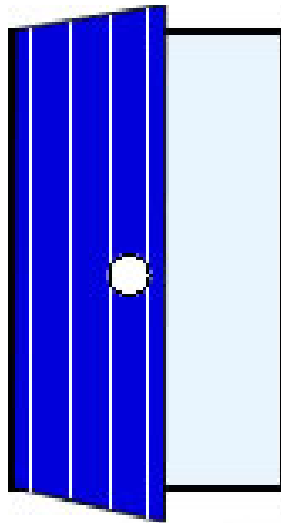


# **BIBLE STUDIES**



**Mill Lane Chapel**

**Titus**

### 3) “For this cause left I thee in Crete”

#### Read Chapter 1: 5-9

We have already noticed that Titus Chapter 1 can be divided in the following way: **(1)** the commission of Paul (vv1-4); **(2)** the charge to Titus (vv5-9); **(3)** the circumstances in Crete (vv10-16)

#### 1) THE COMMISSION OF PAUL, vv1-4

In introducing the letter, Paul's refers to his calling as “a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ”, and to his specific ministry: “according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness” (v1). He acknowledges his part in the eternal purpose of God: “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; but hath in these last days manifested his word through preaching, which is committed **unto me** according to the commandment of God our Saviour” (vv2-3). This brings us to:

#### 2) THE CHARGE TO TITUS, vv5-9

“For this cause left I thee in Crete...” (v5). Apart from references to Crete in Acts 2: 11 (amongst others on the day of Pentecost, “Cretes and Arabians heard the apostles speak in their “tongues, the wonderful works of God”) and Acts 27: 7-13, 21, the island is only mentioned in Titus. Whilst Paul certainly sailed past the island *en route* to Rome, there is no record that he actually went ashore. Hence the suggestion that he refers here to a visit made between his first and second imprisonments at Rome.

“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” (v5). We should note:

**i) The assemblies were formed of unpretentious people.** They were once in the category described in v12: “One of themselves, even a prophet of their own said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies”. Compare 1 Cor. 6: 11, “And such (as described in vv9-10) were some of you...” Compare 1 Sam. 22: 2, “And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him (David at Adullam): and he became a captain over them”. The ‘raw material’ may look unpretentious, but there is potential for God in every believer.

**ii) The assemblies were established in unpromising territory.** In fact, they were established in spiritually hostile territory. Just think about the Cretans again! These churches were certainly located in most unfavourable circumstances! Compare Corinth: “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...” The expression, “church of God which is at Corinth”, is a contradiction in terms. But God can do what men cannot do. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one” (Job 14: 4).

God does not remove believers from their undesirable environment, but leaves them there so that they may “be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life....” (Phil. 2: 15-16).

*iii) The assemblies were to be places of divine order.* “That thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting...” The expression “the things that are wanting” implies ‘setting right what was defective’, probably restoring ‘what had fallen into disorder since the apostle had laboured in Crete’ (W.E.Vine). Compare 1 Cor. 14: 40, “Let all things be done decently and in order”. Needless to say, Paul refers here to **God’s** arrangements. The cry, “Let us make us a king to judge us like all **the nations**” (1 Sam. 8: 5), is endemic today.

*iv) The assemblies were ordered by apostolic authority.* “And ordain elders in every city, as **I had appointed thee**”. The words “appointed thee” mean ‘gave thee charge’. Compare 1 Cor. 14: 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”.

We must now consider in more detail the question of elders. Titus was to “ordain elders in every city”. The island had evidently been thoroughly evangelised, and assemblies had been planted in a number of places.

It has been rightly said that an assembly can have ‘being’ without elders, but it cannot have ‘well-being’ without them. Future problems must inevitably arise if this matter is not carefully addressed at the onset of assembly life. In this connection, we must pay attention to the following:

#### **A) THEIR DESCRIPTION, vv5 & 7**

“Ordain **elders** in every city” (v5); “For a **bishop** must be blameless” (v7). So we have “elders” (v5) on one hand and ‘bishops’ (v7) on the other. As we will see, the two terms refer to the same people, and this is confirmed elsewhere in the New Testament.

##### **a) “Elders”**

The word “elder” translates the Greek word *‘presbuteros’*, and means, literally, ‘an old man.’ But don’t get too alarmed at this juncture! There are in fact three passages where the word “bishop” or “overseer” (*episkopos*, or a kindred word), and “elder” (*presbuteros*), occur together: **(i)** Titus 1: 5-7, “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.....For a **bishop** must be blameless.” Notice that Paul does not say ‘ordain elders in every **assembly**’ here, but in “every **city**.” Perhaps this stresses their standing in the community. **(ii)** Acts 20: 17-28, “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the **elders** of the church (so they were a recognised body of people: it wasn’t a case of calling ‘a brethren’s meeting’). And when they were come to him, he said unto them.....Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the

which (in the which) the Holy Ghost hath made you **overseers**." (iii) 1 Pet.5: 1-2, "The **elders** which are among you I exhort.....feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the **oversight** thereof." The word "oversight" ('*episkopeo*') describes the work rather than the person ('*episkopos*'), but the point is clear. The two words, bishop and elder, describe the same person. It is also worth mentioning at this juncture that the body of elders is called "**the presbytery**" (*presbuterion*) in 1 Tim. 4: 14.

### **b) "Bishops"**

Even a most cursory reading of the relevant passages will show that in the New Testament, "bishops" are far removed from the ecclesiastical dignitaries which abound in Christendom. The Authorised Version does, however, use language which requires some investigation.

As we have noticed, the word "bishop" in our Authorised Version translates the Greek '*episkopos*.' It is made up of '*epi*', over, and '*skopeo*', to look or watch. So, literally translated, the word means 'overseer.' Now let's look at the various places in the New Testament where '*episkopos*' occurs: (i) Philippians 1: 1, "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the **bishops** and deacons." (ii) 1 Tim. 3: 1. "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a **bishop**, he desireth a good work". (iii) 1 Tim. 3: 2, "A **bishop** then must be blameless." (iv) Titus 1: 7, "For a **bishop** must be blameless, as the steward of God." (v) Acts 20: 17 & 28, "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them....Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which ('in the which', JND) the Holy Ghost hath made you **overseers**."

These four passages yield at least four immediate lessons, all of which simply consist in noting what the Scriptures say for themselves:

i) In New Testament times there was a plurality of "bishops" in local churches. See, for example, Phil.1: 1. Not one bishop presiding over a number of churches, but a plurality of bishops in one church. Proverbs 11: 14 gives at least one reason for this: "Where no counsel is, the people fall: **but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety**." See also 15: 22 and 24: 6.

ii) The word "bishop" or "bishops" in the first three references above (Phil. 1: 1; 1 Tim. 3: 1-2; Titus 1: 6-7) becomes "overseers" in the last reference (Acts 20: 28). The lack of uniformity in the Authorised Version evidently arises from the fact that the translators were charged, amongst other things, to keep 'the old ecclesiastical words.'

iii) The "overseers" in Acts 20: 28 are not "over" the flock in any hierarchical sense, but 'in' the flock. It is not a case of 'clergy and laity.'

iv) The "overseers" are not appointed by democratic processes, but by the Holy Spirit. This is very important, and we will refer to this later.

The word '*episkopos*' also occurs in 1 Pet. 2: 25 with reference to the Lord Jesus Himself: "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned into the Shepherd and **Bishop** of your souls".

We must now consider the relationship between the two words “elder” and “bishop” (or “overseer”):

### **c) Overseers and Elders**

The use of two words to describe the same men is certainly not mere duplication. The terms are not synonymous: **(i)** The word '**overseer**' describes the man's **ministry**. It stresses his **duty**. Notice in this connection that the word "visitation" in Luke 19: 44 and 1 Pet. 2: 12, is '**episkope**.' So an overseer is someone who visits! The word "visit" in the New Testament comes from a word associated with '**episkopeo**.' See W.E.Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. **(ii)** The word '**elder**' describes the man's **maturity**: it stresses his **dignity**. An elder is not necessarily an old man in years: but he must be a man with experience and maturity. He must not be "a novice" (meaning, a new convert), (1 Tim. 3: 6).

### **B) THEIR APPOINTMENT, vv5**

They are certainly appointed, but not by a church synod, nor by 'a show of hands!' Read Acts 20: 28 again: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which ('in the which') **the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.**" So they are appointed and equipped by the Holy Spirit. But weren't they chosen by the apostles? See, for example, Acts 14. Paul and Barnabas were travelling home after completing the outward leg of the first missionary journey. "And when they had preached the gospel to that city (Derbe), and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples...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" (vv21-23). The word "ordained" simply means 'chosen', literally, 'to stretch out the hand.' But how did they know who to choose? The answer is quite simple: they chose those men who exhibited the necessary qualifications. These qualifications were later listed in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1. Paul and Barnabas were able to discern fitness for eldership. They were not voted into office, or chosen by some democratic process. Their own lives and ability bore witness to their calling. By the same criteria, local assemblies today can discern fitness for eldership.

This is very important. It is not a case of choosing a brother 'to fill the gap.' Or choosing a brother who 'would make a good elder.' Or choosing a brother who, because of professional qualifications, would 'be an asset on the oversight.' It is a case of recognising a brother because he is already doing the work, he is already displaying a shepherd heart, and he is already marked by the necessary spiritual and moral qualities. All too often, a brother is asked to 'join the oversight', and is then expected to commence the work of overseership. The correct order is the exact reverse: a brother is already acting as an overseer, and is therefore recognised by the assembly for what he is actually doing.

In Titus 1, Titus was able to discern the men suitable for eldership in the assemblies because he was aware of the necessary qualifications (see vv6-9). This brings us to:

### C) THEIR QUALIFICATIONS, vv6-9

i) **In domestic life.** “If any be blameless (not ‘sinless’), the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot, or unruly” (v6). “Blameless” has the idea of ‘that which cannot be called into account’. “The husband of one wife” (see also 1 Tim 3: 5) has been defined as a ‘one woman man’. “Having faithful children not accused of riot (wastefulness) or unruly (not subject to rule)” does not necessarily mean believing children, but children who have been brought up to behave properly.

ii) **In personal life. Negative features** are listed first. “For a bishop must be blameless (as in v6), as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre” (v7). Note the phrase “steward of God”. Unlike shepherding, which emphasises their relation to the flock, stewardship emphasises their relation to God. See also Acts 20: 28 (the assembly is called “the church of God”); 1 Pet. 5: 2 (“feed the flock of God”); Heb.13: 17 (an elder must “give account”). These verses also emphasise the responsibility of the overseers. They are responsible to **the Lord**. Hence, “For a bishop (overseer) must be blameless, as **the steward of God**” (v7). An elder is **not** responsible **to** the flock, but he **is** responsible **for** the flock.

“**Not** self-willed”. JND has ‘headstrong’. This means, basically, ‘not self-pleasing’. Not arrogant, asserting their own will. The necessity for careful avoidance of this amongst elders. They are to remember that it is God’s assembly, and not the place for elders to do as they please. As we have already noted, an elder is “the steward of God”. Compare 1 Pet. 5: 3. “**Not** soon angry”. JND has ‘not passionate’. It means ‘not quick-tempered’. Compare James 1: 19. “**Not** given to wine”. The necessity for this will be obvious. This was Noah’s downfall. See Gen 9: 21. “**No** striker” means ‘no brawler’. “**Not** given to filthy lucre” or ‘base gain’. See also v11, “for filthy lucre’s sake”. This was “the error of Balaam” (Jude v11).

**Positive features** follow: “but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate” (v8). “A lover of hospitality”, meaning ‘hospitable’, literally ‘lover of strangers’. A lovely example occurs in 2 Kings 4: 8-10. “A lover of good men” meaning ‘a lover of goodness.’ “Sober” (*sophron*) means of a ‘sound mind’. “Just” is most important. ‘The overseer must be upright in his dealings with men; a failure in righteousness would weaken his authority’ (D.E.West). Job was “an upright man” (Job 1: 8; 2: 3). “Holy” translates *hosios*: ‘More than the thought of holiness is in view, it includes the idea of being gracious, as well as unpolluted’ (D.E.West) “Temperate” (*enkrates*, not *nephalios*) means exercising self-control.

### D) THEIR WORK, v9

“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”.

Let's say straight away, that overseers or elders are people who work. They are not non-executive directors: in fact, they are more like working-directors, although the word 'director' is not really suitable at all! Paul put it like this: “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which **labour** among you, and



are over you ('take the lead among you', JND) in the Lord, and admonish you" (1 Thess. 5: 12).

Their work can be summed up by the following: "If a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he **take care of the church of God**" (1 Tim.3: 5). If you want to find out what this means, turn up Luke 10: 33-35. Yes, the 'Good Samaritan!' "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and **took care of him**. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, **Take care of him**". The words are exactly the same. So there's no doubt about the work. It is caring for people, and especially when they've taken some hard knocks. It is a work of tending as well as feeding.

The Lord Jesus is the perfect example to every elder. Read John 10: like the Good Shepherd, "he calleth his sheep by name and leadeth them out" (v3); "they know his voice" (v4); through him, they "find pasture" (v9); he "giveth his life for the sheep" (v11): compare 1 John 3: 16; he can say, "I...know my sheep" (v14). Their reward is described in 1 Pet. 5: 4.

But here, in Titus 1: 9, it is the preservation of the Lord's people that is particularly stressed. "holding fast the faithful word". (The word *logos* here is the opposite of *mythos*. Unlike the uncertainties of human wisdom and logic, the word of God is thoroughly reliable. There is no need to say more!). The overseer must hold fast the faithful word **himself**. The words "hold fast" mean 'hold firm' or 'cleave to'. The word "faithful" means 'to be trusted...reliable'. As opposed to v14, "not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men". The words, "as he hath been taught", mean 'according to the doctrine taught'. The words "that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers (those who contradict and oppose)" are elsewhere rendered, 'that he may be able both to encourage by sound teaching and refute gainsayers' (JND). Very clearly, a man will not be able to use the word of God effectively unless he holds it fast himself!

So **(i)** doctrine exhorts or encourages the saints; **(ii)** doctrine refutes the gainsayers. This is most important. Our great bulwark against error is to teach and maintain the truth. As every lawn expert will tell you, the best way to ensure that weeds and moss do not flourish is to see to it that the grass is growing so well that there is no room for weed seeds and moss spores! Make sure that the right things are flourishing, and the wrong things just won't gain a foothold!

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