



Article
Dec 15

Titus 1:9 – An Exposition

Editor’s Note: You can also [listen to a podcast interview](#) with John Kitchen released in conjunction with this article.

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The 1:9 Alliance is a network of like-minded, like-hearted believers from within The Christian and Missionary Alliance who rally around the Lord Jesus Christ as presented in God’s Word.

Titus 1:9 states our purpose succinctly: “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.”

Here Paul instructed Titus to choose qualified men as leaders for his people. The pronoun “he” makes this clear. Titus is to choose men but not every male is qualified. The men he chooses are designated as “elders” (*presbuteroi*, Titus 1:5) and each one is marked out as an “overseer” (*episkopos*, Titus 1:7). As elsewhere in the New Testament the two terms are used interchangeably. Acts 20 is another example of this (vv.17, 28). Here verse 28

makes clear that elders/overseers are “to shepherd [*poimaino*] the church of God” (NASB). Peter echoes this when he calls elders/overseers to “shepherd the flock of God” (1 Pet. 5:2). Today we often call these men pastors. Jesus himself is called “the Shepherd [*poimen*] and Overseer [*episkopos*] of your souls” (1 Pet. 2:25). Jesus is “the good shepherd” (John 10:11), “the great shepherd” (Heb. 13:20), and “the chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:2). He has appointed elders/overseers as his under-shepherds to lead, feed, and care for his people in his name and by his Spirit. These men are elders in character, overseers in responsibility, and shepherds of those under their charge.

To fulfill God’s charge such men “must” do something, something specific. They live under both divine necessity and accountability. Among God’s people they are always about the work of “keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account” (Heb. 13:17).

If they are to carry out this divine obligation they must “hold firm to the trustworthy word.” To “hold firm” requires something supernatural in one’s grip and one’s grit. So, the elder/overseer must choose the Word of God over other allurements that present themselves and devotedly cling to the divinely-given “word” at all costs. The present tense verb in the original language underscores that this must be the habit and pattern of his life.

It is “to the trustworthy word as taught” that such men are to “hold firm.” A more literal word order would be: “the according-to-the-teaching faithful word.” The “word” under consideration is qualified twice. It is “the-according-to-the-teaching” word, the word that concurs with what Paul and the other Apostles taught. Conformity to the apostolic teaching is what makes this “the trustworthy word.” Anything else constitutes false teaching (Titus 1:10-16).

The number one job of elders/overseers/pastors is to rightly hold and hold forth the Word of God, the Bible. Being men under divine call and commission, they know there are not multiple legitimate meanings of a single text. There is but one—the one the divine Author expressed through his Spirit-guided human authors. This singular, divinely-intended meaning is what the man of God will relentlessly pursue until he finds, holds, and holds it forth to God’s people. This alone is what the man of God is authorized to speak. Scripture does not merely send us on a

trajectory of divine intent, leaving us to explore and expand upon it with new meaning and new words in the present or future. God has spoken. He said precisely what he meant and he still means what he has said. That divinely-intended meaning is the quest of the man of God, it is his standard and message in all his labors. His Spirit-guided grip on Scripture leads the man of God to the meaning of God and to this he must “hold fast,” whatever may come.

Why did God choose this way of building and advancing his people? Why must the church be shepherded by men trained and commissioned under such a calling?

Two purposes are set before us. First, it is “so that he may be able to give instruction.” Clinging to the Word of God will enable a man to possess power (“be able,” *dunatos*) that he would not have otherwise, the power to “give instruction.” The original verb is a compound, combining “to call” and “beside.” It can range in meaning from encourage to exhort. It is one of the essential functions of Biblical preaching (1 Tim. 6:2; 2 Tim. 4:2). Paul will use it again when he tells Titus to “speak and exhort and reprove with all authority” (Titus 2:15). The noun form of the word (often translated as Helper, Counselor, Comforter, Advocate) is used as a title for both the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) and Jesus Christ (1 John 2:1). When a man clings to the Word of God faithfully he places himself in partnership with the Author and Subject of Scripture.

The content of his instruction is “in sound doctrine.” Such doctrine is “sound” in that it is healthy. The adjective was used literally of physical (e.g., Luke 7:10) or mental health (e.g., 15:27). In the Pastoral Epistles it is always used metaphorically and attached either to “faith” (Titus 1:13; 2:2), “words” (1 Tim. 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13), or “teaching/doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1). In this context, then, the word emphasizes the truthfulness, accuracy, or correctness of the doctrine taught. It brings health by transmitting truth and a correct view of reality. God thus made it an essential element of the church’s life and fellowship (Acts 2:42).

The second purpose behind God’s working through such qualified, called, and gifted men is that they may be able “also to rebuke,” when necessary. The whole of Scripture has been given for this purpose (2 Tim. 3:16–17). This too is

one of the basic functions of Biblical preaching (2 Tim. 4:2).

Here the object of the rebuke is “those who contradict” the teaching of the sound doctrine of God’s Word. They must be rebuked because their teaching has deviated (Titus 1:10-16) from “the trustworthy word as taught.” It is not healthy and therefore cannot foster health in those who listen to it.

This two-fold ministry is at the heart of elders/overseers/pastors’ labors in promoting the truth and contradicting departures from it.

Living in a time when people “will not endure sound teaching” (2 Tim. 4:3), the church of Jesus Christ more than ever needs faithful men who tenaciously “hold fast” to the Word of God so that all God’s people will be “holding fast to the word of life” (Phil. 2:16). This quest is at the heart of the 1:9 Alliance.

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