

Titus 24-07-21a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We are in the book of Titus looking at the qualifications for elders in verses five through nine and moving into the elders task beginning in verse 10. There are many implications of this as we have seen in our previous study of 1st Timothy.

1st Timothy and Titus were written fairly close together to two different kinds of communities, but the concerns that Paul has that he reflects and expresses to these pastors, one in Ephesus, Timothy, and the other in Crete, Titus, are concerns that face us today and involve both the responsibilities and opportunities that you and I have as believers, rubbing elbows with other believers and society in general, as well as the functions and responsibilities of leadership in the Christian community. This isn't exclusively limited to the church. It also applies in families, in areas where we are in contact with one another, as well as our neighbors and the outside world.

So it is very pertinent. It is very applicable, especially in these days when we are looking at national leadership, local leadership, state leadership with upcoming elections, people who are expressing goals, agendas, policy platforms, and so on. What is our role? What is our responsibility and our potential in terms of shining a light of God's glory in these circumstances? So you couldn't find a better place to be at this particular point than where we are.

Let's ask God's blessing on our ongoing fellowship and investigation of this portion of His Word, and we'll begin. Father, these are times that challenge us with news, with circumstances, with wars, with political upheaval, with social conflict, with challenges and testings and temptations near at hand in our personal lives, as well as in the communities in which we dwell. We know that Your Word is alive and powerful, that it is profitable to instruct us in the ways of accomplishing Your will and purpose for us.

We pray that as we look at this portion together, that the Holy Spirit will minister it to each of our hearts, encourage us, strengthen us, draw us closer together as a fellowship and in our families and in our associations, so that we can truly be beacons of light, of hope, of the manifest grace that You have made available to each one of us as human beings, and especially those who are in the household of faith. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

It is fascinating to me that in the early stage of both 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul moves immediately to the subject of leadership. Who is going to determine the agenda? Who is going to set the priorities and the goals and maintain the values that are appropriate for believers? You remember just a few pages back in 1 Timothy that the gospel is paramount. Paul lays heavy emphasis on the truth as the foundation of the church and the church as the harbingers, the communicators, the representatives of God's truth.

That is you and me. Where are people going to encounter God's truth? It is going to be in the Christian community. More narrowly, it is going to be in that portion of the Christian community that knows and lives out the truth.

That is a much smaller group. I did some work this week relative to our passage in Titus, where Paul, having accomplished the greeting which we have seen in detail in the first four verses, grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior. These are things we should wake up in the morning and go to bed at night appreciating.

From our Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, we have grace, we have mercy, and we have peace. These come to us. They should reside within us.

They should flow out from us. The measure of any given day in terms of the expression of being the recipient of grace, of mercy, and of peace ought to work itself out in love for God and love for one another. This is the substance.

This is the evidence of our faith, of our hope, and is the measure of our love. Obviously, the source is God our Father in and through the Lord Jesus. Then he moves immediately to the subject at hand.

I left you in Crete for this reason. You need to set in order things that are lacking. This would be a great sign to put on the refrigerator, or next to the coffee pot, or whatever it is we look at first thing in the morning.

The mirror for doing our morning hygiene and ablutions and so on. But what is the purpose for which we have been left on this earth? It's largely the same reason that Paul left Titus in Crete, to set in order things that are lacking and ensure that priorities are respected, observed, and carried out. This is what leaders do.

Leaders know the mission. Leaders organize. They provide.

They guide. They instruct. Their responsibility, their assignment, and their delegated authority is to organize and carry out the mission.

We say, well, those elders, they sure have a big job. I hope they do it. It is not sufficient.

Each of us can read verse 5 and recognize that we have opportunities and potentials to do these same things. We can look at our own circumstances. We can look at our own environment.

You can look at your level of clutter. Believe me when I tell you my level of clutter is fairly high. I am convicted when I read that it is the responsibility for believers in general, and leaders in particular, to set in order, to organize, to systematize.

This is a part of our testimony. This is a witness. Set in order things that are lacking.

There are deficits. There are places where we fall short, where we're not doing what we could and what we should. We should identify those areas in our and attack them with gusto.

Pray about them. Ask for God's leading and guiding in the allocation of our time and our efforts to do what we can do. Sometimes our potential in these areas is limited either by physical circumstances.

We're not all 100% healthy and functional. We don't have the energy and the capabilities of a 24-year-old, or a 34-year-old, or even a 54-year-old. In some of our cases, we're staggering along as best we can.

But to the extent that God gives us the grace and the mercy and the peace, we should set in order whatever we see in our lives that is lacking. If leaders are supposed to do this, that means that the people they lead are to be engaged in this worthy expression of spiritual maturity, spiritual presence. We should not be disorganized.

We should not be countenancing lack. We have providential power from God. We have the Holy Spirit.

We have the Word. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. And appointing elders in every city, this is basically looking for leadership, looking for those who are going to identify and carry out the mission in each area.

When you see each city, think about each area of our life. We have family responsibilities. We have personal responsibilities.

We have a responsibility and a stewardship with our own bodies and our own personal environment to eat healthy, to get a reasonable amount of exercise. It's use it or lose it, as most of us know. And to look at the cities in our life, the area of responsibility.

We have relationships with others. Many of us have a job or other assignments and tasks that are important to carry out faithfully. Again, this is part of where God's glory reflects off of us is whether we are good and faithful servants, whether we are good stewards of our time, our resources, our efforts.

We don't waste it. We are not engaged in self-indulgence or an excessive dedication to entertainment or stimulation or distraction. There are two ways that we can meet difficulties and problems when we lack peace, when we're not availing ourselves of God's grace and mercy.

The world's way is to deflect, to distract, to seek stimulation that will replace a general malaise or misery or disappointment or depression or realization that there is hardship, there is shortcoming, there is either personal sin or being a victim of someone else's personal sin. And there are two things we can do. We can distract ourselves with

stimulation, with distractions of an entertainment nature or delving into a hobby to the exclusion of all else.

Or we just put things out of our mind and we don't actually deal with them. We don't address them. We don't confront them.

We don't have leaders in every city who are going to set in order that which is lacking. We take a different course. We just are like Scarlet O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*.

I'll think about that tomorrow. And we push aside, we procrastinate, and we don't do the biblical spiritually proper and mature thing, which is to confront, address, improvise, adapt, and overcome by God's grace. So this sounds like a little historical circumstance that you can just hop over.

Well, Paul wants Titus to go appoint elders in every city. Isn't that nice? But what does that mean to me? Look at the diversity. Even in a relatively small island like Crete, there are different cities.

There are different communities with different situations, different people, different challenges, different needs. And every one of those needs to be properly addressed in a spiritual fashion. He doesn't say, Titus, take up a collection and send money to every city and throw money at their problems.

Let's take up a collection from saints elsewhere and we'll send it to these cities in Crete so that they can address their needs. What addresses needs? Attention and leadership. Leadership focuses on what is important and that's what we need to do.

Our problems always have a spiritual component. Think about this. If you want an exercise in a thought experiment, see if you can think of any challenge, any problem, any difficulty, any circumstance in your life that does not have a spiritual component, doesn't impinge on your spiritual life.

There's no need or way to express your identity in Christ in that circumstance. See if you can think of one. And like me, I think you will find that the more you think about any given circumstance, any given requirement, responsibility, challenge, relationship, opportunity, disability, there is a spiritual component.

We need to appoint elders in every city of our personal island to set in order what is lacking. That's the application of this particular instruction to Titus from Paul. So what does it take to do this? You say, okay, I'm with you.

I see the metaphor, the analogy of these cities where there are varied and differing needs and I need to set it in order. So I'm with you so far. How? What do I do? I'm with you so far.

What does Paul say next? Appoint elders. What is the requirement for these elders? They need to be blameless and they need to be dedicated to God's authority structure, God's organizing structure. If you're going to set things in order, you've got to be tuned in to God's order.

How does God order things? I could come up with some innovative imaginative way to address the problems in my life, but if I don't do it according to God's structure, God's provision, God's direction, God's design, I'm going to fail. God's design in this particular case, what is the emphasis? It is family. To be blameless is not to be a philanderer, not to be a wayward individual, immoral and inattentive to one's own family.

If a man is blameless, he is going to be a one woman man, not two, not three, not an assortment, not a collection, not a nominal wife, and then a bunch of paramours scattered around the area, which was common in the Greek and Roman world. To have a wife on paper and for formal event purposes, you've got some arm candy that you can take to civic events and social events, but in real life, you're cultivating any number of side relationships. Paul tells Titus, not in the church.

Believers are to be characterized by dedication to God's perfect plan, God's ordering of human society, and it begins with the family. So the family is Adam and Eve. For this cause, shall a man leave father and mother, not father and other father or mother and other mother.

A man comes from a family defined by a father and mother. He leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife. They too become one flesh.

They are now the parents of children. I want to digress here for a moment and share some information with you. There is an institute called the Institute for Family Studies, and I was curious about the status of families in the modern day.

If you go to the homepage, ifsstudies.org, Institute of Family Studies, they have some statistics in large blocks right there on the homepage. Four out of every 10 births in the United States are to unmarried women, 40 percent, four out of 10. The woman having the child is not married.

Thirty-six and a half percent of single mother families are statistically in poverty. They are below the poverty line. That's over a third of single mother families.

Interestingly, almost 70 percent of America's children live in two-parent families, but most of those parents are in many cases not married. I shouldn't say most, but many. By age 12, 40 percent of children will spend some time in a cohabiting household.

Most often, it is the biological mother and a live-in boyfriend. In every year between 2007 through 2013, four in 10 U.S. births were to unmarried women. Recent non-marital births, almost 60 percent are to unmarried women living with the child's father, so

cohabiting.

Single mother families are five times as likely to experience poverty as married parent families. Married couple families, it's down around seven percent poverty. It's, as I said, 36.5 percent in single mother families and 22 percent in single father families.

What are we looking at here? God designed the solitary to be set in families. Families is God's structure. One woman, man, i.e., married, raising children, having faithful children, not accused of dissipation or insubordination in verse 6. Only 22 percent, two out of every 10 millennials, are currently married.

The lifetime risk of divorce for newlyweds today is between 42 and 45 percent. Boys raised in a single parent household are more than twice as likely to be incarcerated compared to boys raised in an intact married home, even after you control for differences in parental income, education, race, and ethnicity. After factoring in trends and biases and effects from parental income, education, race, and ethnicity, boys from a single parent household are more than twice as likely to go to jail and to be incarcerated.

Interestingly, we have, and we have reviewed in great detail, the influence of progressive Christianity in the Christian world today. In simplistic terms, there's great variety and complication when you try to survey Christianity. Do you count Catholics? Do you count Orthodox? Do you count those who believe in a higher power, but they don't necessarily believe in Jesus? People identify as Christian culturally, but not necessarily spiritually.

So it is difficult to assess. But progressive Christianity is a large and growing influence, and you see this in the public face of Christianity, in the talking heads, and the blogs, and the books, and the seminars, and so on. And it is characterized by these things.

First of all, advocating for social justice. And it's tricky. Are we in favor of social injustice? Are we in favor of oppression and abuse and negative things? Of course not.

But we have seen in recent studies, in recent weeks, especially, that Christians who genuinely want there to be love and benefit for others have to start with a strong foundation of truth individually and in the church community. The community of believers have to be grounded in truth. If we attempt to go straight to justice without a grounding in the Word of God, that justice, whatever effort, and to whatever extent someone thinks that they have succeeded and achieved it, it doesn't glorify God.

It doesn't come from God's power. It does not conform to God's order. And along with this advocacy for social justice, part of the definition of social justice that progressive Christianity embraces and pursues is LGBTQ plus rights, gender equality, and not just women ought to get paid the same as men, but women ought to be able to become men if they want to, and men ought to be able to become women if they want to.

It's gender insensitivity. It is gender denial. It is the embrace of transgender cross-dressing, gay pride, and many other of the extremes of people who are confused and who have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.

There is submission. Listen, all of us have a fallen nature. In various individuals, that fallen nature has areas of weakness.

Some of us are more prone to addiction. Some of us are prone to stimulation and wanting to be entertained, wanting to be distracted, wanting to be wowed and to be impressed and to be taken to dazzling heights of emotion. And this is why you have such a large entertainment factor in megachurches.

Give me a light show. Give me a sound show. Have the band play.

Dazzle me. I love being dazzled. I love being impressed.

I want to hear someone with an amazing voice or amazing instrumental capabilities. And this is a weakness where we search for and seek out that stimulation, that entertainment, because while we are being entertained, we are not thinking about responsibilities, tasks, opportunities, the things that tend to oppress us or depress us. Others have an area of weakness when it comes to gambling.

The chance to get rich quick, the chance to hit it big, to put a coin in the slot and have a flood of coins emerge or to guess the right number or to win the lottery. This is a secondary symptom of an innate desire for wealth. If you gamble, it's because you want to hit it big and have the money.

It becomes a process that is almost addictive. This has been going on for over a decade now with auctions, auctions on eBay. There are people who want the joy of defeating someone else and getting the item, sharpshooting them at the last minute, putting in the last winning bid before somebody can respond.

They don't actually care about the item so much as the process of winning. And there is a competitive streak that can get out of hand in our fallen nature. And we're competitive with neighbors.

We want a better looking yard. We want a nicer and shinier car. We want more adorable children who are smarter and get better grades.

And there is a competitive streak that can be out of the box, unhealthy, and even dangerous. There are all kinds of problems in our fallen nature. We can want to dominate.

We can want to get our way. And we want to push our ideas and our solutions onto others. And when somebody does what we want done, there is this weird gratification

that gets out of hand.

There is a desire to see the beatific vision and the kingdom come where wouldn't it be great if I'd love to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony. I'd love to give the world a Coke and so on. And you think, well, what's wrong with that? What's wrong with loving everyone and accepting everyone and big tent and all are welcome and nobody's made to feel bad? This is part of our fallen nature to dislike confrontation, to dislike conflict.

For some of us, can't we all just get along? Let's just not rock the boat. Take people for what they are. And there is a weird misapplication of biblical love that says to love is to accept.

Love and acceptance are not synonymous. You can love something or someone and not accept it because it is wrong. What if you love the high from crack cocaine? What if you love a food that is too sweet and gives you a diabetic shock? You love it.

There's nothing intrinsically wrong with it. It may be a food that God made, but it is bad and therefore wrong for you to partake. What if you love alcohol? What if you love a good gin and tonic or six, or you love a bottle of wine or three, or you love somebody who is toxic to your spiritual life? You cannot accept something just because you love it.

God loves the whole world, but did you notice God does not accept the whole world into his presence? God loves the world. God loves every individual ever created, but he does not accept all of us. How are we made acceptable? This is a piece of truth.

You have to know it and you have to practice truth. Acceptance is not love and love is not acceptance. They are related, but they are different.

Acceptance in God is related to his righteousness and his justice. So to advocate for social justice, there is a part of us that wants to go along to get along, that wants to not be seen as the meanie and the bad guy in the room, and to be the frowner and the critic and the one who does not embrace and accept. Look, everybody else is saying hail fellow well met.

I went to a class reunion some years ago around the time we moved up here of people I went to high school with and one of the people who it was a fairly small gathering. I'd say there was maybe 20 to 25 people in this very large open concept house. One of my classmate girls hosted it at her home, but the air got sucked out of the room by a guy that we went to school with.

He was a year ahead of me, but out and out gay, just loud and proud and talking loud and pushing this gayness. We're largely a Christian community in this area, but people felt like, well, the best thing to do is to be accepting and this is normal and this is okay. Others of us had to get up and leave because I don't want to, by my silence, act as though this is consent.

It is not something to countenance. It is not something to accept and you can love someone without accepting their choices or accepting their priorities or accepting their lifestyle or accepting their practices, accepting what they refuse to try to mend in character. If I have flaws and I am not interested in God, by his grace and through his power, working those out of me, getting the rocks out of the soil so that the seed can be implanted and bear fruit 30-fold, 60-fold and 100-fold, if I like my rocks and I don't want them to leave and I refuse to seek God's power and God's renovation of my fallen nature and I'm okay with it, if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

If I regard it, if I say it's okay, if I don't want it gone, why would the Lord not hear me? Because he does not accept me. How is it that I can go boldly before the throne of grace to ask for help in time of need? Because of the blood of Jesus Christ and I am made acceptable in the beloved. We are accepted.

We are recipients of atonement and redemption and reconciliation through Jesus Christ. Those who are not availing themselves of those works of the Lord Jesus on our behalf, God still has a love for the world and a love for the individual, but he is not going to express that love in blessing because we are not acceptable until we are made acceptable in Christ. Love is not enough.

You can love things without accepting them. So this is the great deception of social justice. Love is the answer.

All you need is love. Just love the oppressed, love the poor, love the addict, love the gay, love the transgender, love the queer, love whatever these other letters stand for. That is not God's way.

That is not God's order. I promise you when Titus did his job and appointed elders in every city in Crete, those elders did not say, hey you Cretans, you liars, and you remember in verse 12, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons. The elders appointed by Titus did not go to each city and say, hey you lazy gluttons, come on in and be a lazy glutton with us.

Be an evil beast with us. Be a filthy liar with us. You can love them.

You can desire the best for them, but acceptance is a different thing. Leadership, elders in our cities have to uphold God's order, God's standard. One man, one woman, married, having plighted their truth, having pledged to stick together till death do us part.

A one woman man, a one man woman, in the sight of God, for God's glory, dedicated to God's purpose. All of these are a part of biblical marriage. So desiring to fix the environment and try to make life better for people without transformation, without being first acceptable in God's sight so that he can work in us and through us for his good purpose, is a distraction.

It is a feel good moment. It is a pat on the back, self-righteousness that is not biblical and is not a part of God's order and does not glorify God. And it is rife in the church today.

This is one of the signal defining aspects. If you ask somebody, well what is this progressive Christianity? The very first thing they're going to say is, well they are advocates for social justice. They don't say they're dedicated to the Lord Jesus and they want to spread the message of salvation and grace and atonement and redemption and reconciliation and propitiation through the sacrificial work of Christ on the cross.

That's not their defining feature. They want everybody to be happy. They want everybody to have a chicken in their pot and a coconut tree in their yard or whatever.

And it sounds great. Think about the snake talking to Eve from the tree. Look how smart this fruit has made me.

This is good for everybody. You'll be smarter than you are. You'll be better off than you are.

You will be less oppressed. You won't have to look to Adam for guidance because when you eat this, you'll be as smart as God. I will help you be a better you, but it's not according to God's order.

It's not a part of God's plan of authority and submission and respect and reflection of the subordination that you find even in the Trinity itself. Subordination, bad. Freedom, opportunity, good.

Well, this is why the first priority in the book of Titus is to set in order things that are lacking and that should be our priority. We need to examine ourselves and where there is a lack and where there is disorder and nonconformity to the plan and purpose of God. We need to get those elders into those cities and get that stuff squared away.

God cannot use us if we're unusable and we're unusable if we are not ordered, if we are not enabled and empowered, if we're not aligned with his plan and purpose, if we are not available to be guided by the Holy Spirit and energized by truth, by the Word of God for every good work. Well, a bit emphatic there, but we are fighting against an enormous attack from within our own community. Our enemies are not so much outsiders, they're inside.

Our border has already been breached. Our problem is with fellow believers. They are the ones subverting and perverting the faith.

And without identifying the source of the problem, we are going to be insulated from it and work in spite of it. So it's a powerful warning from the Word of God. Well, let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to move forward and see what else we can learn from the qualifications for elders.