



Order in the Church

27th CRC Church Anniversary & Ordination of New CRC Governmental Elders

April 21, 2024

Holy Text: Titus 1:5-13

We believe this epistle was written by the Apostle Paul to a church leader, Titus, in the mid-60s AD. Much like 1st and 2nd Timothy, this letter was written to help a young pastor bring *Godly Order* to young churches that were already dealing with false teaching and false teachers.

Writing to Titus in Crete (in the Mediterranean Sea, just south of Ephesus, Corinth, and Colosse), Paul (having likely founded these Cretan churches) wanted to make sure they were built properly, according to the apostolic pattern:

***Acts 14:21-23 (KJV)** And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, **22** Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. **23** And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.*

There is also an emphasis on holiness and good works in Titus. This is completely understandable given that Crete was known for immorality. Ancient historians cite Cretans' propensity to lie, especially about spiritual matters, engage in barbaric forms of warfare and piracy, and practice abominable religious rites among people of the same gender.

Titus was a Greek, probably converted to Christ under the ministry of Paul. Titus had a significant ministry at Corinth, where he was sent by Paul (likely twice) to deal with issues of immorality and encourage the saints there. He also organized offerings (2 Cor 8:6). Like Timothy, Titus was trusted by Paul to be an apostolic delegate, an "overseer of overseers" if you will, to the churches at Corinth and Crete.

A Few Thoughts on this Topic

1. Other than the essential nature of God, the identity and work of Christ, the Gospel, and the perspicuity of Scripture, there are few things MORE important in the ministry of the local church than the Doctrine of Leadership. This is because Christ Himself has set up a system whereby these leaders must teach and guard both sound doctrine and the flock:

***Acts 20:27-28 (KJV)** For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. **28** Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

***1 Timothy 4:16 (KJV)** Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*

2. Godly, qualified leaders are CRITICAL to the ministry of the local church. They do more than administrate (this is very important too!); they work for the maturity of God's people.

Ephesians 4:11-16 (NLT) Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. **12** Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. **13** This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. **14** Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. **15** Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. **16** He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

3. Beloved, just as a normative household rises and falls based on the strength of its head, likewise few things ensure the longevity and overall health of a local assembly like the spiritual health, commitment to truth, love, unity, and accountability of its pastors/elders.

This is the Principle of Authority:

God, for His own purposes and glory, has chosen to dispense and delegate His authority through human agency in all areas of human life, until either we die and are translated into the Heavenly Kingdom, or until He returns.

4. Warning: these realities can produce pride in immature leaders, but in good leaders, they are incredibly humbling. The church leader must keep these frightening truths in mind:

James 3:1 (KJV) My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

Hebrews 13:17 (KJV) Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Order in the Church: Our Text

Titus 1:5 (KJV) For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

- The God of order wants His church "set in order." The reasons ("for this cause") are given:

1. For the faith of God's elect (v.1)
2. For their knowledge of truth and godliness (v.1)
3. For their hope and faith in eternal life (v.2)
4. For their knowledge of God's Word (v.3)
5. For their understanding of the Godhead and our Savior, Jesus Christ (vv.3-4)

- Chief among such order is the setting in of Godly, qualified, leaders. Paul left Titus in Crete to ensure that such men were appointed.

Titus 1:6 (KJV) If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

- *Blameless* implies no overt sin or lawlessness. Such must be uncharacteristic in the life of an pastor/elder. He must live an “unprovable” life...a life above reproach.
- The parallel qualifications in 1 Timothy speak similarly:

1 Timothy 3:1-8 (KJV) *This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; 3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; 4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; 5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) 6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. 8 Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;*

- He must also be the husband of one wife, literally in the Greek: a “one woman man.” Some argue this means he must be married. We believe this speaks more to his believing in and modeling the original design of marriage: **one male and one female. Any other belief or household construction disqualifies him.**
- Another truth from the Text (and we believe a very obvious one) is that **“he” is a man. Incredibly, this must be firmly stated in 2024: Husbands are men.**
- **Therefore, we believe this office (bishop/overseer/elder/pastor...episkopos and poimēn in Greek) is for men only. This is the clear Scriptural precept for the Church:**

1 Timothy 2:11-15 (KJV) *Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. 12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. 13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. 15 Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.*

1 Corinthians 14:34-37 (KJV) *Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. 35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. 36 What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? 37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.*

- Sadly, this is an increasingly minority position. Here are five objections to our stance, and our answers to those objections.

1. **Objection:** *Jesus never taught this; Paul did.*

- **Answer:** *Jesus did teach this; He did so through His apostles.* Jesus and Paul aren’t in conflict. Jesus, through His Spirit, gave inspired words to Paul and others to order the churches. Paul’s words are therefore divine Scripture and authoritative:

2 Peter 3:14-17 (KJV) *Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. 15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul*

*also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you: **16** As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do **also the other scriptures**, unto their own destruction. **17** Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.*

- Scripture is a divine unit. All of it is breathed out by God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness! (2 Tim 3:16-17)
2. **Objection:** *What about Debra, Huldah, Anna, Junia, Priscilla, Philip's daughters and the elect lady?*
- **Answer:** *Just as there were no OT female priests, none of these precious sisters were pastors/elders in NT churches.*
 - Remember this important biblical principle of interpretation: **narrative is not necessarily normative and descriptive is not always prescriptive, especially when we are given actual precepts that deal with an issue.**
 - Remember this equally important principle: **the clear interprets the unclear.**
 - Debra's (Judges 4) rise was a judgment on Barak and weak manhood, not a model for NT pastors. She was a great woman, but not a pastor/elder in the NT church. (Samson and the rest of the judges are not models for NT pastors/elder either!)
 - Huldah (2 Kings 22) was a powerful women of faith, used wonderfully in a specific instance to help King Josiah. She was not a pastor/elder in the NT church.
 - Anna (Lk 2:36-38) prophesied at the temple. Her ministry was about praying and fasting. Wonderfully, she recognized the Baby Jesus as the Messiah and told others of Him! Still, she was not a pastor/elder in the NT church.
 - Junia (Rom 16:7) was not an apostle. She, among others, were "of note among the apostles." In other words, they were "well known to" the apostles (ESV) and they "highly respected" her. (NLT) She was not a pastor/elder in the NT church.
 - Priscilla (Acts 18; Rom 16:3-4; 1 Cor 16:19) was not a co-pastor. She and her husband, Aquila) were friends of Paul, fellow tentmakers, and dedicated followers of Christ. They helped disciple Apollos privately (Acts 18:26) and hosted a church meeting in their home.¹ The order of their names is irrelevant. She was intelligent and faithful but did not meet NT qualifications, so she could not have been a pastor/elder in the NT church. Paul firmly restricted such in an epistle where she is praised! (1 Cor 14/16:19)
 - Philip the evangelist had four virgin daughters who prophesied. (Acts 21:8-9) Bless God! They also were not pastors/elders in a local church; there is no evidence they spoke in a church service. Indeed, such was forbidden. (See 1 Cor 11-5-6 with 1 Cor 14:26-40).
 - The "elect lady" (2 John 1:1) may not even have been a woman. It may have been a way John described the entire church to whom he was writing. The church is often described in female terms (Eph 5; Rev 21). Even if she was an actual woman, there is nothing in 2 John that presupposes her being a pastor/elder in the NT church instead of a beloved friend of the apostle John.

¹ This church started in the McLeod home in 1997. Donna and I have hosted many gatherings of the saints over the years. Donna has had many informal conversations with many people in our home and in our church, with both male and female. None of that meant she was ordained as an elder in the church or should teach in the worship service. People often say "Donna and Carlton." Her name sometimes being called before mine is irrelevant as it relates to God's will for church leadership, and is certainly not an argument for overriding a "commandment of the Lord." (1 Cor 14:37)

- **To be clear, the ministry of women is powerful and needed! Dominion cannot be taken without God's daughters! But God, for His own purposes and glory, has ordered the church a certain way. We do not have the authority to overthrow His commands.**

3. **Objection:** *Acts 2:17-18 and Galatians 3:28 teach that women can be pastors.*

Acts 2:17-18 (KJV) *And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: **18** And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:*

Galatians 3:28 (KJV) *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

- **Answer:** *Neither of these verses speak of leadership in the church.*
 - Acts 2:17-18 describe God's generous and grace-filled spiritual provision for all who would call on Him, on the basis of faith. Women can certainly prophesy in certain contexts (1 Cor 11:1-16).²
 - Galatians 3:28 doesn't dismantle ontological or situational distinctions between people. But it teaches an important point: We all stand equal before God. All who repent and believe are welcome at the LORD's Table, regardless of ethnicity, status, or sex.
4. **Objection:** *The biblical restrictions in the NT were for certain churches or time periods only, not for us now.*
- **Answer:** *God's Word to them is God's Word to us.* This would not only include divine directives for leadership, but also marriage, children, sexuality, sin, forgiveness, repentance, giving, holiness, etc.
 - For example, Paul's commands/directives in 1 Corinthians were for all churches for all time. He says that four different times in the epistle: 1 Cor 4:17, 7:17, 11:16, and 14:33.
 - If one's hermeneutic makes an exception for female leadership in the church, to be consistent, one must make exceptions for order in the home! Such a hermeneutic would lead to the sinful overthrow of all "unpopular" divine statutes, and is a root cause of much of the chaos and rebellion plaguing the western church right now!
5. **Objection:** *What if a sister feels "called and led" to be a pastor and preach to men?*
- **Answer:** *God "calls and leads" according to His Word.* He does not act against His own character. All personal feelings must be tested by the Bible. (1 Thess 5:21) Feelings do not override Scripture!
 - There is one instance of such a woman in the NT at Thyatira. It wasn't pretty:

Revelation 2:20-22 (KJV) *Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. **21** And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. **22** Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.*

² Personal note: I have been tremendously blessed by many words of wisdom from good sisters over the years!

- **Again, Order in the Church, including leadership, is fundamental to church ministry: being salt/light, advancing on the kingdom of darkness, making disciples, honoring Christ, and building Godly homes. This is an issue of extremely high importance. It isn't secondary or tertiary; it is foundational to a healthy church.**
- Note: we don't have any personal agenda here. We aren't sexist or hyper-patriarchal. We aren't against women...we are for them! We believe God's Word for His daughters is good!

Titus 1:7 (KJV) For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

- So then a bishop/overseer/elder must be above reproach. He must lead a life that cannot be easily accused of impropriety or wrongdoing. Such things must seem and be out of character for him.
- He is a steward of God. He manages something that belongs to Another. The church isn't his and the people aren't his. They belong to Christ.
- He isn't arrogant or out to please himself.
- He is not prone to fits of anger.
- He isn't a drunkard, a brawler, or in ministry for financial gain!

Titus 1:8 (KJV) But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;

- A pastor/elder/overseer must love people. Deeply love people. This love is consistently evidenced by kindness in his words and actions. One of the actions is hospitality...an important and encouraging biblical doctrine. An elder leads the way with an open home and open doors.
- He also "loves what is good." (NLT) He loves when men (and women) exhibit holiness and honor. He never affirms what God hates.
- He is "sober," that is, "self-controlled." His life is characterized, in part, by self-discipline.
- He makes sound, righteous judgments based upon the Word of God.
- He strives for personal holiness in his thoughts, words, and actions.
- He knows how to restrain his strength (temperance). He metes out his authority with patience and love.

Titus 1:9 (KJV) Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

- The biblical elder holds fast to the Word of God. He is committed to the God of the Bible and truth of Scripture. He will not compromise God's Word. He will humbly teach the Bible "as he hath been taught" by the Holy Spirit and his human teachers.
- His doctrine is "sound." That is, his teaching and applications flow from the Scriptures, not his own opinions.
- With this doctrine, he both exhorts (calls near and commands to obey) and convinces (reproves, rebukes, and persuades as necessary) the critic and contradictor.

Titus 1:10 (KJV) For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision:

- Why are the qualifications for the pastor/elder so high? Why must his personal life be above reproach? Why must he hold so tightly to the truth and be willing to rebuke and reprove?

- **Because God wants His flock protected. And pastor/elder is a shepherd/warrior!** Just as in Crete there were “many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers,” likewise every church in every age must be protected against the incursion of false teachers and teachings.

Acts 20:29-31 (KJV) *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.*

- **This is one of the pastor/elder’s primary responsibilities: to protect God’s people!**

Titus 1:11 (KJV) *Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.*

- The language here isn’t very nuanced or winsome! The pastor/elder was supposed to stop the mouths of those who, through their ill speech and ulterior motives, were subverting whole houses! Households were (and are!!!) at stake!
- By drawing people to themselves, these teachers hoped to build their own following in order to enrich themselves.

Titus 1:12 (KJV) *One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.*

- All elders minister in a wicked culture. All churches exist within the same.
- Paul knew something of the Cretian culture and exhorted and warned Titus and the elders he would appoint of the sinful cultural mores and proclivities.
- Why? So they might understand the battlefield and take appropriate action!
- “Bishop...why do CRC pastors talk so much about the culture?” “Because we must for your sake!”

Titus 1:13 (KJV) *This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith;*

- Cultural sins and those who popularize and affirm them must be rebuked by Godly pastors and God’s people must be brought to maturity as to not fall prey to such sins.
- Soundness of faith in the flock is the pastor/elder’s goal. A church who, in the Holy Spirit and through the Scriptures, can recognize and defeat the errors of the day is a threat to the devil and a glory unto God!

Closing thoughts:

Men called to hold this office must guard their lives and their families. They must love their wives and disciple their children. They must be willing to give much to hold to the truth for the sake of God’s people. Peter said to those who would lead:

1 Peter 5:2-4 (KJV) *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 *And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.**

May CRC leaders love deeply and remember the Chief Shepherd as they lead.
Amen.