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TITUS 1:5-9

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and
appoint elders in every city as I commanded you-- 6if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife,
having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. 7For a bishop (lit. overseer)
must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not
violent, not greedy for money, 8but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy,
self-controlled, 9holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound
doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

This passage has caused no end of controversy in churches so I will make a few exegetical comments first.

First we need to note the obvious – that Christian leaders have to high character standards and no grave weaknesses, especially those that would affect their judgment. Popularity is never mentioned and neither are looks, charisma, or wealth. Teaching ability is certainly required.

The “one wife” translation is interesting - the word “mias (Gk.)” for “one” is used later in Titus to mean “first” (Titus 3:10) and its uses are (number of occurrences in brackets): one (62), first (8), a certain (4), a (3), the other (1). Taken literally it seems to definitely rule out single elders, homosexual unions and polygamous elders. The elder seems to be required to have a (one) wife and children. It does not rule out having one wife after the other – as in being widowed and re-marrying. In fact widows are told to remarry in both 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Timothy 5. Thus divorced people are neither ruled in or out by a literal interpretation of this verse. Other references are needed to determine that.

“Not given to wine” is actually “me paroinos” – not addicted to wine, drunkenness, not an alcoholic. It does not require the person to be a teetotaler.

The characteristics of the elders family are important in that they are a sign of his leadership ability (1 Timothy 3:4-5). Children are to be faithful rather than wild – specifically not dissolute (asotias) and refractory and completely out of control (anupotakta). What is in view is something like a gang member or criminal. The implication is the child has a willful disregard for authority – including that of the elder. (A pregnant teenage daughter is not quite what is in view here. That is more likely to be a sin of weakness than of violent rebellion.) Faithful has dual meanings and may also mean “believing”. The household is to be generally orderly and obedient.

Elders, bishops and overseers seem to be one and the same. Thus elders (presbuterous) in verse 5 seems to point to the (episkopoi) in verse 7. Paul asks Titus to appoint elders, plural, in every city - not an elder in every church. The city-wide network of house-churches and fellowships was to be overseen by a group of elders. If the city has twelve fellowships and if eight city-elders are appointed then some fellowships may not have elders.

Though many character attributes are mentioned the only specified role of the elders is teaching and counseling in line with God's Word. "[9]holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict." As we shall see later this involved guarding the church from heresy (Titus 1:10-16)

These elders keep the church in line with God's Word and defend the faith from the influence of heretics. They are the equivalent of bible-teachers or theologians operating, in a doctrinal role, to guide the congregations into the truth. The idea of a plurality of elders may have been to keep one person from having all the authority in matters of doctrine and utilizing the corrective balance of a council of wise men.

It is clear that eldership is assumed to be male in these verses but I will not buy into that controversy today.

They are not to be greedy for money or as the KJV puts it "filty lucre" or NASB "base gain" – a word that denotes corrupt funding. This was possibly to avoid the sale of church positions, which was common in pagan circles then and became known as "simony" after Simon Magus, and certainly so that that would serve God, not Mammon. (Matthew 6:24)

After the long list of weaknesses to be avoided comes the positive qualities that are to be sought in the overseer: "but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled. " in other words a deep and solid person with a certain gravity of lifestyle, not given to impulsiveness or addictions in any way. A rock that can be relied on indeed a "just man" and a "holy man".

Hospitality is to be part of the elder's role; he is to be welcoming, kind, and open to others. Not just an insular and aloof expert but rather someone who cares about particular people and has them in his home. The elder is over a city, and probably has to know many people from different fellowships and have a grasp pf the state of the church in its various locations. And the elder must be strong – able to be self-controlled and able to rebuke and correct others (Titus 1:5-16)

What is the purpose of such a list? Was Paul writing to a church telling them how to elect elders? Was he writing to say what should be done to judge elders as they perform their duties? Or is Paul writing to a fellow apostle on how to do the initial selection of leaders on a national scale? It is the latter. Titus, who is often Paul's trouble-shooter (see 2 Corinthians chapters 7,8 and 12), is sent to Crete to appoint spiritual leadership in a morally bankrupt society. Titus is to go from city to city in Crete and appoint elders. No elections are envisaged. Titus will turn up, find leaders, work out who is sound and good, appoint them and maybe train them, and move on to the next city. This list is his guideline for the initial selection of elders over city-wide networks of churches.

Thus this list is intended for leaders who are appointing other leaders. It may guide bishops as they look at ordination candidates and missionary boards as they look at candidates for teaching positions on the field. This list is probably not intended to be used by congregations to critique leaders who are already in office - though it certainly should be consulted at their initial appointment.

As you may guess by the tone of this bible study I have many reservations about how this list and other lists like it in the Pastoral Epistles have been used to judge people whose families go through a rough patch. This list was intended to be used wisely by a mature leader in a certain apostolic situation. It is not a new law for believers or a source of ammunition for critics and accusers. The adage "judge not lest you also be judged" needs to be heeded.

Matthew 7:1-5 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Elders are to be high quality Christians who work in a team to oversee the churches in a city. They are solid Christians who are appointed for being “just, and holy believers” and living friendly lives of quiet godliness and having good doctrine and teaching ability.

More on this teaching role tomorrow.

Blessings,

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