

Titus 1:5-9 Leadership in the Church of God: Management that Produces Order (part 4)

The Pastoral Use of Sound Doctrine: Exhort and Rebuke

Today, we come to part 4 of our sermons on leadership in the church, particularly what an elder looks like. Let me recap. The elder must be above reproach (v. 6, 7): 1) The elder must be above reproach as regards his home life, particularly his relationships with his wife and his children. 2) The elder must be above reproach in his character (He must be godly, living out the gospel of Christ in all he does). 3) The elder must hold on to the Gospel of Christ. 4) The elder must exhort and rebuke with sound doctrine. This is where we will spend our time today.

1. The Elder Exhorts with sound doctrine. The elder must manage the word of God, and of first importance is to hold firm the gospel (last sermon). But, there is more. The elder exhorts with sound doctrine. Look at the 2nd part of v. 9: **“so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine.”** The ESV translates this word as “exhort.” It is different than to merely “teach,” truth. This word is also translated as “comfort” or “encourage” or “urge.” A form of this word is used 109 times in the Greek NT, and Paul uses it 54 times. Often he uses it to show tender nurture and comfort. In 2 Cor. 7:6, Paul uses this word twice when he considers the comfort experienced when God brought Titus to him. **“But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus . . .”** Sometimes Paul uses this word a bit differently. He uses it to in a more stern way to urge his readers to do something. To the Church at Philippi there is a disagreement between two women and he urges them strongly, by saying, **“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord . . .”** In 2 Thess. 3:12 he says, **“Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.”**

I picture a father urging, encouraging, his children to study hard in school. For he knows this is the right thing to do. There are great benefits in learning. There is great discipline in sitting down and making yourself do something you may find difficult to do. He knows that when his children do their best to obey their teachers they will develop habits for life, they will learn truths, they will benefit, and even find some comfort in these disciplines. I think of the coach urging his or her athletes to work hard, to practice with excellence, to give it all they’ve got in the games. Why? Because it is the right thing to do. It is beneficial. And, there will be good results. In the same kind of way, pastors lead their flocks through exhortation. This is a big part of my preaching. I urge you, I encourage you, I do my best to give words that bring comfort to your life.

Now, notice from the text that the basis of this “urging,” this “encouraging,” this “comforting,” is sound doctrine, (v. 9b) that is, sound doctrine that flows from the gospel. Paul’s exhortation was not just taken out of the air, but was based on the Word of God. It was based on truth that can be trusted. Look at v. 9 again: **“hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught.”** Brothers and sisters, EVERY command from God is based upon truth, truth that flows from God himself, who is TRUTH. As James says, **“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us for by the word of truth . . .”** (James 1:17-18).

Let me ask, How helpful is it when you've had a very bad day, and one of your friends comes to you and says, *"I'm here for you. I love you. I care for you. Hang in there."* And then they share words of truth from the Scriptures. And because these words are really based on truth, they can be trusted. And because of this, they bring great comfort to your soul. For example, when you are dealing with guilt from sin, whatever it is, your friend comes to you and says, *"Do you remember what Rom. 8:1 says?"* **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."** *"Be encouraged! Find comfort! Trust in this truth!"* If you are like me, you are tempted to consider your faults, your sins, and be discouraged. But, if you are a Christian, your sins are covered. You are forgiven and God does not condemn you. His Son was condemned in your place. This is sound doctrine!

Or, when you think of our culture and you get down because of all the immorality and the changes coming our way and you know that persecution is coming. And your friend or your pastor comes to you and says, remember the words of truth from our Lord Jesus who says: **"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world"** (John 16:33). Or, recall the words of John who says, **"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world"** (1 John 4:4). Be encouraged! Find comfort!

When you are about to lose your job because of a stance you take as a Christian, a brother or sister in Christ comes along side of you and says, **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused you to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls"** (1 Pet. 1:3-9).

Or, when you are struggling to do what you know is the right thing to do. If you are tempted to look at another woman on the internet, or you are considering another man who is not your husband . . . Or, you are wondering if you should report something on your tax return . . . Or, you are finding it very difficult to forgive someone you know you should forgive . . . Or, you are considering giving up . . . the examples are endless. And then you consider the word of God which says, **"Be holy as I am holy"** (1 Pet. 1:15) or **"Be strong in the Lord and the power of his might"** (Eph. 6:10). Or words from Hebrews which says, **"Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls"** (Heb. 10:35-39).

Brothers and sisters, there is NOTHING this world can bring that can negate or take away from comfort and encouragement from sound doctrine that flows from the gospel of Jesus Christ! NOTHING! Let's read from Rom. 8 before moving to the next truth:

Pastor: And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Congregation: And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Pastor: Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

Congregation: As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Pastor: For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:28-39).

2. The Elder Rebukes with Sound Doctrine. In his commentary on Titus, Calvin says, "*A pastor needs two voices, one for gathering the sheep and the other for driving away wolves and thieves.*" The pastor does not merely exhort the flock with sound doctrine, he also rebukes according to sound doctrine. The context is the correction of error. Look down at vv. 10-14: "**For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."** This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth."

And the basis is the same: the trustworthy word of God. The word for "rebuke" can also be translated as "refute." The same word is used in 2 Tim. 3:16: "**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**" Paul says the same in 2 Tim. 4:1-4: "**I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the**

word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

What does it look like to “rebuke” or “correct” error in the local church with sound doctrine? Well, it looks very much like what a father or a mother would do with their children. If your hit your sister, your father comes and does what? There is certainly some kind of rebuke and probably discipline if it continues. In the same kind of way, shepherds (pastors, elders), do the same. 1) It happens most from the pulpit. 2) It happens in direct private conversation. 3) There can also be public rebuke by the church itself. With these things in mind, let me end with some applications.

Application: Good preaching should both exhort and rebuke. I am afraid that much preaching is one-sided. It is easy to exhort, but often very difficult to rebuke.

Application: The context for exhortation and correction is the local church. For, the church is the **“pillar and buttress of the truth”** (1 Tim. 3:15). This means we must hang on to the Gospel found in the Word of God. And our elders must lead the way in this regard. We must teach with exhortation; we must rebuke, no matter the difficulty.

Application: The Scriptures (inerrant, infallible, inspired) are essential to refuting error. Consider Strachan debate: Conservative vs. Progressive. (Retell – The Scriptures, as the Word “breathed out by God” is still our basis for objective truth.)

Application: Pastors must be “experts” in the Word of God. They must hold fast the gospel and apply the commands of Christ properly in the church.

Application: Let me finish by speaking about the sound doctrine for just a moment. What do you hear when you hear the word “doctrine?” Does it excite you? Do you say to yourself, *“Yes, I love that word and what it means?”* Hmmm. Probably not. Maybe the WORD ITSELF doesn’t excite you. But, I hope from today, you see how comforting doctrine can be for your life. It both encourages you to press on as you look unto Christ. And, it corrects you in the ways you think and live. Can there be anything more practical than the doctrines found in the Bible? No! Christ died for your sins! Do you get excited when I say that? You do! That’s doctrine! When I say, *“Beloved, God loves you with an everlasting love. And He proves it by sending his Son,”* does your heart and mind light up with comfort? Yes! This is doctrine. When I say to you, *“Press on, Christ is coming again, to make all things right,”* do you look forward with anticipation? Yes! This is doctrine. When I preach on the dignity of man or the sanctity of marriage, do you find comfort in these truths? This is doctrine! When we do our best to order the church according to the Word of God and we teach on the beauty of Church of Christ, do you enjoy such words? Yes! This is doctrine. When you hear the word preached, or you read a good book and learn something that corrects your understanding and you adjust your life accordingly, are you excited? Yes! This is doctrine. When you learn that you were dead in your trespasses and sins and you discover that God had his eye on you from eternity, apart from your works, are you happy and amazed? Yes! This is doctrine! Particularly, this is sound doctrine! This is truth. With

this I will encourage you to further your love of doctrine as it both exhorts and rebukes in this great process the Bible calls “sanctification.”