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Welcome

Opening Scripture

Opening Hymn: 620 Sweet is the work, my God, my king

Reading:

Prayer: Adoration and Praise

Main reading: Titus 1:5

Sermon: Honouring Christ-like leaders

Hymn:

Closing Prayer

Close -----

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The audio file is [21\\_01\\_24.mp3](#)

### *Welcome*

■ I have known Bobbie Schipper, a Toylink queen for more than 30 years. In the late eighties some of us singles went over one evening a week to the AEC in Wolverhampton. This was an outreach ministry. Phone books from UAE, Morocco and other Arabic countries had been sought. We spent the evening chatting, writing addresses on envelopes and then filling them with the leaflets in Arabic offering a correspondence course.

Single? Then there is ministry that you can do which you won’t be able to do when married - make the most of it! (BCM prayer letter posting)

■ Those who received the letter were invited to respond to this Bible course, and by God’s grace new converts were evident. Fouzi would then correspond and finally travel to visit them. He would try to link them up, start fledgling churches, look for those able to lead and appoint elders.

Continuing in the pastoral letter to Titus this morning our text is 1:5:

**“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.”** x2 Tit 1:5

### *Pray*

‘I left you in Crete’ - did the Apostle Paul visit Crete? It doesn’t say in Acts though it is notoriously hard to marry up Paul’s journeys to his epistles. One view is that after two years of Roman captivity (Acts 28) there was a short period of freedom and tradition has it that he visited several places to the East including Crete with Titus. Thus **I, I left you in Crete.** BTW they are ‘Cretans’ and not ‘cretins’ as one church member described them!

Paul had laid a good foundation, but it takes time to build. So Titus like Timothy is charged to consolidate and continue the work the Lord had started under Paul, to water where the apostles had planted 1Co 3:6. - and finish what the Lord had begun. *As an army having conquered and moves on - it leaves behind those who will do all this work,* so Paul left Titus on the island of Crete.

... and Titus had to get on with it for time was short, Paul had summoned him to help - Tit 3:12 **“As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there.”**

Just as *Fouzi sought to help those scattered Christians* So in Crete Christians once centered around the synagogues needed help, and nurture, and to be formed into fledgling churches that will become mature churches.

✚ *The Reformation charge against the Pope is that **Jesus is to be the master of his own house!***

So God’s great desire and plan is the appointing of Christ-like under-shepherds over his church.

Paul with his pastoral heart writes to Titus, and why? To what end? **“for the faith of God’s elect”** 1:1 x2 To see the Lord people strong in the Faith.

... And the way the Lord helps his people – is in giving them godly leaders.

At Pentecost there had been those present from Crete Ac 2:11. These Jews and converts to Judaism had been awakened during Peter’s preaching and through repentance and faith in Christ had received the Spirit. Like the Ethiopian with his new found faith they returned with Joy to their country.

Now what? x2 - They need to be nurtured, helped, strengthened, protected, and joined up into local churches, and as God's newly formed Holy people to be bright lamps and shine out the light of the gospel.

That is a huge work. We pray for converts and we are glad if we see one, or two. But a sudden inrush of new believers is a lot of work, is your church up for it? With all their problems new converts need loving patient investm So when Paul left Titus in Crete it wasn't so he could enjoy the sights, or be left wandering around wondering what to do, No. He is there for a **reason**. So to with you or I as Christians, even in the furlough don't waste it, don't slip into holiday mode.

Nor was Titus to act according to his own will or fancy, but according to apostolic instruction. for we read as **I directed you.**"

**For us the ordering of a church is not down to my own 'method, approach'**

One church member voiced concern about how much would change as the church went welcomed a new leader. Nothing - nothing should change! ...If it is being done right! **The Apostles have given us all clear instruction.**

Titus has been given the task to **straighten out** what was unfinished. Part of that was the appointment of elders – who will then carry it on and see it through.

### *The appointing of elders*

**"The reason I left you in Crete was ....to appoint elders, in every town." In every town.**" (Polis) as Nicopolis or Acropolis, Crete was anciently celebrated for the number of its towns/cities. In one passage, Homer ascribes to the island a hundred cities, (*Il* ii.649;) in another, ninety.

In each *politic* they were to establish oversight, elders assigned to groups of believers, most small town initially one congregation, the larger ones more.

Titus is carrying on what Paul had been doing in Asia minor on his first missionary journey. **"Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust."** (Ac 14:23 NIV)

✚ So Timothy and Titus in **appointing elders** continue this vital work - a pattern for all churches - in all places, - at all times.

The laying on of hands is the sign of this appointing. Laying a hand on the head is, **not to check if the chap has a brain as someone said**, but the appointment of authority - by an authority – it's a delegated authority.

We are not going into the qualifications of an elder which follows on, suffice to say the word Elder is Presbuteroi, drop down to v7 and a different word is used: 'Episkopoi' often translated shepherd (footnote says Bishops)

From these words we have the two denominations: Presbyterian / Episcopal This riddle is easily solved for they are used of the same person, it is an easy study: simply put; the overseer as the elder has the authority. And his role in the church? one of shepherding the flock. Leading from the front as the Good shepherd lead. They / we / you - are the Lord's under-shepherds.

There are two offices we see in the Bible the Elder/overseer and the Deacon. How many elders? The bible suggests a plurality of elders.

Is this you think 'top draw' theology that you can better leave to others, No. The writer to the Hebrews (who may well be Paul) puts the laying on of hands as **basic** theology. As teaching goes it is milk not meat, and every Christian should be fully versed in it.

Someone asked the other day "are all elders equal"? Certainly before God... and before others. Jesus speaks of the greatest being the servant of all. There will obviously be levels of maturity displayed, not least between newer and longer serving elders.

- One church leader said he strove to have a 'flat eldership' To which another seasoned pastor replied "you'll need to have a strong leader to maintain that!"

A Pastor holds the office of Elder. So Titus was to ordain such ordinary pastors over the churches. Ever church needs an Elder a leader, at least one. This is the irreducible minimum.

- The Bicycle - Irreducible complexity, without the minimum it ceases to function as a bicycle.
- I have a list of KN churches 2x describe themselves as house churches. Without an elder they are not a church rather a gathering of Christians.

To depart from this is both deluded – and dangerous - as we shall now see.

## What is Elder to be doing?

“**The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished....”**

The word translated **straighten out**, is ἐπιδιορθόω *epidiorthoo*. In the whole Bible it is only found here = bringing order, setting up. AV has **set in order**.

Leaders are to ‘straighten out’. To understand truth and set things in order.

That is why these presbyters or elders are first to be men who *labour in the word and doctrine*. Only then – look at v9 are they able to properly *direct* and care for the churches they have been given charge over; to feed and govern them, and faithfully perform all pastoral work and duty for them.

✚ Those converted at Pentecost and back in Crete were scattered sheep.

They were wonderfully saved – but the wolves were waiting to pounce. V10 points out “**For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, - especially those of the circumcision group.**” Big trouble was coming from persuasive men within the synagogues they attended.

God’s way of helping, strengthening, blessing, governing, ordering his church is through the appointment of elders - Christ-like leaders.

Church leaders must stand firm, **hold firmly v9** to God’s word or else the church will end up ditched. [A picture in the paper a couple of days ago.](#)

- On a country road there is a car facing you lying in the ditch and looking rather sorry for itself. Behind it are two other vehicles neatly in line. When the car skidded on black ice and ditched, the ambulance was sent for - yes that vehicle too slipped and fell in behind. To help them they sent for the fire brigade yes - it too joined the forlorn party.

Remember Paul’s purpose in all this: **for the faith of God’s elect**. A church without a fixed and standing ministry in it – will sooner - or later - veer off.

All through the Bible God used leaders to promote and maintain Godliness amongst His people. Moses, the judges, Samuel and all the prophets, on the return from Exile, Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Malachi, Zechariah.

Remember what happened when Moses was up the mountain? or there were no judges or no prophets? **Wherever there are believers there must be elders**

OK so just what is the Elder - your leader to be doing?

After the Exodus and rescue of God’s people from slavery they came to Mt. Sinai. First things first - they learn how to approach God and to please God.

On the return from Exile the first thing they set up was the altar of sacrifice - the way to approach and please God. It was the reinstatement of the worship of Almighty God. Giving God his right place.

The first thing we say is: **Hallowed be your Name..**

It is Ezra who straightens out, sets in order corporate worship. Lifted up before the people on a platform he reads out aloud the word of God.

The first work of a leader is to lead Christ’s people into God’s presence

**Then it was the altar – now it is the cross. CROSS, sinners, saved, grace,**

Churches without leaders - or poorly lead - will not be cross centered.

They will end up man centered. While the Bible gives liberty in how a church arranges its gatherings – it does not mean we can just do as we want.

The early church tended towards legalism, helped along by the Judaisers.

Today we live in secular age which is ‘casual’, anti-structure, anti-order.

- [Reading our denomination magazine there are churches more akin to Christian social gatherings, café style. seeking to learn from the world.](#)

The church needs to be careful. Freedom to recognise cultural differences does not mean we ignore the clearly given principles of reverence & ‘order’ Satan’s work is to produce disorder with the resulting confusion and chaos. It is a leader’s job to stand against this.

We live in a *careless* age. It’s trendy to have a casual approach. Don’t say it is being ‘spirit led’ No, that is the spirit of the age.

Paul was concerned for the church at Corinth. Just this was happening there. He said **I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be. I fear that there may be quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance - and disorder.** X2 2Co 12:20

That is just what will happen in a church with little or no leadership. God is not a God of disorder. In describing the church together in worship he says **everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.** 1Co 14:40 Or as the AV says **decently and in order** <5010>. the word meaning: arranged, a fixed pattern, observing a fixed time, due or right order, orderly condition.

## Temple

Remember Paul’s purpose? “**for the faith of God’s elect**” 1:1

The task of every leader is the edifying the body of Christ, the perfecting of the saints, and till we all come to complete unity and perfection in Christ.

After the altar they rebuilt the temple. Bad leaders had neglected and destroyed the temple. The good leaders rebuilt it. For example, under the reforming King Joash he **rebuilt the temple of God according to its original design and reinforced it.** 2Ch 24:13...**according to its original design.** – in an orderly manner – as instructed.

The temple in Jerusalem was made of large blocks fitting perfectly together. So we as Christians are those stones being built into this spiritual house.

Those stones were chiselled and smoothed and shaped by 80k stonemasons in the hills of Judea of ... a noisy place! Can you hear the sound ringing through the hills? Churches are noisy places as the work of shaping continues. Is your church a noisy place? Or is a place of peace? Make sure it is not the peace of Sardis - the peace of the cemetery!

Each stone was shaped to fit a large template to make sure that they all perfectly fitted together. So it is that we are all to conform to the template - the likeness of Christ. So that when we all come to mount Zion - where no sound of a chisel is heard, the heavenly Zion - we will fit perfect together.

God is building his house with Christ as the chief cornerstone. It is the work of all church leaders to see that Christians are built together on the foundations of the Apostles and prophets i.e founded on Christ's word.

Much of the letter to Titus is telling him how people are to conduct themselves, so Titus impresses upon the new pastors what is to be expected of older men, older women, young women, young men, and slaves.

See 2:7,8. You can imagine Titus looking at these men squarely in the eye saying: "and how they are to conduct themselves is to be modelled by you"!

- Project Timothy's aim is to strengthen pastors in Uganda. Some remember Gerald Tanner who with others, conduct teaching conferences to equip Pastors to serve their churches. They are in need of teaching. We should pray for them with all the battles they face.

They are in particularly trouble at the moment - How are your church finances during the pandemic? Easy, just tell everyone to set up bank transf

- In Uganda the pastors are having nothing to live on, without people coming to the church they have no income. It is true in many parts of the world. How easy it is for us.

- We must pray for them Project Timothy has been sending money to help. Everything done to help them is recorded and accounted for.

### walls

The next thing they did was the building of the walls around Jerusalem. *Elders are wall builders* x2. Walls demark those inside and out. God's holy people are a separated people. Nehemiah says God's people **"separated themselves from the neighbouring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters"** Ne 10:28

Without walls the church is easily overrun. Elders are to draw lines. This is why having an Elder is a minimum requirement for a church. Elders are to maintain standards and discipline if necessary.

The leaders teaching affirms what Titus says, and what God says: that **grace teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,**" (Tit 2:11-12 NIV)

**There was Joy in worship, Joy with the temple being built joy with the walls being built and there is Joy when we are actively engaged in Mission.**

### A leader is to promote Mission

Lastly the mark of a healthy church is mission. **Your kingdom come.**

Mission needs leading. It is the Elders who spur the church on in its mission

- Autumns BU magazines was entitled *Seeking to listen*, the latest has the heading '*our identity - listening to conversations*' it is full of social Justice issues, gender, disability, climate change, BLM, LGBT inclusion, Celtic Christianity, churches following this are being blown here and there.

The Elders hold the reigns. Good leadership is key to keeping the church focused on what it is called to do. That is its confidence in the gospel and its proclamation. And the work of actively seeking disciples of all nations.

**This requires at all levels, godly, disciplined, clear headed leaders.**

- BEF Dunkirk, return, new recruits, reforming to then return to the battle
- 8<sup>th</sup> in N. Africa, poor leadership Auchinleck > Montgomery, Alan Brooke.

To see progress for God's kingdom, to see Christ's church honouring its head - requires Christ-like leaders. Elders are under-shepherds who need to be godly men, and strong, will you support them? - and pray for them?

**And if you are one of them then may they say of you, as the queen of Sheba said of Solomon; "because the Lord loves his people they have made you their leader"** (1K10)

END