

Apt to Teach

Detailed Outline
1 of 2

I. Understanding the Backdrop of the Instructions to Elders

- A. Qualifications for elders are set forth in 1 Timothy 3:2, “able to teach,” and Titus 1:9, “holding fast the faithful word,” but are applied differently.
- B. In 1 Timothy, Paul instructs Timothy to deal with false teaching that is present in the church at Ephesus. Paul does not instruct Timothy to appoint elders, but to deal with the elders that are already in place (who may have originated some of the false teachings).
- C. In Titus, Paul writes to Titus about the appointment of new elders in several new churches in Crete.
- D. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul seems more focused on the qualifications for elders as they apply to existing elders, while Titus 1 focuses on these same qualifications as applied to the appointment of new elders.

II. Paul’s Words to the Elders of Ephesus in Acts 20:17–35

- A. Paul spent much time in Ephesus, teaching nearly three years (Acts 20:31).
- B. We are told that from there, “all Asia heard the Word of the Lord proclaimed” (Acts 19:10).
- C. He summons for the elders at Miletus and speaks to prepare them for the future.
- D. As Paul heads for Jerusalem he knows he may never see the Ephesians again.
- E. He states that he has taught them everything they needed to know (Acts 20:20, 27).
“... How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house...” (Acts 20:20 NASB)
“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.” (Acts 20:27)
- F. The inference is clear:
 - 1. Paul had already taught them what they needed to know.
 - 2. There is nothing new they would need to know, beyond what he had already taught them.
- G. Knowing that false teachers will arise (some from within their number), Paul emphasizes that the elders need to be on guard, for themselves and the flock. They will teach perverse (different) doctrine in order to gain a personal following. Therefore, elders need to be alert.
- H. Paul commends these leaders to God’s grace and God’s Word (Acts 20:32), which Paul has taught while among them. His inspired teaching will equip them to deal with error that is introduced.

III. Paul's Words of Warning Came True (as seen in 1 Timothy and Titus)

A. Initial observations

1. In 1 Timothy, Paul describes the problem of false teaching first (chapter 1) and then he sets forth the qualifications for elders (chapter 3). There is no mention of appointing elders here.
2. In Titus, Paul first sets out the qualifications for elders (vv. 5–9), and then explains the reason for the qualifications by describing the problem of false teaching that threatened the churches in Crete (vv. 10–16). Paul *does* speak of appointing elders here.

B. 1 Timothy 1:3–7

1. There are some who were authoritative in their sound and confident in what they are doing, but they don't know what they are talking about (5–7).

³ As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, ⁴ nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. ⁵ But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶ For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, ⁷ wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. (1 Tim. 1:3–7)

2. They were talking about the law, their content was Jewish, and they focused on genealogies and speculations.

C. Titus 1:9

Just after Paul speaks about "holding fast the faithful word" he speaks about the character of the false teachers:

¹⁰ For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹ who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. ¹² One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." ¹³ This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. (Titus 1:10–14)

D. Paul also exposes the nature of the false teachers and their teaching:

1. Jewish legalism is aimed at refuting Paul's explanation of God's mystery that belief in the gospel brings about the union of Jews and Gentiles into the church (Ephesians 2 and 3). Jewish legalism subordinates Gentiles to Jews, as though somehow inferior or holding a lower status.
2. Virtually every chapter in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus has something to say about teaching or teachers.

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Detailed Outline
2 of 2

IV. Apt to Teach

An overseer, then, must be . . . able to teach . . . (1 Tim. 3:2 NASB)

- A. This term is used only one other time in the New Testament, and it is by Paul:

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth . . . (2 Tim. 2:24–25)

In this context the setting has to do with false teaching, just like in 1 Timothy.

- B. Apt to teach means to be able to take on all false teaching and provide correction from the Word of God.

- C. This does not mean the elder must have the gift of teaching.

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (1 Tim. 5:17–18)

1. This passage sets some elders apart from others based on their quality and quantity of teaching.
2. This implies that some elders are especially gifted in teaching, but not all will teach at the same level with the same giftedness.
3. But, all elders ought to be able to teach the truth in a way that refutes the error in the church.

- D. Two implications

1. All elders are not equally gifted to teach.

In some elder-led churches there is the assumption that all of the elders are equally able to teach and thus they should all share the teaching load equally, rotating with no distinction in regard to their giftedness.

Clearly Paul teaches in 1 Timothy 5:17–18 (above) that all elders are not equally competent overall or in any one function (whether leading or teaching).

2. The danger of reverse logic: "I am an elder. All elders must be able to teach. Since I am an elder I should do as much of the teaching in the church as any other elder." An elder is not necessarily an elder for a lifetime.

The qualifications in Titus chapter 1 are entrance qualifications, whereas the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 are enduring qualifications.

Just because one initially was judged to have met these qualifications does not mean that there is no longer any standard for their leadership to be evaluated, or that they cannot be disqualified at a later time.

For example, in Acts 20, Paul warned that some may rise up from within to teach false doctrine. If any of those are elders, then surely they would be disqualified from continuing as elders.

The qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3 may serve as the basis for removing an elder.

Elders should be reviewing their own qualifications in an ongoing way.

V. Hold Fast the Word of God

“... Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.” (Titus 1:9)

A. Here, Paul is more specific about the content of the teaching, as well as its application.

1. The elder must “hold fast” to the “faithful word”—the teaching Paul has previously set forth, the teaching to which he referred in Acts 20. This would also be the same doctrine Paul would have previously conveyed to Titus.
2. This is the teaching the elders should proclaim to exhort the saints in the church.
3. This is also the teaching from which false teachers would depart, and thus it is the teaching to which the elder must “hold fast” in order to refute their false teaching.

B. What does it mean to “hold fast” the faithful Word?

1. It means to cling to Paul’s apostolic teaching as God’s full and final revelation—the Word of God given once for all.
2. It means to cling to the faithful Word as that which is true and flawless and accurate, just as Paul and the apostles delivered it.
3. It means to embrace God’s Word as the sufficient source of teaching and practice in the church.
4. It means that we must view the Scriptures as timeless, and thus they are as applicable to saints today as they were to the saints of old.
5. The Scriptures should be the text for of our preaching and teaching.
6. In my opinion, the Word of God also supplies us with the vocabulary by which we identify, define, and speak to the issues of the day. (An example of a non-biblical term which is popularly used in the church is “self-esteem.”)
7. Scriptures are sufficient to the degree that no new teaching or doctrine is needed.

C. The elder needs to be a competent teacher in order to set forth the truth of God’s Word clearly and succinctly, so as to accurately convey the truth God has given to His church.

1. This is so the saints may grasp and embrace the truth to their edification.

2. And it is so that the teaching of false teachers can be powerfully refuted with the teaching of God's Word.

VI. Summary

- A. In 1 Timothy, Paul is setting forth the qualifications by which existing elders can be evaluated.
- B. In Titus, Paul is setting forth the qualifications by which new elders can be evaluated and officially appointed.
- C. The importance of the requirement that elders be able to teach competently
 1. In these days, false teaching is rampant. Elders must be able to understand and communicate the truth.
 2. People are departing from the truth for that which appeals to their fleshly desires.
- D. We need teachers who hold to the truth of the Word, and teach it in an effective manner.