

Titus 1:4–6

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. 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: if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

Set in Order — The Authority That Appoints

Verse 5 opens the body of the letter: Titus was left in Crete precisely to set right what remained unordered, and to establish elders in every city *as I had appointed thee*. That final clause is important — it shows the character of the authority involved. Titus acts not on his own initiative but under apostolic appointment. Paul had appointed him; Paul appointed elders through him. Authority flows downward: apostle to delegate, delegate to elder. This is not a democratic institution — the assembly does not propose candidates and vote upon them. Sheep do not choose their own shepherd. The saints are called to recognise what God appoints, not to elect what pleases them.

This raises the question of the present day, when apostles and their delegates are no longer present. The answer is not to invent a new form of apostolic authority — that is man seeking to be wiser than God's order. The fact is that God knew the ruin of the church was coming, and the provision for authoritative appointment of elders is inseparable from the church being in a condition to receive it. When that condition passed, the provision passed with it. The orderly

response to that is to acknowledge God's hand, own the ruin, and work from the other direction: working on the moral qualifications that are set out in these verses, which no ruin can take away.

Elders in Every City — The One Assembly

The charge is to establish elders in every *city* — not in every assembly, though that is what might naturally be expected. Scripture consistently speaks of one assembly in a city, even if that assembly met at various gathering points within it. The assembly at Jerusalem is always referred to in the singular throughout the Acts, even though the thousands of believers there could not all have met in one building. Meeting at multiple points does not create multiple assemblies; there is one assembly in the city.

The term *elder* speaks of maturity — not of chronological age. Verse 7 uses the term *bishop* or *overseer* for the same person, viewed from the angle of the work rather than the person. Elder and bishop are not two offices but one, seen from two different aspects. The elaborate ecclesiastical hierarchy that assigns bishops over groups of elders and gives them wider diocesan authority is entirely foreign to Scripture. An elder's charge is local — confined to the assembly in which he has been established. He is not an elder in the next city, whatever visits he may make there.

If Any Be Blameless — Working from the Ground Up

The qualifications begin with blamelessness. Titus's task was not to go into a city and establish a person's blamelessness — he had to go and *find* a blameless person. That person was already in order. Titus's role was to recognise and formally establish what was already there. Where apostolic authority is not available to do this formally, the resource is precisely to cultivate what the apostle would have looked for: to work on the blamelessness, to lead a more

ordered life, to have an ordered household. That is what the godly among the brethren were pressing a century ago — not the pretension to a restored apostolic authority, but the cultivation of the moral qualities that no ruin can touch.

Husband of One Wife — Marriage as God's Thought

The qualification *husband of one wife* has in view the gospel going into a context where polygamous marriages existed. A man saved out of such a marriage is not to be received as though he were in adultery — his existing household is not to be dissolved in a way that would cause immeasurable harm to those within it. But he is debarred from oversight, because his marriage does not set forth the truth of Christ and the assembly — the truth that underlies the institution of Christian marriage.

This does not address the case of a widower who has remarried. The verse is about polygamy, not about second marriages after the death of a first spouse. And it does not mean that any carping fault-finder's accusation disqualifies a man — 1 Timothy 5:19 requires that an accusation against an elder be received only at the mouth of two or three witnesses. What is in view here is freedom from any charge of substance, not immunity from every unfounded complaint.

The institution of Christian marriage is itself a mark of order — it is not a disorderly thing for a Christian man to be a husband, or a Christian woman to be a wife. Marriage sets forth the great truth of Christ and the assembly. And it is nowhere in the New Testament pressed as strongly in connection with orderliness as it is here, in this context, where everything turns on the question of what is in order and what is not.

Having Faithful Children — The Household in Order

The elder is to have faithful children, not accused of excess or unruly. God delights to bless households, and this verse is consistent with that. He said of Abraham: *I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord* (Genesis 18:19). There is something displayed in the behaviour of the household that reflects on the character of its head.

The connection with 1 Timothy 3 is direct: *if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?* The elder who would have to deal with cases of excess and unruliness in the assembly would have no moral weight if those very things were found in his own household.

There is a difference between external restraint and inward orderliness. Children kept under rigid external control give no true indication of what they are — the orderliness of heart is only shown when the occasion to be disorderly arises and it is resisted from within. When a child is left to play without close supervision and the good ordering of heart shows itself then — that is what the apostle has in view. Unruliness is not liberation, whatever certain educational theories suppose. Every person, and every child, needs the constraints of orderliness to prosper. Without them, the result is not freedom but bondage to the flesh and its drives. The ordered household of the elder is the ordered life writ small.

— *Study ends* —