

Necessary & Qualified

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here at Shine Mountain Presbyterian Church and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats but because we're following Jesus together as one community and as we follow Jesus together we've become convinced that there's no one so good they don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his Word. For one week this Sunday we're stepping out of our series in the Gospel of Mark and we're actually going to be looking at the letter that Paul wrote to Titus and we're doing this because this is such a momentous occasion for us as a church that we're getting new elders and so we're just going to pause for a minute and talk about what it means to have these elders leading our church together. This letter is written by Paul near the end of his life and it's one of the only letters in the New Testament that is written not to a church or a group but to an individual.

Paul and Titus have been working together, known each other at this point for probably close to 20 years and so there's a long relationship between the two of them and from what we can understand from the letter, Paul and Titus were working together on the island of Crete, that's a Greek island. Paul for some reason left and Titus is there as a church planter potentially or a church revitalizer to continue the work that they began together. And so I just want us to focus this morning on God's faithfulness to his church to us in providing us with elders and sustaining the elders that we have. And so there's just two things I'm going to say. First of all, the necessity of elders and two, the qualifications for elders. First, the necessity of elders. Second, the qualification of for elders. And I'll warn you as I do sometimes, I'm going to say something but not everything. We'll take a 40,000 foot look at this passage because if we were going to do it full justice, we would probably need several months. It's with that that I invite you to turn with me in God's Word. You can turn on your phones, you can turn in your

Bible, you can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word and God tells us that his Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, which means that God has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead he's given us his Word to show us the way to go.

And so that's why we read now Titus chapter 1, starting at verse 4. Titus chapter 1, verse 4.

Verse 7.

[3 : 5 2] I invite you to pray with me as we come to God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you know and recognize that we are only dust, that we need your help and your voice to guide us and to direct us, to instruct us. We thank you that you give us men to help us in that task. And we thank you most of all for your Word that you use to speak directly to us.

We ask that you would do that this morning, that you would speak through your Word in a powerful way. You'd show us our great need for your grace, and you'd also show us how you meet us at that point of need.

Most of all, that you would let us see Jesus and His beauty and His glory and His power and His love, and that you would grow our love and our affection for Him.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. It was about a year ago, last August, I had breakfast with someone who was visiting our church.

They're in the midst of church shopping. They just moved to town, and they were trying to figure out where it is that they would fit in best. And so one morning, we had breakfast at Wade's Cafe up north, because they lived a little bit away from our church.

[5 : 19] And as we were talking, he told me, you know, as I think about all these different churches that we're looking at and seeing, the thing that really stands out to me about your church is I'm really impressed with your elders.

Now, to tell you, in this moment, I was completely shocked. Not because I don't like our elders. I do. I think our elders are great as well. But here's what I was shocked about.

I was shocked that this man was even thinking about that. And so I said to him, I said, basically, no one has ever said that to me before. No one ever thinks like that.

No one shows up to a church and says, man, I wonder what their elders are like. And I told him, that's exactly the right way to think. That is exactly the right way to be assessing these things, right?

But when I talk to people, what is it they want to discuss with me? We want to talk about what's the music like at our church? And are there strong, small groups? And is there the kind of outreach ministry that I might want to get involved in?

[6 : 22] And I am not saying those things aren't important. They are. Okay? I'm not trying to shame anyone for assessing a church based on those things.

What I am saying is all of those things are downstream of the elders of a church. Now, that person ended up at another faithful gospel preaching church in town for a variety of reasons.

But I still think about that conversation. And I still admire that man for the way he was assessing churches for his family. And I want you to think about it this way.

The foundation of a house is much more critical than whether the countertops are granite or laminate. If you are buying a used car, you are much more concerned with whether the engine is leaking than whether it has the right color.

Home inspectors, when they give you their report about the house that you're buying, the top of the report does not list the colors of paint in the different rooms. No, they want to understand how do the systems work in this house.

[7 : 35] If it's hot outside, will it cool? If it's cold outside, will it get warm? Is there a leak in the roof? Is there something wrong fundamentally with this house that you need to be aware of?

That same thing is true for the church. And so that's what we see in this emphasis in Titus chapter 1. Paul is writing here to Titus who is working with the churches.

And what is the first thing that he tells him after he gives his greeting? Paul does not say, first of all, I want you to make sure you have the right mission and vision and values.

He does not say, the first thing I want you to do is to begin to recruit the most talented musicians in the church. He doesn't say, I want you to figure out the perfect time to hold worship.

No, the first thing on his mind as he writes for these churches on this island is this. Appoint elders in every town. The priority in Paul's mind is the leaders of the church.

[8 : 39] Now, Crete is a sizable island connected with Greece. Very likely there were nearly 10 towns or cities that Titus is working with here. So there's just a practical element of not being able to do everything himself.

And Paul, in the midst of that, doesn't stutter. Your priority as a pastor, as a church planter, is to make sure these churches have faithful elders.

Everything else comes from that. It flows from that. And so like I said, it's not to say those other things don't matter. It's just to say they come after, they're downstream of the leadership that we find in the church.

Do we want to have great music? Absolutely. Who determines and makes sure that we only sing songs that are theologically correct?

The elders. Do we want to have great small groups? Yes, we want to have great small groups. Who is going to recruit and train those leaders?

[9 : 50] The elders. Who is going to roll in when it turns out one of the leaders of that group has run off the tracks and is teaching something contrary to what the Bible says?

It's going to be the elders. Do we want to have a church with sweet fellowship and love and joy? Yes. Who's going to set that tone in the church?

Who's going to make it clear that that's our culture? It's going to be the elders. And so all those other things are critical. They come after the leadership of the church.

The foundation of the church is solid and firm. I've been a big fan of the pastoral epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus for a long time.

And I think Titus first came onto my radar the summer before I went to college, the summer of 2007. And I heard Howard Hendricks, who's now passed away, the legendary professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, give sermons on this letter.

[10 : 56] And Titus 1.5 has stuck out in my mind for a long time. That Paul is telling pastors in the church one of their primary responsibilities is to raise up elders and leaders.

And so as I started at this church, now it seems like a few years ago, a lot of things I didn't know, still a lot of things I don't know. But I had a few instincts and a few convictions.

And one of those was how critical, how important it was for our church to continue to raise up elders. So on October 8, 2018, I began praying that God would raise up new elders in our church.

And I was praying two things in particular. One, that he would bring elders, people who are not in our church at the time. And I was also praying that he would grow elders. He would take men in our church who are not ready to be elders, and he would take them and bring them to that point.

Now, under the bring elders from the outside, I had another prayer request, which is that God would bring us seasoned elders. And what I meant by that was, we need elders who have had experience eldering at other churches.

[12 : 04] Okay, so October 8, 2018, I began praying about this. Wouldn't you know, just a few weeks or months later, who rolls into our church but Steve Thompson.

And I find out quickly that Steve has served as an elder at other PCA churches. And so I think to myself, I see you, Lord. And this man has no idea what he just stepped into.

Okay, that's October of 2018. The first Sunday in February of 2019, who rolls into our church? Scott Sage. Scott and I meet, and I begin to get to know him.

Later in 2019, September 1st to be exact, the Hopper family visits for the first time. Now, I began to get to know Britt, and I learned some disturbing news very early on, which was that Britt was considering the possibility of not living in Colorado forever.

And this was very disturbing to me. And so on June 9, 2020, I began praying that God would provide a house for Britt in southwest Colorado Springs.

[13 : 23] Y'all now know Britt is the third closest person to our church. Right behind Joe and Leah. He beat me out. I'm only two minutes away, but I think he's one minute away.

Okay, that was 2020. Then I found out some other disturbing news, which is that Britt really wanted to have this teaching job, and there might be a teaching job outside of Colorado Springs. So June 8, 2021, a year later, I start praying, God, please provide Britt with a teaching job here in the Springs and not somewhere else.

And if you have talked to Britt recently, you know that he's already started at ECA up north. Now, it's not just me who was praying during this time.

2019, you'll remember we had some officer nominations, and we ended up not getting any officers from that. But that summer of 19, the prayer group here at church, A Time to Pray, also began praying that God would raise up elders in our church.

And this morning, here we are. I say all this to say, okay, God has not given me everything I have asked for for this church.

[14 : 40] And we see God's faithfulness together to us this morning. We see God's grace to our church.

Part of why I'm jumping out of Mark this morning is simply to recognize the work that God has been doing in this community and to say, thank you, Lord. Titus reminds us how critical and essential elders are.

And we see God doing that here among us. We see him continuing to raise up men here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church.

The Lord loves his children. The Lord loves his church. The Lord gives great gifts to his church.

One of those gifts is the men who will lead her. And so we, together as a congregation, can say, yes, praise God.

[15 : 54] Praise God for bringing us Steve and Britt and Scott. Praise God for being faithful to this church and answering our prayers for elders.

Praise God for being faithful to this church and answering our prayers for elders. Now, with that being said, in October of 2018, Cheyenne Mountain Trivia question, how many elders did we have?

We had six. And we lost three to a variety of circumstances. How many elders do we have now? We have six. When I was praying in October of 2018, I was not thinking we need to keep six.

I was thinking we need more than six. Congregation, continue to pray that God would raise up elders in our church. Continue to pray that God would bring faithful men to us.

Now, I want to clarify what I am saying and what I'm not saying. Sometimes when I say things like that, people think that I mean that we are desperate. And anyone with a pulse, we're going to make that person an elder.

[17 : 06] That is not what I'm saying. What I am saying is that we work and we pray towards men God has called and qualified to be elders in his church. Okay?

And there are some godly men who are not gifted or interested in being elders. Okay? So we're looking for people God has gifted, people God has called, people God has qualified.

We do not rush men into leadership in the church. It's been three years since these three men came to our church, 2018-2019.

And we continue to pray that God would raise up leaders for us. Thankfully, Paul has not left us to wonder what it is that we should be looking for when we are asking him to provide elders for us.

Because he goes on in verses 6 through 9 to give a list of qualifications. Now, we don't have enough time this morning for me to outline each of these for you.

[18 : 11] And so I want to draw your attention instead to the repetition that we see in verses 6 and 7. And Paul tells Titus twice that these men need to be above reproach.

Now, we think about above reproach. Sometimes that is an overwhelming phrase for people. They think, well, if someone's going to be an elder or leader in the church, if I'm going to be an elder or leader, that means that I need to be perfect.

And that is not what this means. Above reproach means this person's life is consistent with what he professes to believe.

What he teaches is not going to be undermined by his lifestyle. And so we can have a variety of ways here that Paul gives us that you need to be above reproach.

So this means you're faithfully living out the Christian life. We can't accuse these men of being hypocrites, of saying one thing and doing another. And so it doesn't mean, on the one hand, that this man never struggles with lust.

[19 : 16] It does mean his life is characterized by sexual faithfulness, purity, and integrity. It does mean this is a man who is not known as the town drunk.

It does mean this is a man who does not have a reputation in the church for stirring up division. No, this is a man, and you can look at him and say, that person has the fruit of the Spirit.

We can see that God's grace is at work in his life. He's reached a level of maturity where he's able to teach others with integrity. He's not going to lead the flock astray.

He's going to be able to bring sheep back when they wander away from the fold. There's a principle here that integrity and authority go together. My home office is an absolute train wreck.

If I were to go around teaching and instructing the men of this church to have extremely clean offices, I would have no integrity in doing that.

[20 : 25] I would be a joke. The same is true for the elders of the church. They need to have the integrity in their lives that they're able to exhort and encourage and rebuke, and people will listen.

That when they say, you need to be faithful to your wife, you say, yeah, that man has the authority to say that. He is faithful to his wife. When they say, you need to be a peacemaker in the church, you can say, yes, that man has the authority to say that, because he models what it means to be a peacemaker in this church.

It does not mean that he is perfect or finished with sin. It means that God's grace is at work in his life, that he's consistent in what he says and what he does.

He does not bring shame on the church. The other thing I want to highlight for you, not just above reproach, but if you look at this list of characteristics, you'll notice what is important is not competence, but character.

What is most important is not competence, but character. Paul does not tell Titus, you know, the best way to run a good nonprofit is to get some rich people on your board.

[21 : 44] Because once they're aware of the concerns of the ministry and they feel like they've got a real buy-in to this organization, they'll probably give more money. He doesn't say, you need to identify the most successful people on the island of Crete who've been great at running businesses before because they can really bring that business expertise to the church.

He doesn't say, you need to find the people who just have incredible gifting so that when you hear them speak, you're caught up in the web of their words and you lose touch with everything else in the world because they can just move you in such a way.

Paul doesn't say any of these things. He says, what's most important for these men is their character. What's most important for these men is their walk with the Lord.

Now, the reason for this is another principle, which is the more power you have, the more influence, the more dangerous you are, the more dangerous your flaws and your sins become.

John Maxwell's 13th law of leadership is known as the law of the picture or the law of reproduction, which is a fancy way of saying, people become what they see.

[23 : 04] It's who the elders are that is more important than what they say. It is what they model that's more important than what they teach. Show me a church where elders are gossiping and fighting, and I'll show you a church where the congregation is gossiping and fighting.

Show me a church where the elders are filled with love and hospitality and patience and generosity, and generosity.

And I'll show you a church that's filled with love and patience and hospitality and generosity. The elders set the temperature for the church.

A trip, a journey cannot be more successful than its leaders or its guides. And so we want trustworthy men who can lead us and guide us.

Now, we're going to miss the point if we simply talk this morning about good behavior. If we took most of what's on this list, I think there are many secular businesses that would be very pleased to have someone with these characteristics.

[24 : 23] I'm sure there are some Muslims who would be thrilled to take some of them from us, and I'm sure there are Mormons who would be very pleased with these qualifications.

What is it that makes this different for leaders in the church? Well, thankfully, Paul doesn't leave us to wonder, but in verse 9, we have this final qualification.

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. Now, there's many things that are included there in sound doctrine and trustworthy word, sound doctrine.

We could talk about all sorts of points of theology. The most important point of theology of all of those is going to be the gospel. These elders are going to be able to teach this congregation about the love of God.

They're going to be able to tell this congregation about the grace of God. That as they live holy lives, they're not going to be congratulating themselves or patting themselves on the back because sound doctrine means they know that the source of anything good in their lives is God's grace.

[25 : 44] These are men who understand that apart from God's supernatural work in their lives, they would be in a terrible place. These are men who understand the seriousness and gravity of God's holiness and his judgment.

And they've also experienced the power of God's grace. And so they can say, like Paul, follow me as I follow Christ.

I can tell you stories. Yes, you're struggling with this. Well, let me tell you about the fact that I used to struggle with that as well and in some ways I still do. And here's how God by his grace has been at work in my life.

I didn't pull myself up by the bootstraps. No, God through his word taught me what I needed to know. Through relationships with other people, he grew me and confronted me with my sin. Here is how I continue to have to preach the truth to myself as I face temptation daily.

These are not simply men with good moral behavior. These are men who have an understanding and experience in their lives of the power of God's grace at work.

[26 : 59] They are able to speak from their years of experience about sound doctrine and the trustworthy word. And so they're leading the whole church, not to be more like them.

They're leading the whole church towards the holiness which only God can provide. That's what it means to be above reproach.

We are about 10 minutes north of Cheyenne Mountain State Park. Just drive straight down the highway. I know some of you enjoy it.

I have spent quite a bit of time there, partially because it's a wonderful place to get in a walk and partially because it's extremely close to our church and to my house. And if you're familiar with the trails there, you'll know one of them is the Sundance Trail.

It's actually one of my favorite trails because of the views that you have of Fort Carson and Colorado Springs. And along those trails, they have a variety of signs to help you understand the wildlife and how they operate in the park.

[28 : 05] There's a sign on the Sundance Trail that's there to instruct us how it is that deer function in the park and how it is they learn the routes they're supposed to go.

It says this, Young deer learn the route to their winter range by following their elders. Then generally use the same route every year.

I didn't edit any words in that. The deer learn the way by following their elders. Brothers and sisters, our elders are necessary in the church and they must be qualified in the church because they are the ones who lead God's people and show them the way.

The way to Jesus. Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, we praise you and thank you for your faithfulness to our church.

We thank you for Steve and Britt and Scott. We ask that you'd be working all of our hearts that we would rely more and more on you and your grace and that you'd grow us to look more and more like Jesus.

[29 : 26] That we would not point others to ourselves but we'd point them to you. We ask all these things in the mighty voice. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.