

Elders, 3

Titus 1:8

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, February 24, 2019

We are in the book of Titus. And as you're turning there, I think it's safe to say we would want a legacy like that at our church, wouldn't we? Don't we want people coming here because they know the Word of God is preached and because they know it's being taught here? We don't want them to come just to come. We don't want people to show up just to show up. We want them to do it for those reasons.

A pastor was once talking to a little boy after the service and he told him, "When your father falls asleep in church, you really should wake him up." And the little boy said, "Well, why don't you wake him up? You're the one who put him to sleep?" I think there's something to be said for that. We don't want people falling asleep here, amen? We want them coming here to learn the Word of God.

To say this another way (and we'll tie this into Titus in a moment), we want to see people change, don't we? Don't you want to see people change by the power of God? Is that why you're here today? We want to see them become different. The evangelist Leonard Ravenhill once said, "The great question when you read your Bible is not whether you have been challenged, but whether you have been changed." Listen, friends, the Bible should do more than challenge you or inspire you. It should change you. It should change the way you live, it should change the way you think, it should change everything. And if it doesn't, you need to read it again because you didn't get it the first time. This is a life changing book. It's been said that you can't meet a lion face to face without changing, and you can't read the Bible face to face without changing.

There was a Peanuts cartoon several years ago where Sally, the sister of Charlie Brown, was trying to find something in the Bible, and she couldn't find it. So, finally, she said, "I think I know where it is. It's in the book of Reevaluations." The Bible is a book of reevaluation, right? When you read it, you need to reexamine everything. And I just want to give you a few passages on this. I don't want to spend too much time on this topic because I want to get into the book of Titus, but I think this is important. So, let me point you to a few passages on the subject of change.

Second Corinthians 5:17 - I'll just read this to you. It says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone and behold, new things have come." Paul says, "When you're saved, the old things go away and new things are here." Salvation makes you new, "a new creature," he calls it or "a new creation" - something unlike the world has never seen before. The world can't do that, can it? The world can't make you into a new thing. People try it all the time. They try it through drugs, they try it through therapy, they try it through seminars. It doesn't work. Everything stays the same. It's the same old you, mixed up a different way. When Jesus enters your life, you start over again as a new creation. He gives you a new heart, He gives you a new soul, He gives you a brand-new mind. Galatians 2:20 also says, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Paul says,

“In Christ, I don't even live anymore. I'm so new, I'm so different, I'm not even the same man, because Christ lives in me.”

Some of you have had the experience of getting saved and then running into someone years later who knew you before you were saved, and they don't even recognize you anymore, amen? They didn't even know who you are. You started talking to them ... I ran into my doubles partner several years ago at Shepherd's Conference. He used to coach tennis at the Beverly Hills Tennis Club and he makes a lot of money. (I realized I'm in this for spiritual things when I was talking to him, but he was my doubles partner in college.) And as we got to talk, and he was just being a sincere man, but he just started letting out a string of profanity and I hadn't heard language like that in years. He's just lost. I've been made new by the grace of God, and it changes everything. I live in Christ now. It's a difference that has happened, and he hasn't experienced that. Colossians 3 says,

1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

But the point in all of these verses is that you have changed. If you're a Christian, you're a different person.

And I mention that because I don't think a lot of people are getting this today. Even a lot of professing Christians, I don't think they've changed. They've been challenged but not changed. They've been inspired, but that's about it. They haven't reevaluated things. According to an article in the Vancouver Sun several years ago, the divorce rate among Evangelical Christians in Canada is the same as it is for non-Christians. It's the exact same. That's shameful, isn't it? That's embarrassing. And why is that? Because they haven't changed, not in that area. They look just like the world. You see the same thing when you look at other sins like pornography. Statistics tell us that Christians watch pornography as much as non-Christians do. In fact, in some areas, it may even be worse. Christianity Today wrote an article where they said that in certain areas like the Bible Belt in the United States, the pornography rate is higher than it is in other parts of the country. Why? Because we haven't changed. We're acting like the same old creation. I've lost count of the people I've met who say they're believers and they don't act any different. They don't pray, they don't go to church. They don't share their faith, they don't read their Bibles, they don't take the Lord's Supper. Instead, they lust, they covet, they lie, they gossip, they steal, they act just like the world does. It's like you can live like you're going to hell and get into heaven.

And I bring that up to say that if that's you this morning, I'm not trying to get into your kitchen, but I'm trying to remind you, this is something the Bible knows nothing about. The Bible knows nothing about a relationship with Jesus Christ that doesn't change you. That is foreign to Scripture. Every time Jesus met somebody in the Bible, they changed. They were different. They went in one way, they came out another way. They didn't fall asleep when He preached. This is the thing that changes you. And I mention that because when we look at the book of Titus, this is what we see. We see a people whose lives have changed. This is a whole church that's just different.

If you're joining us for the first time this morning, we're in a series called the "How to Plant a Church" series because that's what the book of Titus is about. It's written to tell us how to plant a church or to get it started. But the main idea (or one of the main ideas behind this) is that you plant a church with change. If the church is going to get started, people are going to have to become different by the power of God. And if you read in chapter 1, Titus 1:4-5, this is a verse we've read a lot as we've gone through this. But it kind of sets the stage for the book. It says, "To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you."

This is who the book was written to. Paul says, "It was written to Titus, my true child in a common faith." That's where you get the name of the book. It's called "the Book of Titus". And he says, "It's written for this reason, so that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city." Those were Titus' instructions. "Set things in order, put them in place, smooth them out" as the word indicates, and "appoint elders," which we'll say a word about here in just a moment.

Verse 5 tells us where this was written to as well. It was written to the people on the island of Crete. I've told you before, Crete was an island off the coast of Greece in the Mediterranean Sea. It was located halfway between Jerusalem and Rome. So, if you drew a line on a map between Jerusalem and Rome, you would go right over the island of Crete. It was stuck in the middle, but it was nothing like them. Crete was a place all of its own. I talked with one of our brothers in the church the other day who spent about a month on the island of Crete and he said, "It's still this way. It's still a very unusual place."

And there's some reasons for this, historically. For one thing, history tells us that bronze was invented on the island, making them a military powerhouse. So, they loved to fight. You go on the island of Crete and it would be very easy to pick a fight. They were just a rowdy group of people. And there was also several types of wine invented on the island, making them pretty rambunctious. People loved to get drunk and fight on this island.

In fact, if you look down in chapter 1:12, you can see a little more insight into the type of people that were there. Verse 12 says, one of themselves, a prophet of their own said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons." That's an interesting verse because Paul says, "Look at what their own people said about them. Look at one of their own prophets said, he said, 'They're liars, beasts and gluttons.'" Most scholars believe this was said by the prophet Epimenides, who is considered to be one of the seven great wise men of the ancient world. He was considered one of the smartest men of days passed. And he was from the island of Crete. And he said, "I can tell you from my personal experience, my people are a bunch of scoundrels. They are a bunch of dirt bags." And Paul writes this letter saying, "But not these Cretans. Not these guys, they've changed."

If you look down in chapter 2:11-12, just giving you some highlights from this book. Chapter 2:11 tells you about the change in these people. It says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men [even the Cretans] instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age." That is a changed life,

amen? They came in a bunch of rowdy, rambunctious Cretans, they came out living sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age.

And the book of Titus tells you what this looks like in the church. It tells you what the change looks like on a macro level. And it starts by talking about leaders because they set the stage for everyone else. If you look back up in chapter 1:5-7, this is how the book starts. It says,

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 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 [in other words, not acting like a Cretan.]

Paul says, "The way you build a church, you start with leaders. And Titus, you have to teach them to live an entirely different life. They have to change. They have to be different."

And just to walk you through this quickly, the word "elder" in verse 5 is *presbyteros*, which simply means "a leader of the church". The idea is that this is a man who leads with maturity and wisdom, which is what the word "elder" implies. And there's other words for this position as well. There's the word *episkopos*, which means "overseer", "someone who oversees the church". You see that down in verse 7. That word "overseer" and the word "elder" are interchangeable, and they refer to the same office. There's also the word *poimen*, from which we get the word "pastor", "shepherd". But all these words refer to the same thing. This is a man who leads the church like a shepherd would. He leads it with maturity and skill.

And we could add that every church in the New Testament had elders. We don't really know of any other model of leadership in the New Testament. This is the only one that we have. And they all had to be qualified, which is what chapter 1 is talking about. You couldn't just take a man and say, "Do you want to be an elder? Okay, you can be an elder. Would you like to do this? Okay, draw straws and you're in." There were things to look for. There were expectations for the office. And Paul says, the first expectation in verse 6 is that a man must be "above reproach" or "not accused of sin" as the word indicates. He can be accused of sin, but the accusation won't stick. This is an innocent man. He lives a godly life.

And he also says later in that verse, he's the husband of one wife or a one-woman man. That's not a reference to his marital state, but to his moral state. This is a sexually pure guy. It would have been very hard to find a man like this on the island of Crete. It would've been very hard to find a man like this in the first century. Sexual morals were very low, and yet Paul tells Titus, "This is the kind of man you're looking for and the kind of man you're going to train up."

He must have children who believe - that's another thing, it says. "Not accused of dissipation or rebellion." He can't be self-righteous or self-willed, addicted to wine and so forth and so on. But the idea in all of this, is that this is a man who needs to change before he takes on office. He needs to live an exemplary sort of life. His marriage can't be in a wreck, his family can't be in a wreck. And Paul says, "You need to train this up in an individual."

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning. And this morning, we're going to look at more of the changes that need to take place in a man's life before he can become an elder. We're going to look at the ways that he needs to be different from the world around him. I don't think I have to tell you this, but there is no better testimony we have for Christ than living a different life. Do you guys get that? Would everybody say amen to that? There's nothing greater you can show the world than being changed, being born again.

It was said that at the trial of James, the apostle, he led a man to the Lord at his trial. And as James was going out to be martyred, this man went with him. He noticed such a change in the apostle, such a difference in this man that he came to Christ at the trial and went off to be beheaded with him. The world needs to see more of that (not the beheadings - let me explain that, a changed life). It needs to see more of a Christian testimony.

And let's talk about what this looks like in the elders. And this is important for all of us, by the way, because these things are expected of everyone in the church. I've told you before, elders are not super Christians, they're just ordinary ones who are exemplary. They live a model life. They don't have a higher standard. They actually have the same standard as everyone else. And so, this should encourage you because this means we all can do this.

But let's talk about this by looking at three general qualifications for an elder in the church. That's our outline for today in Titus 1:8. We're going to look at three more general qualifications for an elder in the church. We looked at a couple of them last week, and this week we're just going to continue the list from what we talked about before. So far, Paul's talked about specific qualifications, being the husband of one wife, having children who believe. But now he's going to spread the net and talk about general ones.

And the first one is this, an elder must be hospitable. If you're taking notes, the first general qualification we're going to look at this morning is that an elder must be hospitable. He must love being around people, is the idea here. He must enjoy their company. I think it goes without saying that if a man has changed, then his relationships with people will change. Does that make sense? If he's different, then the way he interacts with others is going to be different. And to show you this, Paul says in verses 7 through 8, he says, "For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine or pugnacious or fond of sordid gain, but he must be [and here's the word here] hospitable."

Now, just a couple of thoughts on this, there's 17 qualifications for an elder in this passage. 17 of them in all, from verses 7 down to verse 9 or verse 6 to verse 9. And if you look at the list in First Timothy 3 which we read a moment ago and First Peter 5, there's 31 of them. Pastor Larry Nelson has actually written a paper on that if you'd like to read it, but there's 31 qualifications in all.

And I might add that they're all supposed to be part of the same package. In other words, a man has to be all these things before you put him into office. He can't just be 15 or 20 of them. He can't just be not addicted to wine and not quick-tempered, but a real jerk and not as hospitable. They're all supposed to be the same package for this guy. They're intertwined.

And the one Paul mentions here is that an elder must be hospitable. That's the word *philoxenus* in Greek, which comes from two words, *philos* which means "love" and *xenus*, which means "stranger". This is a man who loves strangers. He loves people he's never met before, and everybody really. The word really refer to everybody. This is a guy who loves everybody. Those he's never met, and those he's met for the hundredth time. He is a people person.

There's a saying in certain circles that the church would be great if it wasn't for the people. You guys heard that before? The ministry would be great if it wasn't for all the trouble that they bring. This guy doesn't talk that way. He doesn't even think that way. He's in it for the people. That's why he serves the church. He loves the saints of God.

The Cretans did not love people as a rule of thumb. They weren't very friendly. They were hostile but not hospitable. They liked it when you visited and bought their stuff, and then that's it. "You can leave, thank you very much." But Paul says an elder should be different from that. He doesn't have a "get lost" sticker on his forehead. You guys know what I'm talking about? People that have like a "no trespassing" sign around their neck or "you can get this close, but no further." This guy lets you in to his life.

To say it this way, this is a man who loves people when no one is watching and he loves people when everyone is watching. Some men do well in ministry when everybody's watching, when they're up here on stage or on the pulpit. But then you're shut out of their life after that. This is a guy that opens up his life in every corner.

And let me tell you why this is important for an elder to be hospitable, why this is in here - because more things are caught than taught in the ministry. You guys ever heard that before? More things are caught than taught. Same thing in parenting, right? You guys ever had your kids repeat something and you say, "I don't talk like that, do I?" Right? It's the same way in the ministry. More things are learned by example than instruction. And this is a guy who gets that and he lets you see his example, the hidden parts of his life.

Several years ago, George Barna did a survey where he discovered that most people have no idea what Christians mean when they use phrases like "the Gospel" and "salvation". Your average person on the street doesn't know what we mean when we use the word "repentance" or when we say, "I feel convicted." They don't talk like that. But Barna says, they can recognize a godly life when they see one. They can do that. They can recognize a sincere person. And Paul says, "That's what you're looking for in an elder. You want to see a sincere person. You want to see a man who lives a godly life wherever he goes, and he lets you in on that. He lets you see firsthand. This is a guy who's okay with you hanging out with him when he fixes his car." I don't know how to fix my car, so I can't let you in on that. You can come and watch me read a book. I like to read books. That would be fine. You guys are thinking, "Boy, that would be wonderful. I can't wait. That would be amazing."

But this is a guy who lets you hang out with his family, right? With his kids. He lets you watch the hockey game with him or those kinds of things. And I might add this isn't just an expectation for elders, this is something for everyone in the church. We're all supposed to be doing this together. We're all supposed to be hospitable.

Just a few passages on this, First Peter 4:8-9 says, “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, and be hospitable to one another without complaint.” That's a convicting verse, isn't it? Be hospitable without complaint. Let me tell you something, it's easy to have people over. It's hard to have them over and not complain about it, right? There's a Swahili proverb thing that says, if a visitor stays for three days, give him a bed. If he stays for four days, give him a shovel and put him to work.

It's hard to do this. People come over and they break your stuff, right? They mess up the furniture. We're having care groups this afternoon, so don't look at me like you don't know what I'm talking about. If some of you guys are hosting care groups, they eat all your food, especially your chips. I keep telling my wife, “Don't buy the good stuff when everybody comes over, put it back in the ...” They drink your coffee, they borrow your books and don't return them. And some of you know what I'm talking about. Some of you got my books, they got my stamp in them. But you're not supposed to complain about that.

The author of Hebrews takes us to a higher level. He says in Hebrews 13:1, he says, “Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.” He doesn't go into detail on that, so we don't know how that plays out, but the idea is that this is a serious thing. You could possibly entertain angels without knowing it.

My wife and I had a door to door salesman come by some time ago, a young man. And door to door salesmen, they don't come over when they're supposed to, right? He came over during dinner and I don't know, maybe the guy just looked hungry to me and I invited him over for dinner. And we got to share the Gospel in our own kind of fumbling, simple way with him at dinnertime. I don't think he was an angel, I don't know. But the idea is that you don't know. This is a very important part of the Christian life.

John Wesley said, “The Bible knows nothing of a solitary religion. The Christian life is meant to be lived in community with others.” And that's what this is talking about here. You need to be in community with others. If I went around the room right now, I'm guessing the majority of you would say, this is what led you to the Lord. It wasn't just a book or just a sermon or just something like that. It was a relationship with someone, right? Amen? And so, this is the first qualification we're looking at today. An elder must be relational, he must be hospitable with people.

It leads to a second qualification that goes right along with that. And that is that this man loves what is good. If you're taking notes, the second qualification here is that this man loves what is good. He is hospitable and loves people and is accessible to them. But he also loves the good things that he sees in them. If you read on in verse 7, it says, “For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine or pugnacious or fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, and loving what is good.”

Just tying these two thoughts together. I didn't mention this before, but hospitality was important in the first century, because Christians were on the run due to persecution. They were fleeing for their lives and it wouldn't be unusual for you to get a knock on the door in the middle of the night

from someone who needed to be let in. In other words, they were considered bad by the authorities. Christians were considered scum of the earth. And Paul says, “An elder doesn't see them this way. He sees the good in them.” The phrase “loving what is good”, it's one word in Greek *philagathos* which comes from *philia* – “love” and *agathos* – “good”. It starts off with the same word as the previous one. And elder is to love strangers - *philoxenus*, and he's to love the good – *philagathos*. His life is portrayed by *philia*, love - the loving man.

And the word “good” here could refer to a lot of things. It could refer to doctrine. He loves to see good doctrine in people. He likes it when people come up and repeat good sound theology. He likes good behaviour. He likes it when people do the things they're supposed to do. It could refer to growth. He likes to see good growth in Christ, good thoughts on and on and on. But this is a guy who loves good things. There's a positive tone to his ministry. There's a positive tone to his life. You walk away and you're encouraged by the time you had with him, you're not deflated all the time. I've talked with Christians who say, their leaders just deflate them. They take the wind out of their sails. But it's not this guy. He puts wind back into your sails. That's why he's on the elder board. He wants to see good things happen in the church.

And this is important because some men just like to see bad things. You know what I'm talking about? They like it when people fail. They take a sick delight in pointing out error and problems in the church. Every time you talk to them, it's another problem and another problem and another problem. Every time you speak to them, it's like Eeyore in a thistle patch. Rain cloud over their heads. They're kind of like the policeman who goes around or the judge who says, “Wrong, wrong, wrong” all the time. And Paul says that's not an elder. He builds people up instead of tearing them down. The famous preacher, J. H. Jowett had once said that, “Every sermon should do three things; it should enlighten the mind, arouse the conscience and conquer the will, but it has to do all three things.” It's not the job of a preacher just to go around conquering everything. Beating everybody down so he can stand on top of the pile. We're supposed to love what is good in people.

And I need to mention, like we're doing with all these other ones, this isn't just for elders, this is for all of us. As Christians, we all need to love what is good in other people. We need to be positive and hopeful and encouraging with them, and build them up instead of tearing them down. People should be better off for having known you as a friend, amen? They should be better off for having a relationship with you. We shouldn't go around saying, “Wrong, wrong, wrong,” all the time. It's been said that blowing out someone's candle doesn't make yours shine any brighter. And we all need to remember that. Criticizing someone does not make you shine brighter. It's also been said you shouldn't look down on someone unless you're admiring their shoes. You should look people eye to eye. Listen, friends, there's always problems in the church, amen? Even in the best church, there's always something to point out. There's always error somewhere, and there's a time to talk about that, but it's not every time. And there's a time to point it out, but it's just not every time. We shouldn't make it our favourite topic of discussion. We need to love what is good in others and fan the flames in that. It's not always easy to find the good in people. Some people, there's just so much bad being thrown at you it's hard to find what the Lord is doing in their lives. But when you find it, latch onto it and blow into it, build it up, encourage them in that. Philippians 4:8, it says, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if

there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” Paul knew there were problems in the church. He knew it more than anybody. And he said, “Don’t dwell on that, dwell on the positive things.”

An example of this is our church history tells us that two of the greatest preachers of the Great Awakening. George Whitfield and John Wesley fought horribly over the doctrine of election. They just couldn’t agree on it. And they attacked each other’s position. They did it in sermons, they did it in letters that they wrote back and forth. But when George Whitfield died, someone asked John Wesley, “Do you think you’ll see him in heaven? Do you think you’ll see that man in glory?” And John Wesley said, “No, I don’t think I will because he will be standing too close to Jesus.” He saw the good in him. Even though he disagreed with him, even though they butted heads, John Wesley saw all the good things George Whitfield had done for the Lord and he rejoiced in that. We all need to do that. We could all take a cue from that.

And it leads to one more qualification for an elder in this passage, one more expectation to look at this morning. Just to review these other ones. First, Paul says, an elder must be hospitable, he must love strangers and people, as the word indicates. And second, he must love what is good in them. He must love the good things that he sees in others and be positive about his ministry. This guy shouldn’t go around blowing out people’s candles all the time. But it leads to another qualification that we’ll look at today.

And like I said earlier, there’s more that we could talk about. This doesn’t cover them all. In fact, we’re going very slowly through this list because we would like to expand our elder board sometime in the near future. We’ve talked about this before, but we’re going carefully through this list because we would like to acknowledge these qualities in some of the men of our church and put them in office.

And just to give you an update on that, we’re still waiting for the lawyers to finish going through the Bylaws so we can send them to you. So, we appreciate your patience in this. This is why I haven’t mentioned it to you in just a little while. But we’ve asked the law firm to make sure everything in there is above board and according to law. And as soon as they’re done, we’ll send them to you to get your thoughts and to approve them so we can follow them in appointing elders. So, that’s our process in this. Hopefully, we’ll be getting them to you shortly.

But while we’re waiting on that, we’re going through these elder qualifications, so we know what to look for. And the last one we’re going to look at this morning is this. If you look in verse 7, Paul says an elder needs to be sensible and just. He needs to be hospitable - that’s important. He needs to love what is good. And finally, one more for today, he needs to be sensible and just. Which is another way of saying, he just needs to have a level head on his shoulders. This needs to be a reasonable man. Some men throw reason out the window when they come into church, right? Something about the spiritual nature of things just makes reason go away. Paul says this is a guy who comes to church and keeps his head on his shoulders. And if you read in verse 7, just to read through this again. He says, “For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious or fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good and sensible and just.”

The word sensible here is the Greek word *sophro* which could be translated “self-controlled”. Some of your bibles say “self-control” there or “wise”. And the word “just” means just what it says. It refers to someone who is fair in his leadership. But the idea is that this is a level headed person. This is someone who has control over their emotions. They don't get caught up in the heat of the moment. They don't lose their cool under pressure. Which is important because there's a lot of situations in the church that are very pressure-filled. There's a lot of emotional moments in the church, and this is a guy who can handle it without losing his composure. There's also a lot of situations in the church that are neither black or white. They're kind of gray. There's a little ambiguity, and this is a man who knows how to deal with that too. He can work his way through tricky situations. He doesn't lose the forest through the trees. So many men in ministry really fall apart in a conflict. They come unglued.

I was talking with a brother the other day from another church long way away from here about a crisis situation between two leaders in the church. And he said it would all go away, the crisis would all stop if both men would just apologize. If both men would just say, “I'm sorry.” They've both done something wrong. That's what Paul is talking about here. This is a sensible man. I remember another situation I was involved in where we were working through something and I thought I was right on an issue and so I kept bringing it up. Every time, no matter where we went, in the discussion, I had to go back to the same thing over and over again. And so, one pastor took me aside and he said, “Why are you doing that?” He said, “Does anybody agree with you?” I said, “No.” He said, “Is anybody listening?” I said, “No.” He said, “Then can you just drop it so we can go home and just talk about it some other time?” That's a sensible man. This man was pouring sensibility in to me, into my life.

This was a big issue in Crete, because like I said, these people didn't know how to handle conflict. They fought all the time. They had a bad reputation for arguing. And so Paul says, “Titus, you have to teach him something different. You have to help them change.” And let's be honest, we all need some work in this area, amen? Does anybody feel like they handle conflict really well? You guys are being really quiet. I will take that as a yes. We all struggle with conflict, right? One deacon said, “We only have God-fearing Christians in this church until someone sits in their pew, until someone rubs them the wrong way.” Paul says, “It shouldn't be that way with you. You should be a devout Christian when someone sits in your seat, rubs you the wrong way.”

And just to get you thinking about this, let me ask you some questions - when someone does rub you the wrong way, are you still hospitable then? Do you still invite people over to your home when you're in a disagreement with them? When you're in an argument? You hear the phrase, “Killing it with kindness, not killing them with kindness,” but just killing the situation with kindness. Can you do that with people? Do you still see the good in them when they keep bringing the same thing up over and over again or when you're in the midst of butting heads? Do you still love them through that? Are you still being gracious? Or do you try to blow their candle out?

Friends, this is one of the biggest complaints unbelievers have against Christians, in that we just fight all the time. It's been said, if you get ten Christians in a room, you get 50 different opinions, and it's ruining our witness to Christ. So, we need to reevaluate ourselves here. We need to

change and be different. We can't expect the world to change if we don't change here. We can't expect them to be different if we're not different in this. We need to learn how to love each other through conflict. C. S. Lewis said, "Don't waste time in wondering whether you love your neighbor or not, just do it. Just find someone and love them. Make peace with them and God will be glorified in that."

Alexander Strauch who writes a lot about eldership, he says, "We must remember that many church conflicts are not about the central truths of the Gospel, but about secondary issues, personality clashes and preferences. These can be peacefully resolved by spirit-filled leaders and by the people in the church." He says it this way, "We need to wage peace with each other." Are you waging peace this morning? Two tribes in Africa were once at war with each other and wondering how to stop it. They were trying to find a way to end the conflict. So, they came up with the idea of a "peace child". And the idea is that one of the tribal leaders gave his child to another leader of an opposing tribe to raise as one of his own. And so long as the child was alive, there would be peace. He was the peace child. Friends, we have a peace child among us today. God has given us someone to remind us not to fight. His name is Jesus Christ. He tore down the wall of hostility between us. He tore down the veil that separated us from God and so, we can tear it down with each other and wage peace. Will you do that today? If you have anger in your heart against someone, will you make it right and do that because God has stopped His anger against you in Christ?

We're going to continue the rest of this list next week. We'll finish off the qualifications for an elder. But let's take these to heart. These are things for all of us to learn and adopt into our own lives and to give God glory through that. Let's pray in this.

Father, we do ask for Your mercy in this as we look at these lists of qualifications and these lists of areas where we all need to grow in. The intention this morning was not to beat up on anybody and I pray that it was in no way communicated that way, Father. I look at this passage with confidence, knowing what Christ can do in our lives as a church.

Lord, help us to be hospitable and loving and sensible and just with each other. Help us to honour You in a conflict, whatever that may come on. Lord, may Christ be glorified in this church. May we have a peaceful body this morning through what He has done. May we wage peace with one another in Him. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.