretans also claimed the place where Zeus died, and that his tomb remained on the island. Given this self-assigned rich religious history, the island of Crete came to be known as a sort of Camelot, where the most pure forms of civility, society, and government coexisted. As such, Cretans fashioned themselves as those who were dutifully about the business of aspiring to the Greek ideals of piety, justice, and self-control, a well-known triad of virtue which Greek philosophy and mythology strived to teach and invoke in its hearers. It is well known throughout the ancient world that Crete was supposed to be, or at least the Cretans thought themselves to be, the home of the gods and therefore a mecca of virtue and the Greek aspiration of the "good" life.

Now hear is the Achilles' Heel of it all – Crete was nothing like this! By the point in history that Paul and Titus arrive to Crete, many writers besides Paul have made very negative assessments about the whole of Cretan society. In fact, their widespread reputation for lying had become so well know that they earned themselves a place in infamy when the word "cretanize" became a Greek verb meaning, "to lie." In fact, one of the biggest lies the Cretans were thought to have spread was the very story that Zeus was born and *buried* on their island, indicating that he was not the "god" all of the Greek world thought him to be, rather, he

was a man who was both born and then died. The Cretans had become so destitute in their disregard for Greek virtue that one of their own poets or prophets, Epimenides, has written, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons.(v. 12)” Paul endorses this view by commenting in v. 13, “This testimony is true.”

While all of this may seem a little hard to get your arms around, consider a simple modern day parallel that is very close to home. As Americans, we generally consider ourselves to be the descendants, whether right or wrong, of those looking for religious freedom. And that our forefathers were godly men. And that we, as a nation, faithfully aspire to the Judeo-Christian ethic. We fight for freedom, for liberty, for the pursuit of happiness, we are a nation under God, we are moral, ethical, and upstanding. Yet, most of the world thinks otherwise. Whether because of wars we are waging, global warming agreements we are not signing, middle-eastern countries we are strong-arming, genocides we are ignoring, movies we are making, music we are broadcasting, porn we are exporting, greedy capitalistic ideology, political infighting, or corporate scandal, much of the world views us as detestable. And...we are! Just as is every other society in the world. Our predicament then, as Americans, is not so different than that of the Cretans.

So we can bring this Greek history lesson full circle and back to our text with three quick observations *for now*. **First**, this Greek triad of virtue we spoke of earlier is picked up by Paul when he speaks of elders. We can find it at the end of verse 8, “*upright, holy, and disciplined.*” The Cretan ear would have recognized Paul’s qualification for elders to be paralleling their own ideals: piety – holy (duty to the gods); justice – upright (duty to others); self-control – discipline (duty to self). **Secondly**, Paul, as we will see, takes this triad of Greek virtue and weaves it throughout his letter. The first appearance is in the reference to the character of elders, the second will be in his condemnation of the Cretan false teachers and their utter failure to aspire to the Greek ideal. And the third in chapter 2 we’ll consider later this morning. Thirdly, Paul in verse 2 takes time to note that he carries promises from a “God, who never lies...” Zeus, the king of gods that the Greeks worshipped and the consummation of the Greek ideal was himself a liar, just as his countrymen, the Cretans, were well-known for their lying habits. It is clear Paul is targeting the Greek mindset on the ancient island of Crete, and we can glean much from considering this context and the history here... .

Evidence of godly leadership

An elder, so says Paul, must demonstrate that he is able to lead in his own home, for if he cannot do it here, what confidence is there that he can do so in the church? (1 Timothy 3:4-5). Therefore he must be a one woman man whose children profess faith in Christ and are not wild, self-indulgent, wasteful, or marked by rebelliousness and disobedience in their own home.

Evidence godly character

An elder must also show evidence of godly character. We can paint this picture negatively by showing what the man must not: (**arrogant**) be one who arrogantly disregards others in order to please himself; (**quick-tempered**) quickly become angry;

(drunkard) have addictions to any sort of substance or material; **(violent)** be violent in action, word, or demeanor; **(greedy for gain)** be all about the money, that is, one who would use his office or other unrighteous and greedy means to “get ahead.”

We can also paint a positive picture by showing what the man must: **(hospitable)** be a lover of strangers or one who gladly extends his resources to those who are not in his circle of trusted friends; **(a lover of good)** be a lover of good and perhaps more easily distinguished as a hater of evil (righteous anger); **(self-controlled)** be one who is in control of himself at all times *infrequently confessing*, “*I did not mean to do or say that, I lost control...*”; **(upright)** upright in that his conduct *in all spheres* is godly, moral, and ethical; **(holy)** in his heart displaying an attitude that is concerned for the conforming to what is pleasing to God; **(disciplined)** one who has demonstrated the inner strength that enables him to resist bodily appetites and passions and to work hard in the godward conforming of his own thoughts and behaviors.

These are the things the elder “must be,” that is, they are ongoing, life-pervading, distinguishing characteristics of the elder candidate’s life at the time of appointment. Wives, friends, confidants, and shepherds, we must all watch over each other and our body that we might be confident that this is the type of leadership we have. You might ask, “Isn’t this the responsibility of the elders? I don’t want to think about this stuff, I have enough things going on.” While it is a responsibility of the elders, it is also a responsibility of the church as a whole. Remember, Titus likely already knows all of these things – in fact Paul verifies this when he tells him in v.5 to, “appoint elders in every town *as I directed you.*” They’ve already discussed it. Paul now writes, yes to remind Titus, be even more so to instruct the Cretan church what they ought to be looking for in terms of potential shepherds among them. We must all watch over this body keeping mind that God uses his people for his people.

Evidence of godly ministry

Lastly, *the elder must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught* for two reasons, two duties, in which he must be engaged for the good of the believers: 1) *giving sound instruction*, and 2) *rebuking, by sound doctrine*, those who contradict it (1 Timothy 1:4ff). So it is not enough that he hold firm to the Word: **1)** (*as taught*) but that he hold firm to a Scriptural interpretation of it – it is not his to redefine; **2)** (*giving sound doctrine*) that he be able to impart the word in a manner by which others are able to be taught – he must have some skill for the understandable communication of the Word; and **3)** (*rebuking by sound doctrine*) he must be able enough with the word, and bold enough with the word, to expose the error of those who contradict sound doctrine.

And Their Enemies

Paul makes a seamless transition as he lets Titus know that the new elders would need to be able to rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine. And how long would it be until they had an opportunity? Not long. In v.10 Paul says, “*for there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.*” The

problem for the Cretan church is not a small one – there are *many* people who are distorting the gospel in many ways. Some of them we’ve bumped into before – the circumcision party, those who would take certain aspects of Judaism and blend it with Christianity. It would sound something like, “You need to be circumcised, not eat these things, and observe special days, before you can call yourself a Christian.” In addition, the distinctly Greek elements blended into Paul’s letter indicate that this Judaism was likely mixed with Greek philosophy and religion, hence Paul identifies the false teachers as those who devote themselves to, “*Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.* (v.14).”

Their failure as an ideal Greek culture (v.12)

As we have already established, the Cretans were of a base and immoral culture, though their aspirations were of the highest ideals. Here is how Paul describes them: **Liars:** Zeus was a liar, the Greek world thinks you lie about Zeus, and the rest of the world just thinks you are plain old liars in your dealings with them. **Evil beasts:** One ancient author has said that although the island of Crete is devoid of beasts, “we have no need of predatory beasts, we have predatory humans.” This is to say that they were full of injustice and their society was savage, unpredictable, mean, and unfair. **Lazy gluttons:** It is likely here that “lazy” is a bit of tongue and cheek, a glutton is not lazy. He must go after endlessly the wants of his appetite. It was this idolatrous hunger for more that characterized Cretans and fed their social savagery.

Take note that Paul is taking pains to point out that they utterly fail the Greek ideal – they are not pious, they are liars; they are not just, they are evil beast tearing apart their fellow man; they are not self-controlled, they are lazy gluttons actively filling their appetites.

Their false profession (v. 10, 15-16)

These people do not have a “*knowledge of truth which accords with godliness... (v.1),*” their characters have not been transformed as they’ve held “*firm to the trustworthy word as taught... (v.9)*” Rather, in stark contrast, (v.16) “*They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works...*” They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good works, insubordinate, empty talkers, deceivers, use religious teaching for shameful gain, and both their minds and consciences are defiled. They neither have sound doctrine or the lives that confirm it. To the pure, true believers with sound doctrine, certain days, types of food, circumcision or not, are all pure – because they understand that “material things receive their moral character from the attitude of the [heart].”¹ To the impure, however, because their hearts are defiled, all things are impure and they find their false righteousness in acts and things versus Christ.

¹ Heibert in Gaebelein, p. 434

Their formidable influence (v.11)

Not only had these men infiltrated the church, they were actually in the homes of believers polluting the truth. Hard to believe? Can't imagine a scenario like that today? Go home and turn on your cable TV, look on you bookshelf, listen to the radio, look over the history of your internet browser. False teachers have more access to our homes today than ever before. The leaderless believers in Crete had been thoroughly infiltrated by aspects of both their culture and other religions. Without question, action was needed.

Titus' faithful response (v. 11, 13)

Paul's charge to Titus in response to the false teachers is two-fold, and it is exactly what the elders are called to do in v.9. In verse 11 comes the call to "silence" them. In our Hollywood saturated minds, all the wrong images come to bear as we hear this command. What Paul means is made clear at the end of the letter, verses 10-11, is reinforced by 1 Timothy 1:4ff, and is certainly demonstrated by Paul in 2 Corinthians 10 and 11. *In love*, Titus is to verbally confront the false teachers (and sharply rebuke if necessary), pointing out their error using the Word, warning them to turn away from false doctrine, and finally, if they will not "*be sound in the faith*" (v. 13), "*have nothing to do with them*" (3:10). Yet the goal remains restoration as made clear by v.13, "*Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.*" And then in chapter 2 verse 1, comes the call to continue to teach sound doctrine, "*But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.*" That is, in the face of adversaries, you must not stop teaching sound doctrine – yes refute and rebuke and warn – but not at the cost of continuing in this highest of duties. This your first line of defense and offense.

Observations & Applications

- 1) So, should we convict Paul of making a racial slur against the Cretans? Was Paul a self-righteous bigot? Paul and Titus were missionaries to a culture that was enamored with itself, a culture that was practiced in the most dangerous form of deception, self-deception. The Cretans saw themselves as the seat of religion in the Greek world and the society which was most likely to produce "true" Greeks, that is, members of society aspiring to the triple ideal of piety, justice, and self-control. The reality, however, is that they were liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons and the whole rest of the world knew it. Yet they pursued their Greek ideals through their Greek gods, through their Judaistic law-keeping, to no avail. They were fakes. The Cretans interaction or relationship with the divine could not transform them into their ideal. Their gospel could not redeem them. Their saviors could not save them. Paul is seeking to disabuse these false teachers of their false gospels who are trusting in a false salvation. Paul is attempting to not only "sharply rebuke" the false teachers, but to come crashing through their self-made world of lies! "You are nothing like the Greek ideal, you are liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons! Your deity, your religion, your doctrines have failed you." They do not have the *knowledge of the truth* that results in godliness

(v.1), and you are woefully unlike the elders *whose holding firm to the trustworthy word has produce godly character* (vv. 5-10).

What then is the answer? How can they achieve these Greek ideals which are so like true godliness – which God in his common grace had allowed them to recognize? Paul has already pointed them in the right direction twice – and next week he completely lifts the veil, but we can take a peek now. Look at Titus 2:11-12 with me: *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age...* Did you see it? There is that trio of Greek and now Christian ideals again: self-controlled, upright (justice), and godly (pious) life. But how is it achieved? By Zeus? By lawkeeping? No! By the grace of God appearing, that is Christ! (2:13-14, read). O false teachers misguided in your search for redemption, come and believe and bow to Christ. One final point that we should not miss...Come to chapter 3 verse 3, *“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasure, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of our God our Savior appeared, he saved us.”* Is Paul only calling out to these false teachers? No! Here we learn that **WE** are the liars, the evil beasts, and the lazy gluttons who pursued false gospels, false redemptions. Yes, Paul is dealing with a problem in church at Crete, but simultaneously he is engaged in calling our souls to repentance and rejoicing.

- 2) History is important: 1) Anchors our faith in objective events, and 2) enables us to better understand the text.
- 3) Elders who do their whole job...
- 4) Leaderless churches lead to lost believers...and by “lost” I mean...
- 5) Elders, everyone’s responsibility...
 - a) March 26, 2006 manuscript from the PM sermon on Elder Qualifications.
 - b) Be aware of who is qualified (and perhaps encouraging them as they grow toward the role of elder), who is not qualified and therefore throwing up red flags if we were to begin to move toward selecting such a person, and who has become disqualified and then following through and taking biblical steps to deal with such situations.
- 6) False teachers today...our best defense and offense is sound doctrine... the command book ends our text today...