

Fact Sheet for **“Elders #1”**

Titus 1:1-6

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The book of Titus can easily be found in the NT. First look for the T's. They all appear together. The longest titled book (Thessalonians) appears first, then Timothy, and finally the shortest titled book (Titus), This Sunday and next we will be looking at the qualifications those who would be elders need to ascribe to. But consider as we do this. These words are for all of us too.

ESV ¹ ¶ 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.

Paul identifies himself here as both a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. His concern was for the faith of God's elect, and their full knowledge of the truth which is in keeping with godliness. Both in faith and godly living we look forward to the sure and certain hope of eternal life that God has promised before the ages began. And Jesus Christ entrusted Paul with preaching at the proper time. Paul wrote something similar in 1 Timothy 1:8-11.

Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to instruct the church there (1 Timothy 1:3). Likewise Paul left Titus in Crete to provide leadership for the fledgling church there. Paul's instructions in verses 5-9 still ring loud and clear for church leadership today. Similar words were written to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

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.

Notice that Titus was to appoint these initial elders. The church did not elect them.

Then, consider the titles of church leadership. Paul uses the term “elder” in verse 5. One meaning of this word is “older”. Should everyone elected to be an elder in church be over 65 years of age (compare Proverbs 16:31)? Would you consider Timothy, for instance, qualified to be an “elder” (See 1 Timothy 4:12)? Perhaps “elder” is a title for church leadership that is better understood to speak of the biblical knowledge and righteous character that is often found in older godly men.

And... men is the right word. In the original the word “elder” here is masculine. The feminine form of this word is found in 1 Timothy 5:2 as Paul writes of “older women”. This church office of “elder” is therefore gender specific. It is open to qualified men only. Nowhere in the Bible can you find either an elder of Israel or an elder of the church who is a woman. To open this church office to women you have to let culture, not scripture, define your doctrine. At that point culture becomes more authoritative than scripture. At that point your purple glasses of culture define your beliefs.

“Grandpa dropped his glasses once
In a pot of dye,
And when he put them on again
He saw a purple sky.
Purple fires were rising up
From a purple hill,
Men were grinding purple cider
At a purple mill.
Purple Adeline was playing
With a purple doll;
Little purple dragon flies

Were crawling up the wall.
And at the supper-table
He got crazy as a loon
From eating purple apple dumplings
With a purple spoon.”¹

When we change or add to the wording of scripture for some reason we choose to put on our own purple glasses, and we set a precedent as to how we will interpret scripture in the future.

Are there other titles for an elder? Yes, in fact Paul uses one of them in verse 7, “overseer”. But there is also the term “shepherd” or “pastor” (Acts 20:17-18, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-2. Those we identify as a “pastor” are in reality only one of the elders of a church. But the other elders also have a pastoring role. The senior pastor should be the lead elder, not the only elder.

Next, these words and those that follow in verses 7-9 speak of character, not preferences or style. When a church elects someone to be an elder they are not signing-on for the ministry style of a preceding generation. They should elect them for their wisdom and character. You get the first hint of this with the words “above reproach”. Other descriptions are “irreproachable, blameless, held in high respect”. I find that those two words are tough to live up to. They require constant diligence. They speak of not only what is wrong but also of what is shady. And they also have to do with perception. Now we can be reproached for anything that is sin or foolish, or anything that is perceived as sin or foolishness. And none of us are perfect in this life. So take care to be above reproach. Keep short accounts with God and patch the holes in your boat quickly.

We now come to the words “the husband of one wife”. The NIV and NLT refer to a man’s faithfulness to his wife. What do these words mean? There is a lot of passion about the interpretation of these words. Can an elder have had a divorce in his history? Is there forgiveness for a divorce before his salvation? Do they mean he is not a polygamist? Do they refer to “one wife at a time”? Can an elder’s wife have been divorced? What if an elder’s wife dies? Is he still a one woman man? What if an elder who is a widower gets remarried?

Here are some things you need to balance. 1. There are only three simple words in the original... “one... woman... man”. Individually these words mean exactly the same in English as they do in Greek. 2. This same description is a qualification not only for overseers but also for deacons (1 Timothy 3:12). 3. A similar qualification is there for widows as Paul writes of the assistance a church gives to widows (1 Timothy 5:9). 4. This three word term is not further defined by Paul.

So, do these three words refer to marital commitment only? Do these three words refer to marital history only? Or do these three words refer to both? Across the board no one has a problem with these three words referring to marital commitment. If they do refer to marital history then this would be the only qualification for being an elder that a man could never repair. It would go outside of their current character. Then there is the question as to whether these three words refer to both marital commitment and marital history? What balance has the leadership of our church chosen? We require our elder board to make all of their decisions by unanimous consensus. As long as I have been here it has never been possible for our elder board to nominate a divorced man to be an elder. We know it would split the church.

Lastly, are the elder’s children small children, teens, or adult children who are out of the home? What if a man’s adult children who are now out of the home are going awry, like they were when they were at home? But now they don’t live at home. 1. The word for children here most often is not referring to adult children who are out of the home. It can, but not usually. We use our word “children” in a similar sense today. 2. Then I am reminded of a passage found in Jeremiah 31:29. We are ultimately responsible for our own actions. I take Paul’s words to refer to young children still at home.

Lastly, these are values all of us should have in life. They are not just a checklist for choosing elders.

¹ Leroy F. Jackson, author. Childcraft, 1949, vol. 2, p. 94.