

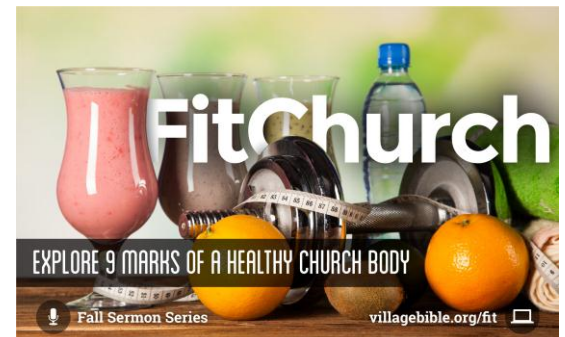


VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Who's the Boss?

FitChurch: 9 Marks of a Healthy Church Body, Part 9

Tim Badal | November 16, 2014 | Titus 1:5-9



Turn in your Bible to Titus 1:5-9. This is the final week in our series, “FitChurch”, in which we have been evaluating indicators of a healthy church. Normally, our church goes through a particular book or passage in its preaching times. This series holistically looks at what the Bible says on a particular topic. These sermons have helped direct us and evaluate whether or not our church is healthy. For the past eight weeks, we have appraised our church ministry. We have asked the Lord, “Are we as healthy as You desire us to be? Where are our areas of weakness? Are we dysfunctional in any aspect of our church life?” This week’s topic flows through that same vein: church leadership.

Whether you are a leader or not, leadership is important for every single person in our church. Pastor John Maxwell once said, “No organization, no family, no sports team, and no church for that matter, will never excel beyond its leadership and how it leads.” We must understand what Maxwell calls the “Law of the Lid.” If we want to be the church that God calls us to be, we must grow and allow the best leaders to serve, lead and direct us in that endeavor. However, we must understand God’s rubric for leaders.

Let’s look at Titus 1:5-9 in order to get a prescription for healthy church leaders. Here is what Paul says to his spiritual disciple Titus, who pastors the church in Crete.

⁷ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷ For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

In the late 80’s and 90’s, TV programs like the Cosby Show, Growing Pains and Family Ties allowed us to watch and fall in love with people we had never met before. We lived life with them on a weekly basis, going through the same trials they did. “Who’s the Boss?” was one of those TV shows. It starred Tony Danza who had become a housekeeper after retiring from major league baseball due to an injury. He and his daughter Samantha moved into the house of an advertising agent, named Angela, and her son. The relationship between the parents was completely platonic. They would fight all the time because Tony was laid back and Angela was high-strung. The question surrounding each episode was, “Who’s the Boss.” Who would lead? Who had ultimate authority? Whose preferences would be followed? Everyone tried to be the boss. There was a constant battle over leadership.

Who is the boss in the local church? Sadly, in churches today there are pews full of people wearing sweaters saying, “I’m the boss. I’m the one in charge.” If this is how you see church involvement, the church will not be healthy. God’s Word does not prescribe everyone being in charge, but only a few individuals.

What does it mean to have godly, solid leaders who have a vision, a plan, responsibility and authority to lead effectively? Who is in charge? When it comes to the church, we must ask ourselves, “Who will lead? Who will direct the vision and mission of the church?” Titus gives us guidelines so that we do not operate the church like “Who’s the Boss?” How do we become a fit church with fit leaders? If Village Bible Church desires to have fit church leadership, we must pursue:

1. The Correct Form of Church Leadership

There are many examples from other churches and organizations on how to run a church. We could choose a pope, give him vestments and a cool hat, put him in a car and say, "Here is our leader." We could let everyone be part of leadership. "We are part of a democracy. Everyone's vote matters. Everyone is in charge of himself." There is the example of the business world: "We don't need a group of shepherds; we need a group of trustees, board members, CEO's and CFO's." Our church could follow the example of a sports organization, looking for people with potential. We could evaluate their stats and pick our pastor based on the person with superstar potential, or we could simply choose our good friend.

While each of these models has valuable aspects, the Bible is clear on what church leadership should look like. Paul has left Titus on the island of Crete for one purpose: to put what remained into order (Titus 1:5). That phrase is from the Greek word that literally means, "to set straight, to complete unfinished reforms." This phrase was used in the medical field and conveyed the idea of setting broken bones back into place. In fact, we get our words, "orthodontist" and "orthopedist" from this Greek word. An orthodontist sets crooked teeth straight. Likewise, Titus had a crooked church that needed to be straightened out. He had an unhealthy church that needed correction. Does Paul ask Titus to go on evangelistic crusades, build buildings or go on service projects? No. Paul says that the way to fix a crooked church is by establishing powerful and godly leadership.

How do you straighten things out? By appointing "*elders in every town as I directed you*" (Titus 1:5). These men must serve. While church leadership is important, it is a secondary issue. When you get to heaven, God will not ask you, "What kind of government did your church have when you were on earth?" When you stand before God, the only thing that will matter is that you have trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior, bowing the knee to Him. Church leadership isn't an issue of heaven and hell. This is an issue of health.

One of the most important things that Village Bible Church has done in the last ten years is devote a lot of time and attention to its leadership. Maybe you are new to the church and are thinking, "Who cares about what the elders should do? Who cares what we should look for? I'm new; I just like the ministry here." Our church has done some heavy lifting in its church leadership to make Village Bible Church what it is today. If you don't have healthy leaders, you will never have a healthy church. What is our view of church leadership?

The Bible establishes that while Jesus Christ is the only head of the church, each local church is to be led by a group of spiritually mature men called elders who are gifted to teach and shepherd the flock under their care. They are given charge to lead in matters of doctrine, direction and discipline.

Let me expound on this statement. We don't have a head pastor because we believe that "Jesus Christ is the only head of the church." We don't have a pope; Jesus is it. We don't have a super-teacher or superstar pastor. We don't have a figurehead who represents us. Jesus speaks for us at Village Bible Church.

Each local church has its elders "who are gifted to teach and shepherd the flock under their care." How do they do this? Leaders should lead in doctrine, direction and discipline. Turn to 1 Peter 5:1-4.

¹So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ²shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory

Peter gives us three titles that help us understand the roles of an elder. He uses three Greek words which explain that elders must be men of:

Maturity

The first word is *presbuteros*. In the New Testament world, *presbuteroi* were men of maturity. This maturity was the kind of wisdom and deference that usually came with gray hair. This didn't have to be a literal description. It described a man who was dignified, stable and whom people would willingly follow. *Presbuteroi* modeled life for other people. Elders need to be mature in age and in how they live their lives.

Peter was an apostle. However, when he addressed elders in 1 Peter 5:1-4, he did not speak to them as apostles, but as fellow elders. This demonstrated the transition from the Apostolic Age to the Church Age. The church would be led, not by the Twelve Apostles, but by elders.

Responsibility

The job of the elders was the job of a shepherd: *"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you."* This is the Greek word, *"poimainō."* We get the English word "pastor" from this. It means, "one who cares for the needs of others, to nourish, to feed and supply." An elder's job is to be a pastor. When we use the term "elder" at Village Bible Church, it is interchangeable with the term "pastor." At our church we don't have lay elders and staff pastors; we have lay pastors and staff pastors. Throughout Scripture these terms are synonymous. The elders job is to pastor, or shepherd, the people.

Authority

Peter states that elders are pastors by *"exercising oversight."* This is the Greek word, *"episkopoi."* We get the word "episcopal" from it and it means, "to look upon, inspect, oversee, to look after, to rule over."

These three things encapsulate the role of an elder. There is a lot of debate on what elders should look like. Most would agree that elders should be mature. No one wants a junior high student leading the church. Responsibility and authority are also vital to the role of an elder because:

- **Responsibility – Authority = Anarchy.** If your elders are a group of individuals who have responsibility to take care of your needs, but you choose to disregard their direction, everyone will do what is right in their own eyes (Proverbs 12:15, 21:2). As a parent, your job is to provide your children with shelter, food, clothing and other daily needs. That is pastoring--shepherding--your child well. However, if your children can rebel and disregard your instruction, there will be anarchy in the home. Your authority is hollow and worthless. In the church, if there is no balance between responsibility and authority, there will be anarchy. They will depend on the pastor to provide, but they will shirk any discipline from authority. Jesus was an example of a Leader Who had both authority and responsibility. In Matthew 2:3-6, the scribes and chief priests remind Herod of this Messianic prophesy, *"And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."* Jesus would be the Ruler of His people and shepherd His people. Jesus didn't come to say, "I'll feed you, take care of you, heal you, exorcise demons from you, but I won't tell you how to live." Most unbelievers want what Jesus provides, but they don't want the authority that comes with it. They live lives of anarchy.
- **Authority – Responsibility = Tyranny.** If your leaders have authority, but don't take care of you, they will pompously rule their leadership over you. They will pontificate. If this is all you do as a parent, your children will never know that you love them. The same is true for church leaders. Leaders become nothing but unloving dictators. Jesus could have come and only exercised His authority--overturning tables, casting out demons, throwing people against walls, etc. He is the ultimate Authority. Instead Jesus says, "Even though the Gentiles lead like this, I haven't. I came to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). When Jesus saw people, He saw them as helpless and harassed sheep without a shepherd. He loved them, cared for them and was filled with compassion for them. Elders must have authority, but if they don't lovingly shepherd then they are nothing but tyrants.
- **Responsibility + Authority = Stability.** Do you want a stable, secure and safe church? Then you need elders who have authority. When they say something, people follow them. In addition to this, they love, care for and minister to the people. People's needs are important to them. When this kind of authority and responsibility takes place, you will have a stable church.

Elders will be held accountable before God. God will ask the leaders of His church, "How responsible were you for My sheep? Did you care for them? Did you minister to their needs? Did you direct, oversee, lead and guide? Even when it was difficult, did you discipline them? Did you instruct them in holiness? Did you help them follow My commands? Was My church stable?"

2. Those with a Consuming Call from God

Paul calls Titus to, *"appoint elders in every town as I directed you"* (Titus 1:5). Titus went out through Crete and appointed elders, making sure that they understand the people's affairs. Titus appointed elders (plural) in every town (singular). Titus didn't just put a random man in a position to lead as CEO. Titus sought a group of men who met the right criteria, who had a single calling,

and he placed them in one particular church. At Village Bible Church we believe that elders ought to serve on a team. We believe that a church cannot have one single elder, but must always have a plurality of elders serving the flock.

What does this consuming call look like?

A desire to serve

Elders must have the desire to serve. First Timothy 3:1 states, *"If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task."* This word for aspires means, "to stretch out oneself in order to take hold of something." The word "aspire" conveys the idea of a man longing for his wife. That type of longing isn't wrong. It is a good, proper and right desire. Likewise, men who desire to be an elder want a noble thing. If a man desires to be an overseer, we don't discourage it.

A heartfelt devotion to the task

Years ago when I was in high school, our church held a difficult meeting. During the question and answer portion, a man got up and said, "I am against what we are doing. I hate what we're doing. You should bring me on as an elder." The elder leading the meeting asked him why he wanted to be an elder. The man replied, "I want to make the decisions." That is not what it means to be an elder.

Howard Hendricks gave this advice to pastors, "If you desire to be a pastor or a shepherd or an elder, then you better like the smell of sheep poop. As a shepherd you will be covered in it all the time." The role of elder is not an easy job. It is not being part of a board of directors who sit up in an ivory tower making decisions. A shepherd must love the sheep. An elder's task will be more about shepherding than about decisions. Our elder meetings are 80% shepherding and 20% making decisions. We meet twice a month as elders and one of those meetings is wholly dedicated to looking through our church directory and asking how our people are doing. How do we show love for these people? How do we meet their needs? Are there areas in their lives where they are struggling? Are they going through trials? We pray for them. This is not a half-hour endeavor. It lasts three or four hours. That group of ten men pray and minister to the flock. If you desire a task, it better be the right task.

A dedication to serve with other elders

Because "elders" is plural, being an elder makes you part of a team. You are part of a group of men who come from different backgrounds and different walks of life. This is the pattern of the New Testament. Why would God want a leadership structure that requires multiple men rather than just one?

God wanted to remind the church that just as He leads us as a Triune God, He wants His church to be lead by a plurality of leaders. While we believe in one God, that one God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is three Persons in One. When we see God as Trinity, we see unity in the midst of diversity. The Father is not like the Son. The Son is not like the Spirit. They are three distinct Persons. God wants a group of diverse men to seek the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3), to lead His people who are diverse to a place of unity. It would be easy for one person to make all the decisions for a church. He would stand unopposed. However, when other people from different generations, backgrounds and life experiences come together, there will be diversity, and unity becomes something beautiful. The elders have a goal: though we are diverse, we process things through the spirit of consensus. Our elders are unified. After long deliberation, we must come to a unified conclusion. An elder cannot be a lone ranger. Every elder must serve with other men whom they love and respect as they serve God and the other members of the church.

3. Those with Christ-like Character

Titus 1:6 describes what an elder looks like. Each of these qualifications is in the present tense. These are things that mark an elder's life. He habitually does them in the present, not just the past. When you look at a candidate for an elder, ask yourself, "Has he shown a pattern of consistency? Can I stand behind him? Can I follow his leadership?"

Morally

Elders need to be above reproach. Paul says this twice, both in Titus 1:6 and Titus 1:7. Sometimes in Greek, when a phrase is at the beginning of the sentence, the writer is emphasizing that phrase. Repeating a word or phrase draws even more attention to its importance. Paul does that here by repeating the need for elders to be above reproach. Leaders must be blameless.

What does it mean to be above reproach? The pattern of life isn't one of perfection, but one without blame. It is a person who has unquestioned integrity. An elder lives his life in such a way that his character is free from accusation or suspicion. If an accusation comes against an elder, his skin is made of Teflon, not Velcro. Things don't stick to him.

An elder's life should be the same at church as it is in the community. He should be the same in public as he is in private. He should be the same in his free time as in the church business meeting. He should be the same on a business trip as with his wife in his home. He should be the same with the kids at church as with his kids in his home. His character is as consistent in his thought life and private life as it is in public. The man must be morally a man of character.

Domestically

His home life is a model for others. Paul says in Titus 1:6, *"If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife..."* What does a "husband of one wife" mean? Village Bible Church affirms that this is about a man's relationship with his wife, not his marital status. If a "husband of one wife" describes a marital status, a few things result:

1. Single men can never become elders. If you think single men shouldn't be elders, remember that Paul himself was a single man.
2. Men who are widowed could no longer serve as elders.
3. As long as a man is married, he can treat his wife however he wants. He could be a brutal husband and father as long as he has a wife and kids.

However, the Greek says that an elder is a "one-woman man." The idea is not about marital status, but that he is faithful to the woman who is in his life. Can a divorced man be an elder at Village Bible Church? Yes. It is possible. In his second marriage, has he shown that he is devoted to his wife? Because divorce brings a lot of pain and sorrow, has that divorce been dealt with in a God-honoring way? Are there loose ends? Is there anything that could be used to accuse that divorcee? A divorced man could possibly serve as an elder as long as he is devoted to his wife and has shown a pattern of what Biblical marriage looks like.

Also in Titus 1:6, an elder's *"children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination."* A man must not only be an example in his marriage, but also in his family. Does he have to have kids? No. Paul doesn't have any children. However, a man must be an example. Both the ESV and the NIV translate this the same way and I think they are wrong because of what the original language says. These translations say that his children must believe. The word here is *pistos*. If you translate this phrase that way, it means that his children must be believers. It puts an unbiblical responsibility on someone else for the salvation of another. You will not be held responsible for the salvation of another. When you stand before God, you will stand before God by yourself.

The word *pistos* means "belief" or "faith" and it is used as an adjective here. The children are faithful, not faith-filled. What does that mean? Paul says that an elder's children are not open to the accusation of debauchery or insubordination. This idea of being faithful is tied to the idea of rebellion. Therefore, an elder can serve as long as his children are faithful to his leading as a father. They aren't insubordinate or reckless. As a parent, you may honor and serve God to the best of your ability, yet have a child who rejects God and walks away from the faith. An elder doesn't force his children to believe, but leads them in a way where he demonstrates the fear and admonition of the Lord. As an elder, your children might not be at a place where they can accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. You do not know if all of your children will be saved.

Socially

There are things that elders should and should not be doing. As God's steward, an overseer must be above reproach:

- He cannot be arrogant
- He cannot be quick tempered
- He cannot be a drunkard
- He cannot be violent
- He cannot be greedy for gain

What should an elder look like?

- Hospitable (literally this word means "a lover of strangers")
- A lover of good things
- Self-controlled

- Upright
- Holy
- Disciplined

Why? In 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Paul tells Timothy that an elder's job is a spiritual one. They are overseeing the house of the Lord. When there is a spiritual job, there must be a spiritually blameless man.

4. Those Who Care for the Flock and are Capable of Teaching Others

Elders must teach and care for the flock. What does that mean? Elders must be men who are:

Engaged in people's lives

Beware of an elder who has no time for other people. An elder's job is to serve the people under his care. This involves close proximity to the sheep. This should not be drudgery. They consider the needs of others important.

Encouraging and exhorting others

Based on 1 Thessalonians 1:12-15, elders must do two things:

1. **Hug.** They must physically, emotionally and spiritually love on people. They must minister to them. Elders ought to be approachable. The sheep should know that their elders genuinely care for and about them. They should model the love Jesus has for His sheep.
2. **Bug.** While they care, they must be willing to confront people in their sin, even when it's difficult. They must be people whom the sheep trust to come and lovingly point out areas of sin in their lives. Leaders are called to present the church as a radiant bride to the Savior, and so corrective discipline must take place. An elder must be a man of courage in order to speak difficult truths in love. This isn't easy or fun. He bugs because God tells him to do so.

How does a man get to that point?

Established in doctrine

In Titus 1:9, elders must be established in their doctrine. *"He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught."* This means that elders must be men of the Word, not just in knowledge, but in application. There are many denominations that throw God's Word out the door and into the garbage can. In every one of those churches, the leadership has given itself over to the world instead of the Word of God. Leaders will always lead the church into holiness or ungodliness. They will do one or the other.

Educating others in truth

Elders educate people in the truth, so that those people in turn may educate still more. In Titus 1:9b it says, *"So that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."* The job of an elder is not to save every person and their friends. It is not your job to bring your friends to church so that the pastor can save them. The role of the elders is to equip you so that you can win the lost. They equip you so that you can do the works of service. Ephesians 4:1, *"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called."*

Elders aren't the only evangelists. They equip, shepherd and lead so that the people of God can do the work of the ministry. Elders model evangelism. This education involves two things:

1. Reminding the sheep of who they are in Christ
2. Refuting false teaching

The job of an elder is not only telling the congregation what the Word of God says, but also reminding them of the false teaching out in the world. There will be times when elders will warn others to stop listening and reading things that promote false teaching. When they point these things out, listen to them. Their job is to refute false teaching.

Elders, do your job. Do it well. Do it when it's unpopular. Do it when it's difficult. Be men of courage. Be men of conviction. Be men of the Word of God. Do what you've been called to do because you will stand before Jesus and you will give an account (Hebrews 13:17). Remember Ezekiel 34:4. You are called to strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind the wounded, bring back the strays and search for the lost. Do this, and do this well, in the grace that God gives you.

Men who desire to be elders someday desire a noble thing. This church needs more elders. We need men who are called, not to fill a spot on a committee, but called to be pastors and shepherds. Let an elder know of your interest in this calling.

Congregation, respect your leaders. They are here so that the Word may be preached and so that the church may be a place of order. Submit to their godly leadership. This is not a cult. When your leaders lead biblically, you must obey. They follow the Word of God. Don't make their job difficult. Hebrews says, make their job a joy (Hebrews 13:17).

Some of you might sit through this sermon thinking, "I'm never going to be an elder. I don't need to listen to this." However, if you want to be part of a healthy church, this information is paramount. You need to know how to follow and choose good leaders. The church may need to confront a pastor or an elder, calling them out of their role.

Church members, you can live out these same qualifications (apart from the role of teaching). Your marriage is important. Be a husband of one wife. Be a wife of one husband. Be people who raise your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Don't be drunkards, slanderers or people given to fits of anger. Be hospitable. Be lovers of good, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined people. These are things for which every single person should strive.

While the role of elder is difficult, it is a joy to serve. Pray for your elders. Pray that God would give us the grace to be healthy, not just today, but in the generations to come.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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