



How to Lead Cretans

Titus 1:5-9

Spiritually healthy churches don't run themselves

Sometime between AD 63-67, Paul and Titus went to Crete with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They preached among the cities, people responded, and (house) churches were planted. Paul was on the island for a short while. Short enough that he would need to leave Titus behind while he went on to Greece; only to follow up with a curt, business-like letter carried by two Christians: Zenas and Apollos (3:13). The Letter to Titus is Paul's follow-up MEMO, directing Titus the trouble-shooter to bring some organization to these fledgling house churches. Paul's role was to establish a beachhead for the Gospel; and then move on. This accorded with Paul's usual practice (Acts 14:23) of appointing elders in every church and then with prayer and fasting committing the believers to the Lord. Paul lived this principle: there is no success without successors.

Spiritually healthy churches need leaders

Titus 1:5 answers these questions: Who would shoulder the responsibility to parent these new believers who were scattered throughout the cities on Crete? Who would teach them Christian doctrine in an age before the New Testament was compiled? Who would develop them into spiritually healthy believers? Who would pray over their spiritual needs? Protect their young faith? Who would model Christianity? The responsibility of parenting believers had to happen or else the future of Christianity would go the way of an abandoned baby. Paul says that this "stewardship" would be upon a group of servant-leaders called elders.

Titus 1:5-9 says that this is the role of the elder leadership team! A group of spiritual parents who has journeyed farther along in the faith; a team of godly servant leaders who model Christ before the rest of the believers. If you think of the church community as a daughter, the elders are the strong, loving, caring, doting, and fiercely protective father who wants nothing less than the best spiritual future for his beautiful girl. They will sacrifice for her. They will stay up late into the night pleading with her to be of God. They will lay down their lives for her. If you think of the church community as a flock of sheep, the elders are a team of pastors, shepherds, bishops—synonymous words that describe care-givers who make sure those sheep are fed by day and protected by night. They ensure the nourishment of the sheep. They will kill any wolf that comes near.

Furthermore, the elders will serve as the vanguard for the invasion of Christianity on Crete! The church was in an urban culture; God's people were city-dwellers. People walked to work; walked home; they had shops and stores and jobs in the marketplace. It was all so very public. So when Cretans got curious about this Christian God named Jesus, who would be consulted first? And did their lives match the

beliefs they professed? The Christian elders claimed to know God; did their actions support this? Do your actions and ethics at work bring curiosity to others about the God you worship?

Spiritually healthy churches need leaders *who are spiritually healthy!*

Leading themselves (vv. 7-8)

The key word here is “blameless”. Five descriptors tell what blamelessness is not; while seven descriptors tell what blamelessness is. Incidentally, Paul puts these in the form of a list, because he’s talking to Greeks. Paul’s list shows his awareness of how the Greeks communicated virtues. Had he been talking to a predominately Hebrew culture, he would have communicated this in the form of a parable (as Jesus did in Luke 12:42, “Who is the faithful and wise manager?”). The point is that these shepherd leaders—who cared for the young Christian house churches—had to live counter-culturally (Titus 1:12). Elders were to be upright, not liars; holy, not evil brutes; and disciplined, not addicted gluttons.

Leading their families (v. 6)

It may sound ironic, but when a leader puts his family first, the community benefits. When a leader puts the local community or the church community first, both his family and the community suffer. Titus 1:6 insists (along with 1 Timothy 3: 5) that starting at home is always the key to affecting others in a positive way. Leading one’s household well gains credibility to lead the family of God. You don’t need an MBA to manage God’s church; but you do need a mature marriage and strong parenting skills. (Maxwell 2007, 30)

It is inaccurate to think of the elders primarily as a board of directors overseeing a 501(c)3 tax exempt non-profit organization; or some religious version of a for-profit corporation. It is misguided to think of the eldership like the United States Senate, or some power-based body. When we do that, we will inevitably get frustrated at the comparison because the church will seem so back-woods. We read Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 about the elder being the husband of one wife and children who must not be incorrigible. We think, “What’s up with that? What’s Paul got against women? And what does parenting have to do with knowing how to run an organization?”

Fundamentally, the church is a *family*. In Titus, local churches met—not in mortgaged facilities—but in homes! Titus 2 lists the typical groups in a family structure! So, the church is a family. *God’s plan for the organization and leadership of the local church family is derived from His plan for the organization and leadership of the nuclear family.* As husbands/fathers in marriage/family have been divinely called as servant-leaders to initiate in providing and protecting the family entrusted to them, so such godly husbands/fathers are divinely called to the stewardship of providing and protecting the spiritual church family. *The family and the church family are the only two places where God has called and expects godly, Cross-bearing, Christ-focused husbands/fathers to be the initiating servant-leaders.* Headship is not about “calling the shots” or being “bossy” or “getting the final say” or having the “final word”; headship is the divine calling to be the first to be nailed to the cross. To be the first to feed the sheep, protect the sheep, and stay up all night to watch the sheep; and if need be, lay one’s life down for the sheep. Furthermore, a spiritually healthy eldership will ensure that all the gifts from all the believers—children, students, women, men—are being fully utilized for the building up of the entire church family!

Leading in teaching the Word (v. 9)

Elders are to protect believers from false teaching by teaching sound doctrine and refuting inaccuracies about Christ and the Gospel. You see, it’s the Gospel that has transformed these elders! They’d better master that which has mastered them! Those who were once foolish enslaved, and deceived (3:3) have been changed by the best news ever—the Grace of God has appeared! Grace has come to prodigals and predators—and now some of them are elders! Only Jesus can do that!