

God's Leaders: Qualifications for Elders

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Course description: Part 4

This course explores an introduction into God's plan for the leaders of the church and a discussion of qualifications given Titus. This course will fall into three sections. First, the context behind the qualifications given in the book of Titus will be discussed. Second, there will be a discussion of the qualifications given (vv. 6-9). Third, there will be a discussion on the reasons and importance for these qualifications (vv. 10-16).

Course Objectives: By the end of this class students will have:

- A. An understanding the biblical basis for the eldership, especially in the context of the book of Titus.
- B. An understanding of importance of establishing elders "in every city."
- C. Knowledge of the various qualifications listed.

Outline of the class:

- A. Part One: The Context Behind the Qualifications
 1. There is a crucial need to establish quality leadership on the island. Therefore, Paul will spend the first part of the Epistle discussing the qualities/characteristics required of elders (1:5-9) and the need/importance that these men possess these qualities (1:10-16).
 2. Related to 1:10-16, and common to the Epistles to Timothy, is the problem with false teachers (3:9-11). On the island there is a Jewish element (1:10) that has an interest in myths and genealogies (1:14; 3:9). They are powerful, argumentative, deceptive and manipulative (1:10-14). They are immoral (1:14-15) and hope to profit from their false teaching (1:11).
 3. **1:5** is a key verse. The Bible student always looks for verses that give a clue to the purpose of the writing. Here Paul provides (a) the reason Titus was left in Crete – he had work to do, and (b) Paul's own description of what that work should entail.
 4. Paul begins by saying for this reason Titus was left in Crete. This not so gentle statement reminds Titus that he wasn't left there for a glorified vacation. He was there for a reason, a divine purpose. Whatever Titus was doing, this seems to suggest it wasn't what Paul wanted him to be doing. So, what was Titus doing? Perhaps 3:9 provides a clue. Titus (like Timothy – cf. 2 Tim. 2:14-16, 23) seems to be using up a lot of valuable time participating on the island debate team; an enterprise that Paul says bluntly is "unprofitable and worthless." Titus needs to get back to the reason the apostle left him there in the first place.

5. There are two primary tasks with which Titus had received apostolic direction (διεταξάμην – to arrange completely, appoint, charge): (1) **Set in order** (επιδιορθώω) what remains – The situation on the island, at this point, is totally unacceptable to Paul. Titus must get busy and straighten up those areas that are yet insufficient. By analyzing chapters 2 & 3, we can see that Paul is specifically referring to the area of Christian conduct and example. (2) **Appoint elders in every city**. The word elders (πρεσβυτέρους) is a word that has a basic meaning of one who is older or wise with old age and experience. The fact that these men are to be “appointed” shows that this is a particular office or position (you can’t appoint one to old age...this comes quite naturally!) This word is notably in the plural. The concept of one man serving as an authority over all is foreign to the NT. Equally, one notices that Paul says that these elders should be in every city. This also demonstrates that the divine plan was for each church to be autonomous, that is, self-governing.
6. The word “appoint” (καταστήσας) has led some to falsely conclude that a hierarchical system is God’s plan for His church in every generation. The Catholic Church uses this verse to support the doctrine of apostolic succession; others use it to prove that a pyramid structure was intended by God (2:15 is also thrown into the discussion). Even some of our brethren believe this shows that the evangelist is a position higher than anyone else in the congregation (including elders). However, careful consideration of this word will show that Titus is not operating as an independent authority. In Acts 6:3 the Apostles intend to “appoint” (καταστήσομεν) certain men, but verse five shows that the seven were “selected” by the people (6:3, 5). It is understandable that Titus would take the lead here, since he would be most knowledgeable of the necessary qualifications. Yet to argue that this word means to act as an independent authority is wholly unwarranted.

B. Questions for further consideration:

1. If Titus was sent to Crete with a specific purpose in appointing elders in every city, then how vital should it be for the church today to ensure elders are in every location?
2. Why do you think it is significant that elders be appointed and how should they be appointed?

Conclusion:

- A. These last two qualifications are, in the opinion of this writer, those that are most lacking in elders today. Many are not able to boldly defend the truth and many are not able to show the false teacher how he has erred. The Lord requires His elders to be ones who can refute false teachers and exhort in sound doctrine. If one cannot do this, then he must not serve, even if he meets all the other qualifications.
- B. We must remember that good men do not equal qualified leaders. God has these qualifications for a reason.

C. It is frequently observed that the church as a whole lacks leaders. In addition, those who do have leaders sometimes have those who are not qualified to lead. It is not possible to be the church of Christ without having good, sound, qualified leaders. In order for this to happen, these texts need to be taught and emphasized. Equally, our younger men need to be encouraged to strive to be elders someday. That “seed thought” might be all it takes to set him on the course to be a good leader someday.