

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Stewards

## What the Church Needs Now-Part 3

### *Titus 1:7*

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the author of Sherlock Holmes decided on one occasion to pull a practical joke on a dozen close friends and prominent business associates. He sent them all the same telegram, anonymously, which simply announced, “All is discovered!” Without ever intending to do so, he ended up creating quite a scandal because within 48 hours, half of the recipients of his telegram had mysteriously left the country without a word.

This isn’t a new problem or challenge.

Diogenes, the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. cynic and philosopher was known to walk around Athens with a lantern burning brightly and when asked why, he would explain that he was simply looking for an honest man and he was having a hard time finding one.

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of Moody Church and a prolific author, wrote in his little volume entitled, *The Integrity Crisis*, and I quote, “The church has grown accustomed to hearing people question the gospel simply because the message seems foolish; but today the situation is embarrassingly reversed, for now the messenger is suspect.”<sup>i</sup>

In other words, show me an honest servant leader.

The reason this matters to the church is fairly obvious. A cynical world today is basically looking for the same thing. And they’re asking the same questions, “Why should we listen to the church? How do we know you’re telling the truth? Do you really believe that stuff yourself? And if you do, why aren’t you and your leaders living it out?”

Can the church be that institution today worthy of being trusted?”

Paul the Apostle would believe and teach that the solution begins with leaders holding a spiritual office who are submissive to the Holy Spirit.

One of the most critical questions to ask and answer is, who’s leading the church? And what exactly qualified them to lead?

In his commentary, *Insights on the Book of Titus*, Chuck Swindoll wrote that Paul demanded leaders to be men of character, regardless of their age, their wealth, their experience, their power or their position. Leaders must demonstrate proven Christian maturity.<sup>ii</sup>

I remember a leading Christian statesman coming to Colonial several years ago. He was a pastor and Christian leader so well known that if I told you what he did you might figure out who he is; he’s with the Lord now and I don’t want to disparage him in any way.

On one occasion when he was visiting, I was showing him around Cary – our church was young and we were looking for land and we needed money to build our first building. He said, rather matter of factly, “What you need to do is put well know, wealthy men on your board. Their influence and financial resources will provide for you to do what you need to do.”

While I thanked him for his advice, something in my heart said, “I don’t know about that . . .” you don’t find business connections and financial portfolios in the biblical list of qualifications for an elder or church leader.

Several years later, long after this gentleman had resigned in his old age, a scandal arrested the attention of that city where he pastored. The chairman of his church board was a prestigious banker and landowner died . . . he had chaired the board for decades. He along with his wife were involved in an accident and killed. I learned that their funeral was well attended and very elaborate; their death impacted thousands of people.

But the news that came out a few months later impacted that city in an entirely different way. When this man’s will was probated by the court, a young woman in her 20’s showed up.

The family of course wanted to know who she was, and she claimed to be the deceased man’s illegitimate daughter. She had all the proof she needed that he had been secretly providing for her

all those years – in the very same town. And she had all the proof she needed.

The family, the church, the ministries, and most importantly, the name and cause of Christ was sullied as the news spread throughout the community.

What's more, all the major decisions this man had made were now in question.

Now that doesn't mean a banker can't be an elder; that a wealthy or well connected businessman is disqualified to be servant-leader; that wealth is evil or that someone influential in the community has secret or two he's hiding.

No, my point is that choosing leaders according to worldly success might is not the standard provided by God.

As Paul writes to Titus, his young protégé and pastor on the island of Crete, the qualifications you find in chapter 1 have nothing to do with a financial portfolio but a spiritual portfolio.

How much a man earns has nothing to do with whether or not he can lead.

How much he owns doesn't qualify him for oversight.

So what does? Paul continues to spell it out for us . . . you'll notice he writes in *verse 7 of Titus chapter 1, For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward.*

Paul changes the word from presbuteros, or elder in *verse 5*, to episkopos, or bishop, here in *verse 7*.

***The overseer – or the bishop – must be above reproach.***

Paul uses a different term for this officer – he shifts from elder to bishop.

The Catholic Church maintains that a bishop is higher up on the food chain than an elder and thus Paul is now going to give different qualifications for a different, higher office – the office of bishop.

What that does is conveniently separate the bishop in *verse 7* from the qualifications of an elder in *verse 6* where he must be a faithful husband and father, obviously allowed to be married and have children.

They maintain that Paul gives us one list for married elders in the church, qualified in *verse 6*; and then Paul gives us a new list for the office of celibate bishops in *verses 7-9* where there's no reference to a wife or children. And then of course you're off and running up the celibate food chain eventually to cardinals and finally the pope.

The problem with all that tradition and hierarchy is the verse itself. The Bible just gets in the way of all of that. *Verse 7* begins with the little Greek word γαρ – translated *for* – “***for the overseer must be above reproach.***”

In other words, Paul is effectively continuing his thoughts without taking a grammatical breath – he isn't changing the subject.

In fact, grammatically, there's no break in the flow of characteristics.<sup>iii</sup>

He's simply giving additional requirements for the same office along with a little more explanation of what kind of elder/bishop/pastor should hold the office of leadership in the church.

The Apostle Peter, ironically, just so happens to be the biblical writer who uses the terms elder, pastor and bishop in the same text for the same man and the same office (1 Peter 5:2)

And Peter was a married man. At least that would be the clear assumption since Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, we're told in Matthew 8:14. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. I don't know many men who would be willing to have a mother-in-law without getting a wife out of the deal, right?

I'm not going any further with that; except to say that I happen to have had a wonderful mother-in-law who is now in heaven and is probably listening.

As *verse 7* opens, Paul re-emphasizes the categorical characteristic of blamelessness – he repeats it *in verse 7. The overseer who rules over is to be blameless.* Remember from our former study that this doesn't mean a church leader is flawless – no one could then apply, but while he isn't flawless but he must be faithful.

Paul is not demanding perfection, but someone who demonstrates a pattern to be imitated.

First, here in *verse 6*, he must be faithful and worthy of imitation in the **private life** of his marriage and home and now secondly, in verses 7-9 he is to be worthy of imitation in his **public life** and character.

That's the only shift Paul has in mind here in *verse 7*. From private to public.

In fact, Paul adds an interesting word here in this opening phrase – notice *verse 7, he must be above reproach as (what?) as God's steward.*

The word steward comes from – oikonomos – oikos for house and nemo for arranger.<sup>iv</sup>

A steward is the arranger – the keeper of the house.

A steward in Paul's day was most often a slave who had risen through the ranks as someone capable honest and who could be trusted by his master to manage the master's estate.

The steward didn't own his master's estate, he just managed it – he stewarded it.

Like the stewardess on the plane – now called “flight attendant.” She doesn't own the plane, but she manages everything inside the plane – she arranges the plane – on behalf of her employer.

The term “steward” in our English language came from an old Anglo-Saxon word, stig-ward – or literally, keeper of the sty; which meant he was the keeper of, literally, the pigs or the pigsty. I know that doesn't sound all that flattering, but back in the middle ages, this was a critical position of management because the survival of the estate depended upon honest and faithful management of their primary meat supply.<sup>v</sup>

The most famous steward in the Bible is Joseph (Genesis chapter 39) where he was sold into slavery and belonged for a time to Potiphar. He became such a well trusted man that Potiphar placed him as the manager, the steward, of his estate.

This is the idea in the mind of Paul as he writes to Titus – and elder arranges and manages the house of God, so to speak.

Earlier, Paul told Timothy, an elder, ***“In case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household God, which is the church of the living God . . . (1 Timothy 3:15).***

In other words, the church is God's household, and elders/bishops/pastors are God's stewards in that household; which is a reminder that the church belongs to God; it also reminds us that God has given human oversight to elders, who manage the church; they steward His church on His behalf, [accountable to Him] as they fulfill His will as he feeds, leads, trains, counsels, disciplines, guards, encourages and equips the household of God.<sup>vi</sup>

Now I don't know about you, but have you ever left your kids in the care of some babysitter – someone who is about to steward your estate and your children – and you find yourself telling the sitter several things not to do, before you get around to telling them what to do.

Don't do this and don't do that and make sure the kids don't do this and they can't do that . . . in other words, you start with the negatives because you

want their full attention – this stuff is critical – before you get around to the list of positives.

That's exactly what Paul does here.

He gives us five negatives before giving us seven positives.

***Notice verse 7. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain.***

Let me outline these five negative characteristics this way; because an elder/bishop/pastor is managing God's household, he cannot be

1. Blinded by arrogance
2. Controlled by anger
3. Influenced by alcohol
4. Recognized as abusive
5. Driven by affluence

**1. First, an elder can't be blinded by arrogance.**

Paul writes, ***“God's steward is not self-willed.”***

The reason this is first in the list is because it's the exact opposite attitude of a steward.

A steward doesn't do his will . . . he does the will of the master.

A steward doesn't own the household – he's just on loan for a while to manage it.

You wouldn't expect to come home and find out the babysitter used your makeup and painted the living room lime green and gotten rid of the dog.

Unless you said she could, she'd probably not be invited back. This isn't her house, those aren't her clothes and she can't get rid of the dog.

She wasn't brought to your house to do her will.

Now let me add that this word, self-willed comes across as a little more mild to us English readers than Paul intended.

He's actually referring to someone so given over to arrogance and self-serving that he gives off a spirit of entitlement. He doesn't exist for the sake of the church, the church exists for the sake of him.

And in the analogy of that babysitter, this refers to you coming home to find out that she's actually changed the locks,

put all your clothes out on the front porch and changed the name on the mailbox to their own.

This kind of person doesn't walk, he struts.

He's caught up with his own importance . . . he's blinded by his own reflection.

This was the downfall of Satan – given great responsibility as the highest of the created angels – and what did he do – he became blinded in his arrogance so that he said, “I will ascend to heaven – *I will ascend to heaven . . . I will raise my throne above the stars of God . . . I will sit on the mount of assembly . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds . . . I will make myself like the Most High. (Isaiah 14:12-14).*

I will . . . I will . . . I will . . . I will . . . I will.

Satan had great authority . . . he just forgot whose will mattered most.

One author wrote, “An elder never says, ‘This is mine!’ All that he has comes from God. His time, possessions, ambitions, and talents are all loaned to him by the Lord and he must be faithful to use them to honor God and build the church of God.<sup>vii</sup>

Paul says, Titus, make sure you grant power only to those who aren't in love with it.

## **2. Secondly, an elder is not controlled by anger.**

Paul describes it in *verse 7 as quick-tempered.*

Now it's important to understand that Paul is referring to way of life – a habit.

In fact, there are two primary Greek words for anger. One word is thumos (θυμος) and this word refers to anger that quickly blazes up and just as quickly subsides – like throwing straw on a fire.

The second word is orgilos (οργιλος) which is an anger that a man actually nurses to keep warm.<sup>viii</sup>

Paul isn't referring then to someone who has an occasional burst of anger but to a person who has a propensity to anger.<sup>ix</sup>

In other words, they are simply known as angry people. They have an internal inclination toward anger more than any other emotion and they are easily provoked to respond in that way.

The reason this is so critical is simply because working with people provides so many opportunities to get irritated and angry, right?

You served in that classroom; you lead that Bible study; you volunteer to lead in that ministry; you teach that class; you manage that department at work or school; you coach that team and you've got more reasons than anybody else to lose your cool.

So if losing your cool is your default and propensity, everyone loses.

One author wrote that the qualified elder must guard against a spirit of hostility, resentment and anger – even when everything in the church seems to be going in the wrong direction and people are critical or indifferent.<sup>x</sup>

Reminds me of what another author wrote, tongue in cheek – and every leader in here can identify with this. He wrote, being a leader is kinda like running a cemetery – there are a lot of people under you but no one is listening.

So what are you going to do about it?

Consider Jesus Christ, the ultimate model/shepherd. Can you imagine spending three years with Simon Peter, Thomas and Judas in the same class? Even after three years they're debating who's gonna be the greatest in the kingdom.

And Jesus gets up from supper and washes all their feet – including the feet of Judas (*John 13:5*).

He didn't teach them with clenched fists, but with a towel and a basin of water.

He taught them how to respond to the worst offenses by praying as He died on the cross, “*Father forgive them . . . they really don't know what they're doing.*” (*Luke 23:34*)

So it's as if Paul is saying, that's exactly the kind of pattern I want modeled in the church . . . it was modeled first for us by our Master.

An elder can't be blinded by arrogance or controlled by anger.

## **3. Third, an elder can't be influenced by alcohol.**

*Paul writes, a steward of God can't be addicted to wine.*

The word used here carries the idea of being continually alongside wine.

In other words, wine isn't to be his companion.<sup>xi</sup>

If you study the Biblical instruction regarding alcoholic drinks – as we would call them – you'll soon discover that abstinence is not mandated.

In fact, there isn't a verse that states that Christians should abstain from all wine at all times. What you do find are strong exhortations against strong drink and much wine.<sup>xii</sup>

An elder isn't to be one who seems to be perceived as under the influence of wine - which would take quite a bit of effort on his part, by the way.

In fact, what's most often overlooked in this issue is an understanding of what this wine was like in Paul's day. Most people never stop to consider that the wine of the New Testament days isn't the same thing as the wine of Harris Teeter today.

We know from history that wine was basically purified water. Pliny the first century historian referred to wine as eight parts water and one part wine. We have plenty of data from the first century to know that the average mixture was about three to four parts water to one part wine.<sup>xiii</sup>

It was effectively purified water. Which explains why Paul had to tell Timothy to *drink a little wine for his stomach sake (1 Timothy 5:23)*.

In other words, Timothy was so concerned about his reputation as a young elder that he not be viewed in any way as attached to wine or ever under the influence that he swore off on any of it all and began drinking straight water – which obviously wasn't a safe thing to do.

I've been to countries where water isn't safely purified and I've only drunk from bottled water; I brushed my teeth and used bottled water; when I took a shower I closed my eyes and shut my mouth so tightly my lips hurt . . . one drop could change everything.

Timothy, you need fermented wine – water basically cleansed from contamination.

One Bible scholar who studied the making of wine in the first century made the comment that the average first century person would need to drink, twelve eight ounce glasses of wine to get the same amount of alcohol one could get today in one martini.<sup>xiv</sup>

Wine today is comparable to the strong drink of the early centuries which the Bible clearly forbids. Why? Because it so quickly can bring you under its influence and impair your judgment.

What I find personally tragic is that in this age, when we now know that half of the murders, suicides and accidental deaths in America are related to alcohol; that one in four families has some kind of problem with substance abuse; that alcohol is one of the largest health problems in America; that drinking reduces life expectancy, breaks up families, destroys people financially and on and on – why would any elder defend it, but rather instead model a pattern that stays as far away from it as possible?

Add to that the fact Paul and Timothy and Titus had virtually nothing much to drink – we have hundreds of choices which will not impair our

judgment or cause us to hinder our testimony or perhaps even tacitly endorse something that would cause a younger believer to stumble or, as Paul wrote, *“to be ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.” (1 Corinthians 8:9 & 11)*.

Solomon wrote in *Proverbs 31:4-5 It is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire beer (NIV translation for “strong drink”) lest they drink and forget what is decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.*

Timothy was onto something . . . there's your model. It isn't how much you can drink without offending somebody else or maybe needing a ride home, but how far away from it can you stay?

And Paul writes here, *not addicted to wine* – literally, he isn't always drinking – which would imply he can't be the kind of man who's gonna drink 12 eight ounce glasses and more so that he can get that buzz.

I am frankly amazed, and I've watched it happen over the past 5 years or so, how pastors and elders are now bragging about their own breweries in their basements – their own brew. This is the new pastoral badge of liberty and relevance.

One man came to Colonial from another church in our community for one reason – he told me that he was in a church where the men's Bible study typically included drinking beer – from the pastor on down – and he told me he was a recovering alcoholic and found it far too tempting to engage in what they viewed as their personal badge of Christian liberty.

Listen, sometimes our liberty strangles common sense.

You're not going to find that here. For no other reason than that of influencing others toward holy living, our deacons and elders and leaders and teachers are asked to model not how much they can handle but how clean a life can they possibly live.

And it isn't just this issue but gluttony, media choices – certainly pornographic material, sensuality in movies and music, the use of drugs.

People are going to want to excuse all of it and shove all of it into Romans 14 and say, “Listen it's my prerogative and my right and so don't bother me about it.

An elder doesn't think like that. He's thinking, what would be best for the flock. What would keep them from the precipice? What would protect them the most?

It isn't how much of it can we manage, but how far away from as much of it can I stay?

Every father and mother needs to take note . . . what you allow on TV becomes the standard that will be stretched by your children; what you listen to endorses whatever world it comes from; whatever you have in your refrigerator becomes the starting place for them . . . and they'll take it further than you ever dreamed.

For the elder, he must not allow anything to cloud his mind or captivate his senses.

#### **4. Paul goes on to say that an elder cannot be recognized as abusive.**

He writes in *verse 7, not pugnacious*.

This is a word that refers to a 'striker'. In the Apostolic Canons you find this interesting prohibition, and I quote, "We order that the bishop who strikes an erring believer should be dismissed."<sup>xv</sup>

Evidently anyone who got out of order got smacked, literally.

The word came to refer to violence not only in action but in speech. It came to refer to a 'browbeater' – someone who berated and verbally abused others.

This characteristic would become so critically important simply because elders often handle highly emotional conflicts; they get involved in deeply felt doctrinal disagreements; an elder will often be in the middle of tense situations as a referee and often the crowd turns on whom? The referee.

What Paul is saying here is that if the elder is given to respond to abuse with matching abuse – if he is reviled and he reviles back – if he shouts his way through one argument after another – if he berates and belittles others into submission, then he isn't qualified because as a pattern of life he doesn't model Christ's response to reviling and abuse and mistreatment.

One author wrote, if he will treat the sheep roughly and hurt them; if he will in his frustration respond to the sheep with verbal assaults, he cannot be one of Christ's under-shepherds.<sup>xvi</sup>

It's as simple as that.

Another author commented on this text by writing, true spiritual authority has nothing to do with [a vicious tongue] or white knuckles and clenched fists.

<sup>xvii</sup>An elder cannot be one who is, as a pattern of life and character:

1. Blinded by arrogance

2. Controlled by anger
3. Influenced by alcohol
4. Recognized as abusive

#### **5. One more . . . he cannot be driven by affluence**

Paul writes at the end of *verse 7, not fond of sordid gain*.

Paul is referring here to an elder whose life is all about money, no matter how he makes it.

Money dictates his character – it drives his ambitions – it is the subject of most of his conversations so much so that everyone knows that making money is really his chief love in life.

Perhaps this characteristic made the list because the Cretans had a reputation for greed. One Roman poet said that the Cretans were as eager for riches as bees are for honey.<sup>xviii</sup>

It's as if Paul is warning Titus not to choose a Cretan to be an elder – or at least make sure these Christians have the Cretan squeezed out of their soul first.

If they haven't, their ministry will favor the wealthy. They'll be easily bought. They'll make decisions based on money and not ministry.

Their hidden motive for serving in ministry is to fleece the flock instead of feed the flock.

Which is the opposite of the nature of an elder's ministry which is to give . . . to be generous . . . to manage funds for the benefit of others.

In fact the very next phrase in *Titus 1:8* is a direct contrast to greed – and it is *hospitality* – generosity of spirit.

Generosity and giving should be the hallmark of a shepherd's heart.

Is there anyone more generous than Christ our Chief Shepherd? Does He not daily lavish us with His grace?

So His under-shepherds must not be stingy, greedy or shady, but generous and great hearted and giving.

Let's model that in the way we give to Christ and in the way we give to others.

I close with an email I received from a teenager just a few weeks ago . . . I'll leave her name off – I'm sure she didn't expect me to read most of it, but I wanted you to hear how we might even be able to model generosity today.

The subject line read, “My experience regarding a way in which Christians can improve their witness”

You probably don't know who I am but I've been attending Colonial ever since I was a baby and we were in the old building. Now I'm a senior in high school . . . I wanted to tell you about a conversation I had with a co-worker this past Saturday. I work at the El Dorado on Tryon Road on Fridays and Saturdays as a waitress. El Dorado is a good spot for a lot of people to go after church because they have good prices for lunch and it is right next to the church.

I know Colonial isn't the only church that goes there, but I know a lot of Colonial people do. I was talking to a co-worker, and I mentioned how I bet Sunday is a good day to work because it's really crowded from all the people going after church. He told me that in fact it's not because he never receives good tips. And as I'm sure you know, as a waiter/waitress the majority of our salary comes from tips. I remember him very clearly saying, "They go and get blessed by God" and they can't even come here and pay for our service. He claimed that that is the reason he doesn't go to church. (Do I believe this is the only reason? No. There must be something else going on, but nonetheless it is still a bad witness.)

One of the other waitresses called us all freeloaders. The worst is when someone leaves a gospel tract instead of a tip. I think if you want to leave a tract you should leave a really big tip if you want them to actually read it. As I said, I know colonial isn't the only church that goes there. Nonetheless, Colonial is a big church.

You can do what you'd like with this information, keep it to yourself, share with a bible study, whatever. But I wanted to tell you because you could make the biggest difference. In my opinion, Christians should always tip well, especially when they come in their dress clothes on Sunday for lunch because it's obvious that they've just come from church. And if they can't afford to tip well, they should get fast food or eat at home.

Like I said, you can do whatever you decide you want to do with this information.

Thank you – I decided to tell it to several thousand people.

And with that as our closing challenge, let's model Christianity – as a Flock and most certainly as leaders who are 21<sup>st</sup> century stewards of God's household:

- not driven by affluence
- not recognized as abusive
- not influenced by alcohol
- not controlled by anger
- and not blinded by arrogance

Praise God from whom all blessings flow  
Praise Him all creatures here below  
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts;  
Praise Father, son and Holy Ghost.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/4/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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iv W.E. Vines, Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (Thomas Nelson, 1997), p. 1087

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- vi Adapted from John MacArthur, Titus (Moody Press, 1996), p. 35
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